

School to work transitions



Adam Sanders (Employment Specialist) Gema Martínez (STEP Participant) Ashley Peters (STEP Participant) Ashley Metcalf (STEP Participant)

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



Presents of Mind Gift Store - a contracted job sampling site for STEP participants

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



Vaseful Flowers and Gifts - contracted job sampling site for STEP Participants.

“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.”

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



Ashley Peters (STEP Participant) Gema Martinez (STEP Participant) Adam Sanders (Employment Specialist) Chris Brownback (STEP Participant)

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



Group of STEP participants and administrators on the first day at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital.

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.comop.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.

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- 1 Cut out sign, mount on poster board, and hang from doorknob.
- 2 When secondhand smoke is detected in the house, make gagging sound and repeat, "You're killing me in here!"
- 3 Politely suggest to the smoker, "Take it outside."

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