

HIGH SCHOOL HIGH TECH



The Able Trust High School High Tech (HSHT) program provides high school students with disabilities the opportunity to

explore jobs and post-secondary education leading to in-demand careers. HSHT links youth to a broad range of academic, career development and experiential resources and experiences that will enable them to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce.

HSHT has been helping prepare students for the workforce for more than 15 years. It is a community-

based partnership made up of students, parents and caregivers, businesses, educators and rehabilitation professionals. With more than 40 programs throughout Florida, the High School High Tech program has been shown to reduce the high school dropout rate and increase the post-secondary enrollment rate of students.

The Able Trust is a statewide leader in raising awareness of and advocating for disability employment in Florida. We connect Florida businesses to local disability service agencies, and people with disabilities. The Able Trust is Florida's statewide resource, supporting businesses in their efforts to employ this under-utilized talent pool.

SUCCESS STORIES



RICHARD

My son Richard was diagnosed with high functioning autism at the end of his kindergarten year, and our life changed. Academically, Richard did very well but socially, he had difficulty in forming peer friendships. Richard joined the High School High Tech (HSHT) program halfway through his sophomore year in high school. I was delighted that he had a group to feel affiliated with, and the training that would occur during the after-school activities on topics such as career and personal development, preparing for a job interview, writing a resume, and interpersonal relationships among coworkers – all things Richard needed to learn.

Through his interaction with HSHT, Richard formed acquaintances with other group members. The fundraising drives and volunteer events helped him learn the value of helping others less fortunate, and he got to know others with various disabilities and their worth. The program also offered Richard job shadowing opportunities, fieldtrips and the opportunity to hear from guest speakers during workshops.

Richard graduated from high school, and he choose a career based on his love of zoos and aquariums. He attends Santa Fe College in Gainesville and plans to do an internship after his graduation and find a permanent fulltime job with his Associate of Science degree. Many thanks to the High School High Tech program and the instructor Amy Tharpe for such a great start to a wonderful, satisfying career!

Wendy Van Duyne, Parent

Richard went on to achieve his goal with a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of Florida, and a career at the Florida Aquarium.

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MELISA



Melisa Lewis wanted a career in health care – and she wasn't about to let her auditory processing deficit and hearing loss keep her from achieving her dream. The education, internships, and career training she received as a student in The Able Trust's High School High Tech program in Gainesville prepared Melisa to attend and graduate Magna Cum Laude from the University of Central Florida College of Nursing. A year into her first job as an R.N., Melisa was named her hospital's Neuroscience Floor Rookie of the Year. Today, Melisa works in an intensive care unit in Palm Coast.

One in five Floridians have some sort of visible or hidden disability and workers like Melisa are making a difference in Florida's economy. Floridians with disabilities make important contributions to Florida's workforce. They are flexible problem-

solvers who refuse to let barriers stand in their way. Employers that embrace inclusion of those with disabilities welcome a large pool of talented applicants and make their businesses more accessible to customers with disabilities.

As the workplace evolves with restructured jobs, remote work, and adaptive technology, Floridians with disabilities can be ideal talent for the 21st Century.

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RICARDO

An April 28, 2021 Florida Times-Union article, "*Rehab tech at Wolfson becomes autism role model*", states that as a child, Ricardo was diagnosed with autism but he didn't let this stop him. "It may have taken me longer to do certain things, but I still did them. I don't ever let something stop me; I always press through," said Ricardo.

In high school, Ricardo participated in the High School High Tech (HSHT) program funded by The Able Trust and administered locally by The Arc. The program gave him the opportunity to explore career options and in 2020, Wolfson Children's Hospital hired Ricardo to work at the Autism and Neurodevelopment Center. Ricardo's responsibilities included sanitizing treatment surfaces, helping the therapists prepare materials for treatment sessions and assisting in patient care.



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According to the Florida Times Union article, a situation occurred in which a child visiting the hospital was inside a play tube tunnel and refused to come out. "Neither his parents nor therapist could get him to budge." But when the therapist asked Ricardo to offer his hand and calmly ask him to come out, the child immediately responded by accepting his hand.

"I love working with the children," he said. "I understand better what they need and how they respond. That's what I love the most."