Owen Schuldt’s Volunteer Work Teaches Many Lessons

Owen Schuldt, a participant at ABC Works in Caledonia, has been a part of the St. John’s Lutheran Elementary School staff for 14 years. Although this is a volunteer position, it is vital to students and teachers, who all benefit from his assistance. Owen works both in the library scanning books in/out for 1st – 4th graders, as well as in the 1st and 2nd grade classroom, helping with language arts skills.

Through the years, Owen has made many great friendships with students and teachers alike. It is very common to hear the students on the playground calling his name as he is leaving, wishing him a good day. The instructors are extremely welcoming each Thursday morning, greeting him and thanking him for his work at St. John’s.

Laura Campbell, long time teacher at St. John’s, pioneered this position and welcomed Owen to her classroom and the library at a time when Owen was looking for something more in his life. His love for children and his desire to help make this a perfect fit for Owen! The students not only benefit from an educational standpoint, but they also get an opportunity to see diversity in working with and becoming friends with Owen. From a very young age, Owen’s presence in their classroom teaches the students respect and acceptance of individuals with disabilities as they see how much people can thrive and be productive even though they may learn, speak, and mobilize in a different manner than they do. This experience is a win for Owen, students, and teachers!

After Mrs. Campbell moved away, her replacement, Christina Paggi, continues to have Owen assist in the classroom, helping students with their language arts activities and interacting every Thursday. Owen experiences true inclusion at St. John’s where he is included in holiday celebrations, and where the kids bring him Valentines, Easter treats, and birthday cards. Owen also participates in special drives that the school hosts such as walk-a-thons and saving his pop can tops to raise money for the Ronald McDonald House, which helps families of children with medical needs.

If Owen could speak for himself, he would say that Thursday mornings at St. John’s School is the highlight of his week – In fact…he DOES speak for himself, as he never hesitates to head for the door every Thursday morning when asked if he is ready to go see the kids at St. John’s! A great partnership was formed 14 years ago in a little classroom across the street from ABC Works. This little classroom continues to hold BIG opportunity for Owen Schuldt, as he teaches children about language skills, acceptance, and friendship!

Written by Sheila Heberlein, Program Coordinator
ABC’s School to Work Program Celebrates 32 Years!

ABC’s Community Based School to Employment Program (also known as School to Work) is celebrating 32 years. This program started in 1984 in response to a grant that the MR Providers Group (predecessor to CTECH) – a cooperative agency of community members, residential services, the Rochester school district, and other community agencies – had received from Vocational Services and the Job Training Partnership Act to provide career placement opportunities for youth with disabilities. ABC was the primary agency for this program and was funded by this grant for 3 years.

Nancy Joyce was the Community Based School to Employment Program (CBSce) coordinator at ABC starting in 1986. The Rochester Public School district saw the significant change in students and the unique opportunities this program offered, and decided to take over the fiscal responsibility of this program when the grant was no longer able to fund the program. Nancy remembers her first day of work: she stated that she was sitting at her desk in her nice dress clothes and the marketing manager at that time came in and handed her keys. When she had asked what they were for, she was told that she needed to go pick up the students and go clean a newly constructed home. The CBSce program consisted of about 10-15 students originally and the first community placement of the program was a student at Wendy’s on 2nd Street. Community partners were very receptive to welcome young students to the community and provide them with accommodations. Nancy remembers a time when Burger King had developed a light system to help a student know what needed to be done during the busy times of the day. The partnerships within the community and school district has since expanded to the current state of ABC’s program today.

Originally, ABC only worked with the Rochester Public School District, but has since then expanded to be able to offer the program to other surrounding school districts. ABC’s Community Based School to Employment Program receives the most referrals from the schools (as compared to the other agencies) due to the numerous partnerships ABC has in the community. The amount of career exploration opportunities and skill building that the community partnerships provide, allow students to be able to explore their likes and dislikes, and build their skills to work as independently as possible in a job that they enjoy doing.

Originally the CBSce program was designed for career placement and the emphasis has since then shifted to career exploration. In the beginning the program only offered one job placement. Today, students are able to have three work experiences a year which offers more opportunities for work experiences and skill building. Students are able to explore and try tasks that are new and outside their comfort-zone outside what the school can offer them. Students are also able to participate in two job trials a year in an unrelated work area than their current position.

