Title: Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Community Partner: Pathfinder Village

A survey and outreach project for regional employers about hiring people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities for a student interested in education and project development.

Project Description:
Employment is seen as a critical component to improving the quality of life for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, as well as a benchmark for measuring the success of special education programs. However, despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) almost 30 years ago, changing attitudes in the workplace and billions of dollars spent on government programs to help employ people with disabilities, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the percentage of working-age people with disabilities in the labor force remains about one-third that of people with no disability. Why aren’t more people with disabilities employed?

Pathfinder Village will place a Fellow to work as a special project assistant to the Interim Director of the Kennedy Willis Center on a new employment initiative. Working in collaboration with the Otsego County Chamber of Commerce, the Fellow will survey businesses to assess their attitudes, perceptions and willingness to employ people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Using information collected as part of the initial survey, the Fellow will help create educational outreach materials for the Otsego County Chamber of Commerce which would help to inform businesses of advantages and incentives for employing people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. In addition, Pathfinder Village would commit to offering initial support to businesses to ensure a successful match, positive on-boarding experience and increase the likelihood of long-term retention.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to create a collaborative support network and partnership between local businesses, the Otsego County Chamber of Commerce and Pathfinder Village to increase the employment and retention rates of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities within Otsego County. If successful, this may also serve as a model for other counties.

About the Community Partner:
Through the Upstate Institute program, Pathfinder Village has improved its marketing and outreach to many more families touched by a developmental disability. The work of previous Fellows directly led to more effective outreach by the organization and improved linkages of families to needed services.

Founded originally as the first and only community established specifically for individuals with Down syndrome, the mission of Pathfinder Village is to promote a healthy, progressive environment that respects each individual, supporting a life of value and independence for children and adults with Down syndrome and related developmental disabilities. Recognizing the gifts, talents and abilities of each person they support, the Pathfinder Village community enables individuals with disabilities and their families to envision and to create a “life with meaning” that includes friendships, independence, community involvement and the freedom to pursue individual interests and life goals.

Licensed and certified by the NYS Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities, the NYS Education Department and the NYS Department of Health, Pathfinder Village provides a wide range of program services and supports in a carefully planned community campus setting that mirrors a small New York City block with its own school, playground and recreation facilities.
England style village. Programs include residential homes, health services, and educational, recreational and vocational programs.

**Required Skills:**
This experience will provide an Upstate Institute Fellow the opportunity to be introduced to, and gain experience in, project development and management. Research activities, grant research and writing, marketing and public speaking will also be part of the Fellow’s experience. Because the project is linked to the strategic expansion of Pathfinder Village programs and services, the Fellow will also gain first hand insights into the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities and the role of a planned village community in creating a life with meaning for persons with disabilities.

**Logistics:**
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and Pathfinder Village. Working full-time at Pathfinder Village, the Upstate Field School Fellow will work with the Interim Director of the KWC and project team during the design and marketing phases of the project. The student will have the opportunity to conduct research on employment issues and trends in Otsego County, participate in project meetings and network with key community partners through the development phase of the project.

Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500 plus reimbursement for any costs associated with transportation for this project. A car is not required for this project, but may be helpful. A Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work.

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