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Young Man with Autism Exceeding Expectations in Finance

PRINCETON, NJ – Jonathan Kolakowski never held a job before. He did not have a college degree, and like many people with autism, was often overlooked by employers.

Johnathan turned to Community Options for supported employment services. Community Options is a national nonprofit that provides housing and employment to 5,000 people with disabilities. Johnathan's job coach introduced him to Jim Spano, Managing Director of Spano Partners Holdings. As a long-time disability advocate and Community Options Enterprises Trustee, Jim wanted staff diversity at his renewable energy company.

“The inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce is an issue that I have always felt strongly about and advocated for,” said Jim Spano. “Employment provides meaning to life. And everyone, regardless of ability should have the opportunity to have that.”

After interviewing with Spano Partners Holdings, Jonathan was hired. From day one, Jonathan excelled at his job. While his position was in administrative support, it soon became clear that Jonathan had greater potential.

With an interest in bookkeeping, Jonathan began helping in the company's finance department. Tony Psomas, Chief Financial Officer for Spano Partners Holdings, mentored Johnathan. Tony taught him how to examine budgets and understand general accounting principles.

“I have benefitted greatly from my time working at Spano Partners. I have been able to contribute to the company just as much as anyone else would be able to and I know that this would be the case for many others with autism,” said Jonathan. “Tony and others on the team have played a huge role in my growth. Working with them has been a pleasure and I appreciate all that they have done for my career.”

Since starting his job at Spano Partners, Johnathan decided to further his education. He knew that Spano Partners Holdings provided tuition reimbursement for employees, so he enrolled at Mercer County Community College. Johnathan continues to work while pursuing a degree. The supported employment team at Community Options helps him navigate his busy schedule.

“Jonathan's employment here and inclusion in our finance department is not a charity case,” said Tony Psomas. “He is eager to learn, and a valuable member of the team. We are lucky to have him. He just needed the chance to show what he could do.”

Johnathan's story is impressive and unique, but not unusual. Community Options supports thousands of people each year to enter the workforce and exceed expectations in the workplace. By partnering with state and county vocational rehabilitation offices, the nonprofit agency provides job placement and work-based learning experiences so people with disabilities can gain and maintain competitive integrated employment.

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About Community Options, Inc.:

For over 30 years, Community Options has developed housing and employment supports for people with disabilities – serving thousands of people from over 40 offices across 10 states. Community Options provides advocacy assistance to empower people with disabilities because all people – regardless of ability level – should live and work in the community with dignity, choice and self-determination. For more information please visit our website: www.comop.org and to follow along with the #AllItTakes campaign, search #AllItTakes on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.