PILOT PROGRAM HELPS THE WORKFORCE

Able Trust Grant Funds Student Employment Project Initiative

ST. PETERSBURG, FL. — With a college degree in hand, Nicole St. Clair recently entered a job market that would look unwelcoming whether she had a disability or not. Fortunately, she didn’t have to go it alone in her search for employment. By St. Clair’s side was a mentor from St. Petersburg College’s nascent Student Employment Project, a program that helps students with disabilities find jobs that complement their degrees.

For St. Clair, who is hearing impaired, the relationship with Kelley Ferranti proved to be the key to success, helping her overcome barriers that often keep people with disabilities out of the workforce.

“Kelley went out to speak to companies on my behalf,” says St. Clair. “She would send me e-mails telling me what positions the companies said I was qualified to seek. Then she helped me with my résumé and she prepared me for interviews. She was fabulous; she went above and beyond.”

After four months of searching, St. Clair found a job as an enrollment specialist with Universal HealthCare. She processes requests for additional coverage. St. Clair hopes the position will lead to a long-term career at the company.

While at St. Petersburg College, from which she graduated last May with a bachelor’s degree in management and organizational leadership, St. Clair was among 60 students participating in the Student Employment Project. The program is funded by a three-year, $200,000 grant awarded by The Able Trust, a state-supported initiative that seeks to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment.

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The Student Employment Project helps open doors and improves job opportunities for people with disabilities who have the education and skills required to succeed as professionals. The program provides students with disabilities with “job placement specialists” like Ferranti. The specialists help students write effective resumés and teach them interview skills. They also assist with identifying employment opportunities as well as educating them on workplace behaviors.

“When I was looking for a job, Kelley and I met once a week to see how everything was going,” says St. Clair. “I got discouraged at times and she told me it would take time and to be patient; that the right job would come along. Well, Kelley was right.”

A 2010 Harris Interactive survey titled “The ADA, 20 Years Later,” found that only 21 percent of persons with disabilities aged 18–64 are employed full- or part-time, far below the 59 percent reported for persons without disabilities. Ensuring that the underrepresented disability community can find employment appropriate to their background and skills is a top priority of The Able Trust.

About The Able Trust: The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, is a 501(c)(3) public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990. Its mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment. Since its establishment, The Able Trust has awarded more than $29 million throughout Florida, enabling approximately 2,000 Florida citizens with disabilities to enter the workforce each year. The Able Trust youth programs provide career development and transition to almost 2,000 students with disabilities annually, helping to reduce the dropout rate and prepare young adults for life beyond high school.