

Project SCOUT soars to new heights with expanding partnerships -

Sheila Doles, guest columnist - Ability Center of Greater Toledo, Summer 2007 Newsletter

As Project SCOUT (Securing Career Opportunities at The University of Toledo) celebrates their one year anniversary, the program has grown by leaps and bounds. This employee placement program has enabled more than a dozen individuals with varying disabilities to obtain positions on both the UT Main and Health Science campuses. Under the leadership of project director, Dr. Patricia Devlin, and project coordinator, Diane Witt, Project SCOUT has become a positive force to remove barriers for those who have traditionally found it difficult to gain access and maintain employment without additional support.

“We are excited about the expansion of this program to the UT Health Science Campus, as Project SCOUT is modeled after Project *SEARCH*, a nationally acclaimed program that has been successful at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital,” said Dr. Devlin.

With the support of grant funding provided by the Ability Center of Greater Toledo, Project SCOUT has developed valuable partnerships between The University of Toledo, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, Lucas County Board of Mental Retardation, Harbor Behavioral Healthcare, and the Ability Center. The program creates a single point of entry for partners as they assist their consumers in obtaining employment, with a focus on what an individual ‘can do’ rather than what they ‘cannot do.’

Tim Harrington, Executive Director of the Ability Center of Greater Toledo says “The Ability Center is very excited about the progress of Project SCOUT. Their accomplishments to date represent best practices in community-based employment. This success is the direct result of dedicated individuals throughout The University of Toledo campus who have stepped forward to assure that opportunities for success on campus are available to all individuals.”

“Through existing and customized job opportunities, the program provides a blend of support services such as consultation and job coaching that leads to win-win situations for both job seekers and University personnel,” according to Diane Witt.

This year, Project SCOUT has been collaborating with the College of Engineering M.I.M.E. (Mechanical, Industrial, Mechanical and Engineering) Senior Design Program where adaptive technologies are being designed to assist individuals overcome barriers in their everyday work. For example, one individual employed as an office assistant, Laurel, has difficulty with balance, reach, eye-hand coordination, and currently requires the assistance of a job coach to complete her job tasks. A specific device being designed for Laurel is an automated storage cabinet device activated by a single push pad that brings the shelving down to her level, allowing easy access to a variety of tasks. Utilization of this adaptive device will allow Laurel to perform many of her job functions independently.

The opportunity to work with Project SCOUT was initiated by Christine Smallman, Director of College Relations & Facilities Management for the College of Engineering, and founding director of the MIME senior design program. Ms. Smallman shared that “Project Scout has brought a new dimension to the quality of my work environment. The College of Engineering welcomes Project SCOUT and embraces the opportunity to conduct projects to benefit SCOUT employees.” The senior design program, led by Dr. Mohammed Samir Hefzy, professor and senior design course director, offers college seniors hands on design experience while meeting employees to identify their unique needs and create effective solutions.

In recognition of outstanding performance assisting individuals with unique ability needs in the employment arena, Project SCOUT was awarded one of five Community Partnership Awards from the Lucas County Board of Mental Retardation and Development Disabilities!

Project SCOUT supports core values and strives to achieve best practices that improve a person's quality of life creating community partnerships to enhance the human condition. The University of Toledo President's Commission on Diversity commends Project SCOUT for their continuing commitment to diversity in the workplace and exemplary service to the community.

For additional information on Project SCOUT, please contact staffing coordinator Diane Witt at 419.530.1473 or via email at diane.witt@utoledo.edu. You may also visit the Project SCOUT website at www.projectscout.utoledo.edu.