The strength of the program is that students are able to make connections to their coworkers, supervisors and community as a whole. The partnerships in the community has accounted for the success of this program. Through the career exploration process, the students are able to build skills to be as independent as possible and give back to their community in meaningful ways.

This past school year, ABC’s Community Based School to Employment program served 32 students. There were seven graduates of the program, five of which continued with ABC’s adult programming and one student successfully achieved their goal of obtaining competitive employment. Though changes in the law with the Olmstead Plan and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) may change how the program looks, new referrals keep coming in and we are hopeful that Ability Building Center’s Community Based School to Work program will continue to develop and succeed at providing students diverse opportunities to build work skills and work experience within their community.

Written by Marilyn Yennie, Community Based School Employment Program Coordinator

Marisol making a bed at one of our local hotels.

Patrick cleaning the desks at a job site at one of the schools.

Matthew cleaning exercise equipment at a local fitness center.
In Memory of Alice Adamson

On April 21, 2016 we lost our dear friend Alice Adamson. She was born in Faribault, Minnesota to Tosten and Alma Musgjerd. She graduated from Kenyon High School. She attended the University of Minnesota and Winona State University and received her Master’s Degree in Social Work from St. Mary’s University.

Alice worked at the Cedar Valley Rehabilitation and Adult Community Treatment Center in Austin followed by many years at the Zumbro Valley Mental Health Center. After retirement, Alice had several part-time jobs and volunteered at many civic organizations.

Alice was a wonderful volunteer at ABC for the past 10 years and served as Board President and on many other teams. She was very knowledgeable in the rehabilitation industry and always offered meaningful input. Most of all she was a good friend and was dedicated to making life better for others throughout her community.

We will miss her but will remember her many contributions to our organization.

Remembering Bob & Greg

Many at ABC remember Bob Larsen from his early days (2007) at Ability Enterprises. He was a social butterfly who was proud to belong and proud of his nametag as evidence of that belonging. He greeted everyone, and loved parties and holidays. He had dance moves and could be seen singing his favorite songs even into a broom handle microphone. In recent years, Bob’s declining health made it harder for him to enjoy his favorite activities, but during one of his last times with his friends in AO, Bob was part of our April Fool’s party. Bob will be missed by all of his friends at ABC. How lucky we were to have our lives touched by Bob Larsen!

Written by Kaye Johnson, Activity Coordinator

Greg Persik passed away on May 13, 2016 unexpectedly of natural causes.

When I first met Greg he was on a tour with his Program Coordinator to look at the jobs ABC had at the IBM Rochester site. Greg was a very quiet and not really sure that this job as a courier runner would be a good fit for him. He was very hesitant and afraid as it was a lot of responsibility and IBM was so big. I asked him to give it/me a try to teach him the job and stops. Told him it would not be easy, but felt that he could do the job. Greg accepted the challenge! After a couple of months, he grew into a very confident individual who knew the user ids and office location of over 300 people on 6 floors without looking at a map. The job was perfect fit for him, no need to really carry on a conversation with any customers with the exception if an occasional hello and thank you.

At one point he was working towards a goal of owning a newer truck and getting to work on time was rough due to his illness. His motivation to earn the money for a truck was a green matchbox truck that was on his desk every morning he came in on time. Together we worked towards a newer truck for a couple of years.

Greg’s wheels were is pride and joy. He took very good care of his truck and made sure it was maintained on a regular basis.

On occasion he’d share that he was going on a fishing trip with his dad or to a concert. These were things he loved to do.

Greg taught me a lot in the 24 years I worked as his supervisor. Thank you Ron and Dotty Persik for sharing your son with us!

Written by Jane Kreidermacher, Work Supervisor
Diaper Service

In 1989 Ability Building Center purchased the Small Change Diaper Service with a vision of offering services to the community, providing babies with comfortable, environmentally friendly & cost effective diapers. Go to our web site at www.abcinc.org/news/sum16-01.html and read how this small business has evolved into a great service and opportunity for the people we serve!

