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## Aiming to develop entrepreneurial skills of those with disabilities



By **Beth Fitzgerald**  
 9/16/2009

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Teaching people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs, launch their own small businesses, and create jobs for themselves and others is the mission of **Just Add Water**, which held an open house this morning at its Hillsborough offices.

Just Add Water plans to open its doors this spring as the newest venture of Community Options Inc., a Princeton-based nonprofit that operates six for-profit businesses throughout New Jersey. Those companies employ more than 300 people with disabilities in administrative, maintenance and retail jobs.

Just Add Water will combine a café with offices businesses can rent for conferences and training, plus the entrepreneur development service.

"Suppose you've been working for the last five years as a janitor and you want to start your own janitorial service, but you don't know how to do it," said **Robert Stack**, president of Community Options. "We would help you write your business plan, help you arrange the financing and help you develop a marketing plan."

The recession is making it even harder for the disabled to find jobs, said **Shawn McInerney**, regional assistant director the state Division of Developmental Disabilities. He said DDD serves 41,000 people statewide, and each year more than 600 people with developmental disabilities graduate from school and seek to transition to the work force.

But the majority — perhaps as many as 90 percent — can't find jobs, said **Chris Dixon**, executive director of Community Options Enterprises. And during the recession, the disabled are competing with the newly unemployed for jobs in reception, delivery and foodservice that in better times would attract fewer job applicants.

The entrepreneur route provides a new path for the disabled. "We are going to give them the resources to become entrepreneurs," he said. "In terms of their capability, it is limitless."

Tom Burdick, 41, a member of the board of Community Options, has been in a wheelchair since age 19, and works for the Morristown staffing company **Abilitymarket**, which finds jobs for people with and without disabilities.

"I would love to see more people with disabilities in jobs, in competitive employment," he said. "I love to work. You get to socialize with colleagues, meet people and make friends. It's better than sitting at home and staring at the wall."

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