

PROMISING PRACTICES



Training collaboration with technical college opens doors to careers

Zach gave a quick reply when the student was asked about his next steps in a path toward a retail career: "I'm ready," he said.

Classmate Justin chimed in, "We have the skills and talents."

Zach and Justin completed a five-week training program piloted by Minneapolis area [Opportunity Partners, Inc.](#), in collaboration with The Arc Greater Twin Cities and Dunwoody College of Technology. Certificates, in addition to pride and hope, marked Zach's and Justin's graduations.

"My whole family's happy for me," Zach said, grinning. "It's the beginning of something new."

Opportunity Partners serves 1,700 persons with disabilities each year. The nonprofit organization's most recent [CARF](#) survey report highly commended the organization for developing its Certified Learning Platforms (CLP) program, which is part of its employment skills training options.

Opportunity Partners teamed with Dunwoody College of Technology, a not-for-profit institution in Minneapolis, to develop the CLP program to provide job opportunities and greater independence for students with disabilities.

Piloted in 2010, the CLP program initially offered two levels of certificate training in professional cleaning. A program for retail training was added and recently graduated its second class, including Zach and Justin.

Classes are provided in an integrated community setting in

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

which students can experience the needs of area employers. For students in the retail training program, The Arc's Value Village Thrift Store & Donation Center offers a real-life taste of retail business. Enrollees begin earning an hourly wage during the last week of their training when they begin on-the-job skills development under The Arc's supervision.

Armed with their new skills, students like Zach and Justin who complete a training program can look forward to a brighter future. "I've learned to use the touchscreen cash register, pricing gun, and pallet jack, and I've learned how to provide better customer service," Justin said, beaming.

Justin reached his goal of working as a retail associate, and Zach has steady work in a restaurant.

Opportunity Partners and The Arc each raised funds through donations and grants to cover the cost of the first two classes. Bolstered by the first two programs' success, Opportunity Partners piloted a new Office Assistant training program in 2012 and plans to launch one for Computer Networking/Service this year.



Above: Graduates in the Opportunity Partners' retail training program proudly display the certificates they earned alongside one of their instructors.

For more information about Opportunity Partners' CLP program, contact Paul Fredendall at pfredendall@opportunities.org or (952) 885-2002.