Ability Options

Ability Options (AO) is a Day Program at ABC-Rochester where participants can try new things, socialize with friends and even dance. Activities include Bingo, Dance Parties, therapeutic drumming, circle soccer, group games and board games, Snack Attack and Old Time TV. We recently had coffee with our new Executive Director, Bruce Remme! Read more about AO at www.abcinc.org/news/sum16-02.html

Why I work at ABC?

Liz Schinigoi is a great Job Coach! She says working at ABC has given her the opportunity to become more diverse in her life especially while working in the Ability Enterprises department. The best is when someone says “Hi Liz” when she walks into the room and the smiles on everyone’s faces. Read more of Liz’s story at www.abcinc.org/news/sum16-03.html

Fun & Wellness

The average full-time employee spends 30% of their adult life at work. This means that over the span of a lifetime you can plan to spend 25-30 years of your life in the workplace. At ABC we would much rather spend that time being happy than unhappy. Read about what ABC employees are doing to promote fun and wellness in the workplace at www.abcinc.org/news/sum16-04.html
Congratulations on the WOW Award winners:

**Tim Brunson** is Woodland Industries 2nd quarter Woodland’s Outstanding Worker (WOW) award. Tim was nominated by the staff at Woodland Industries to be Woodland’s Outstanding Worker as he has a great attendance and is always on time for his work shifts. Tim has been very adaptable the last couple months working various enclave jobs such as Miken, Good Times and Hiawatha Valley, and helping in center as well with sewing hoods and boxing bolts. Tim has had a very positive attitude and works hard on his production and quality. Tim loves to fish and play bingo on his free time. Thanks for all your hard work Tim it is greatly appreciated and keep up the GREAT work!!!!!

**Margot Nanez** has worked both in-center and at community worksites. She is currently working on the crew at Mayo Patient Cafeteria. Margot is able to get the supplies needed to fill the condiment table and silverware with little or no assistance. She knows the job well enough to be able to help float staff and the regular job coach when necessary. Margot is flexible and is willing to pick up the slack when a coworker is absent or needs assistance. She is working very hard to reach her work goals and is very well liked by her coworkers and the Sodexo employees.

**Christina Krekula** works in sewing and at the Rochester Athletic Club (RAC). She has covered the RAC site for an extended period of time for another participant. She also goes to Byron Schools when needed. Christina is very flexible and willing to help out anywhere necessary. She gets along well with coworkers and is friendly and pleasant to all. Christina is an excellent ABC employee!

**Bev Foster** has been a life saver at the front desk. She has been willing to pick up additional hours when necessary and has recently taken on more challenging tasks that have “made her excited to come to work again”. She knows she is capable of a great deal more and is unwavering in her commitment to continue her growth. When learning a new task, she asks for the task to be reserved for her so she has the opportunity to fully understand it. She really has done a great job of making it known when she would like to learn a new task.

A Dream Come True!

Congratulations to **Tessah and David Kirkland** on their wedding! They met 14 years ago through the ABC School to Work program. They have been dating around four or five years, and got engaged almost two years ago. Tessah and David chose July 23, to be their wedding day, because her parents got married on July 24, 2010. They wanted their anniversaries to be close so they could take trips together and celebrate together as a family.

The rain came down on the couple’s big day, but as they say, rain on the wedding day is good luck. No matter what the weather is like, rain or shine, David and Tessah had a magical day, one they have been dreaming of for a long time.

The two look forward to going on a Disney cruise for their honeymoon in December, but are more excited to spend the rest of their lives together.
Ways to Donate

- Donate online
- Write a check
- Donate stock, mutual funds, or real estate to ABC
- Name ABC in your will or trust
- Name ABC as beneficiary in your IRA, retirement plan, charitable trust, life insurance policy or annuity
- Name ABC as TOD ("transfer on death") of your bank accounts
- Donate time by volunteering at ABC
- Advocate the Great Things ABC does in our community to others
- Donate to ABC using payroll deduction if your employer provides the option

Reasons to Donate

Support 935 participants, their 14 programs or transportation to get them to work.

Help us raise an extra $60,000 in honor of our 60th Anniversary to purchase a wheelchair accessible bus!

Go online at www.abcinc.org!

Thank You!

This year’s “On the Tee” with ABC raised $88,424 to support the programs and services at ABC!

Join us on June 6, 2017 for another day of golf and fun.