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Community Options, Inc. Begins Over \$1 Million Effort to Train Individuals With Disabilities for Careers in the Information Technology Industry.

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Community Options Inc. and the U.S. Department of Labor Teams With Microsoft,

ITAA, Local Colleges and Training Centers on a Three Year Pilot Program

To Train People With Disabilities

AUSTIN, Texas, April 12 /PRNewswire/ -- Community Options Inc. (COI), a national non-profit organization, today announced a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) for a new project that trains individuals with disabilities for careers in the information technology (IT) industry. Available in four U.S. states, PASS*IT*ON (Plan for Achieving Self Support with Information Technology Opportunities Nationwide), Community Options Inc. will work with Microsoft Corp. (Nasdaq: MSFT), the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) and community colleges and universities to expand and adapt computer training for people with disabilities.

"PASS*IT*ON is designed to challenge conventional thinking by developing new job opportunities for people with disabilities," said Robert Stack, President/CEO of Community Options Inc. "There is a significant shortage of trained professionals in the information technology industry; many people with disabilities are highly motivated and willing to be trained to fill these open positions."

PASS*IT*ON will recruit and train individuals with a range of disabilities. The three-year project will result in long-term employment opportunities, including the post-placement support necessary to maximize career advancement.

In the first year, PASS*IT*ON will be rolled out to approximately 100 individuals in four metropolitan areas: [Austin Community College](#) in Austin, Texas; [The New Jersey Institute of Technology](#) in Mt. Laurel and Newark New Jersey; [Gestalt Systems, Inc.](#), Tysons, Virginia; and [Community College of Denver](#) in Denver, Colorado, with a goal of placing at least 80 of the participants in IT positions with an average salary of \$30,000. In subsequent years, Community Options Inc. plans to implement the project at additional sites nationwide through community-based providers of employment support services and regional councils of IT companies.

"Working with COI to train people with disabilities ties in with the Microsoft Skills 2000 initiative, designed to significantly reduce the skills gap by reaching out to individuals with varying backgrounds interested in developing a career in high tech," said Nancy Lewis, general manager of worldwide training and certification at Microsoft. "Working with the PASS*IT*ON program is just one step -- these pilots will help COI replicate the project nationwide to serve even more people with special needs."

Microsoft's participation in the program includes a cash grant, as well as software, technical resources and tools as part of the Microsoft Skills 2000 initiative and the company's Accessibility and Disabilities Group. More information on the Skills 2000 initiative is available at <http://www.microsoft.com/skills2000/>.

Community Options, Inc. modeled PASSITON after the award-winning Computer Training for People with Disabilities (CTPD) program offered at Community College of Denver since 1981. Kevin Ellerman graduated from the CTPD program in 1983 and went on to become the CTPD Director for the past 13 years. Kevin resigned from his position in October of 1998 to become the PASSITON Program Coordinator. Kevin states, "this project (PASSITON) can really change people's lives by helping displaced workers enter the information technology field, they get not a job but a career."

The Information Technology Association of America will participate in the program on a local levels through the Austin Software Council, Austin Texas; Colorado Software Association, Denver, Colorado; New Jersey Technology Council, Princeton, New Jersey and Northern Virginia Technology Council in Herndon, Virginia. Each local technology council organizes local Business Advisory Councils (BACs) to train and prepare individuals with disabilities for employment computer professionals. The BAC is made up of civic minded members from the business community in the field of management information systems. "The pipeline for IT workers is running dangerously low. With nearly 350,000 vacant IT jobs nationwide, The PASS*IT*ON program is exactly the type of partnership needed to train technical talent. ITAA receives calls every day from companies that need to hire workers immediately or risk loss of productivity. This program will help fill those needs and keep our economy running strong," said ITAA President Harris N. Miller.

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For more information on how to qualify for training, contact Dan Fairchild at Community Options 303-494-1652, or visit the Community Options Web site at <http://www.comop.org/>.

Community Options is a national nonprofit organization incorporated in 1989 to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to live as independently as possible. The organization, headquartered in New Jersey, supports 700 people with disabilities in 11 states: Colorado, [District of Columbia](#), Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin.

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