What are you doing to plan for your future right now? Are you working after school? Does making the transition from being a student to entering the workforce frighten you? The transition from school to work is a challenging time for young adults. For young adults with disabilities, these challenges can be very overwhelming. Community Options, Inc. is working to make that transition easier for young adults with disabilities and their families.

Community Options, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization that develops community-based housing and innovative employment supports for people with disabilities. The School to Employment Program (STEP) created by Community Options was created based on the high level of need there is for young adults with disabilities to start planning for their futures early on while still in high school.

Sampling different types of employment opportunities is often the best way for students preparing to enter the world of work as well as assessing preferences and aptitudes. This is the core concept of the STEP. The STEP starts at the end of a student's junior year in high school and Community Options works with students, families and child study teams to identify those young adults interested in job sampling throughout their senior year of high school.

Community Options has thirty offices across nine states. We are located in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Texas and New Mexico. Across the country, Community Options is supporting thousands of people with disabilities to...
be contributing members of their communities and to experience an improved quality of life. Community Options believes that people with disabilities experience an improved quality of life when they are able to form meaningful relationships with their non-disabled peers. These types of relationships foster the true meaning of inclusion and there are many ways for you to be involved with the organization.

The STEP program holds parent and student workshops. The workshop consists of an eight-week training period at the end of a young adult’s junior year or once they are accepted into the STEP. The workshops include several community-based vocational assessments with regards to that person’s strengths and abilities that they already possess, the building of a basic resume, sample job applications, several mock interviews and role-playing. The STEP workshops are a great way to get involved with the program to help Community Options spread the message of STEP all over the country!

David Awrachow, Director of the

STEP says, “The STEP supports students between the ages of 16 and 21. These students, who are currently enrolled in special education or who have recently graduated from high school, are the focal point of the program. STEP’s ultimate goal is to render meaningful employment to the program participants upon program completion.”

The internships that Community Options offers the students include: Health Information Management, Environmental Services, Patient Management, Surgical Services, Food and Nutrition, and Engineering just to name a few.

“Community Options has been there every step of the way since the inception of the program to guide both parents “and students as they evolve through the transition and ease students into future employment.” offers Awrachow.

Erin Rooney is an Education Instructor for Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in Hamilton, NJ where Community Options currently has a contract to provide internships to students participating in the STEP program. Erin says, “The STEP program is the most organized group that I oversee. The students
are a breath of fresh air when they come to the hospital each day, they remind the hospital employees to look forward to coming to work each day."

Other businesses that the STEP participates with are Vaseful Flowers and Gifts, the country's only nonprofit flower shop, which delivers anywhere in the entire world. Another business the STEP participates with is Presents of Mind, which is an upscale gift store that offers full online shopping capabilities. The Daily Plan It is another job sampling site for youth transitioning out of school. The Daily Plan It is a complete conference and copy center that offers small business owners luxuriously appointed office space at significantly reduced costs with a full concierge service.

There are many ways for teens to get involved with the STEP. Teens can get involved with the STEP. Teens can volunteer with the STEP to offer support and friendships to youth being supported in the program. Teens can also assist the administrator's of the program by helping with the student and parent workshops. Teens can also serve on the Community Options STEP Advisory Council, which helps support the program, and make decisions about the future of the program.

STEP is the most innovative transitional program for youth with disabilities in the country and Community Options needs the help of teens throughout the country to help them spread the message about the work that is being done.

For more information about STEP, please visit www.communityoptions.org. You can also start blogging with Community Options at communityoptions.blogspot.com. Community Options national headquarters is located in Princeton, New Jersey and can be reached by telephone at 609-951-9900.