

Conklin Center Wins Award for Outstanding Employment Program

The Conklin Center's Supported Employment (SE) program was awarded the annual *Beverly Chapman Award for Outstanding Employment Placement Program* for the second time by The Able Trust at its Ability Awards ceremony held in Tallahassee.

The Able Trust selected the Conklin Center for this honor because the Center "has always been an organization with high employment expectations for its clients who are all blind along with such conditions as epilepsy, hearing impairments, brain injuries, mental health or developmental disabilities. The unemployment rate throughout the state has been high the last several years, and all grantees have reported difficulty in finding position openings at any skill level. But the Conklin Center has not slowed in its searches and networking to find employment opportunities that are ready to go."

The unemployment rate for working age adults who are blind is 70% according to the American Foundation for the Blind – even before the economic downturn! Publix, Papa John's Pizza, Olive Garden, Red Lobster and Metra Electronics have employed Conklin Center students and graduates for many years, but as the economy deteriorated, new positions became difficult to find. In response to this challenge, the Center's Supported Employment Team got on the phone and made over 200 cold calls to local businesses. This resulted in new relationships with Miller's Ale House Daytona Beach (where one of the owners is visually impaired) and with K-Mart.



The Start of a New Life

Charman came to the Conklin Center with a serious list of goals: to hold a job, learn how to live on his own, to use a computer and one day, hopefully, to have a family of his own.



These are goals that many young men take for granted. But Charman, who is blind and challenged by a lifelong learning disability, knew he'd need specialized training to get where he wanted to be.

Born prematurely, Charman's eyes weren't fully developed due to retinopathy of prematurity. After an accident at age seven that caused the retinas to become detached, he had surgery that restored vision in his right eye but not in the left eye. During high school, the retina became detached again. This time there were three operations but none could repeat the success of the earlier surgery and restore his vision. While most of his peers were thinking about starting their adult lives, Charman was coping with the loss of his remaining vision.

After his surgery, Charmin could see only light and dark. Despite his blindness and learning disability, he completed high school, and earned a special diploma. After graduation, he remained at home, becoming increasingly anxious because he had no idea how to move on with his life.

That changed when his counselor at Florida's Division of Blind Services told him about the Conklin Center and arranged for him to come to the Center for training in vocational and daily living skills. In just six months he learned keyboarding,

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Dear friends,

It is an honor to be able to tell you that our Supported Employment program was selected to receive The Able Trust's *Beverly Chapman Award for Outstanding Employment Placement Program* second for the time.

Our employment program is the only one that I know of that's dedicated exclusively to the employment and independent living needs of people who are blind and challenged by an additional disabling condition. It is closely aligned with our intensive residential program, where our students can master functional independent living skills that enable them to take charge of their lives.

We believe that employment and independent living are essential elements in the pursuit of happiness. If our adult graduates are going to have real choices about how they live their lives, it's important that we address both elements.

This "whole person" approach enables our graduates to become full participants in community life, reduces barriers historically imposed by significant disability, and provides meaningful alternatives to unemployment and dependence on others.

Your support has been essential to making sure that these - as well as the Center's other programs - are available for those who need our help. With across the board reductions in funding these days, your help is needed more than ever.

With this newsletter we are beginning our fall contributions campaign. Please consider making as generous a gift as possible. There are many more people like Charman who need your help to overcome the obstacles imposed by disabilities who are waiting to build a productive and active life.

Best regards,

Robert Kelly
Executive Director

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

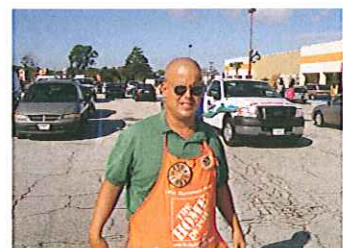
The U.S. Department of Labor recently reported on the Employment Status of People with a Disability for August. The **employment** rate of people 16-64 years of age was just 27.0% for persons with disabilities compared with 70.1% for persons without a disability.

One basic benefit of employing Floridians with disabilities is the dignity and pride that come with earning one's own way in the world and having something meaningful to do every day. We all want and deserve to feel that kind of pride.

It's also important to realize that employment of Floridians with disabilities benefits all of us economically. We live today in a challenging economy, and we can't afford to waste a single person who has the potential to contribute. Employed Floridians with disabilities pay taxes, buy and rent homes and apartments, and patronize businesses in our communities. The investments we make in extending employment opportunity to Floridians with disabilities far outweighs the public cost of the alternatives, which can include disability payments and publicly funded care.

These companies employ our students and graduates:

Bert Fish Hospital
Dustin's Bar-B-Q
Food Lion
Fox Mattress
Hobby Lobby
Home Depot
K-Mart
Little Caesars Pizza
Miller's Daytona Ale House
Outback
Steakhouse
Papa Johns Pizza
Pizza Hut
Publix Supermarket
TJ Maxx
Metra Electronics
Ocean Walk
Theatres
Olive Garden



In Honor**Ann Bloom**

H. Lee Woods

**50th Wedding Anniversary of
Joe & Lucille Detwiler**

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Detwiler

Mary Pezzo

Barbara Decker
Lila Seager

PDG Bob Respass

Gainesville Lions Club
Ocala On Top of the World
Lions Club

Tom Shamus

Edmund J. Klukowski

DG Jerry Skufe

Ocala Lions Club

successful cataract surgery

Mr. and Mrs. Roger Grubic

Doris Turlo

Beverly Hills Lions Club

In Memory**Mrs. Acquaro**

Mr. Rick Acquaro

Les Carle

Ginger Darden
Ocala On Top of the World Lions
Club

Bill Cliett

Ms. Kate B. Doster
Margaret Perkins

USN Herbert William Conklin

Mr. John S. Conklin

deceased family members

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph C. Biscone, Jr.

Betty Jean Dias

John C. Dias

Pat Dyro

Ms. Marion Ruesink

Elizabeth (Betty) Gravely

Homer J. Carter
Marjorie L. Evans
Thomas and MaryAnn Evans
Fred and Marion Holder
Gwen Lindsley
Jacqueline McCracken
retired faculty of
Newberry Elementary School
Newberry Lions Club
Judith B. Shaak
Shirley Shuler
Alice Tharp
Rosemarie Watson, PCC

Charles Helton

Mrs. Betty M. Helton

Lorraine Hessel

Mrs. Mary Campbell

Steven J. Hilgenberg, brother

Mr. and Mrs. John Hilgenberg

Matthew P. Hyland

Ms. Dorothy Hyland

Darrel Jordan's mother

Ms. Marion Ruesink

Carol Kozlowski

Mr. John K. Kozlowski and
Ms. Sharon Le Duc

Delores Kuhnlein

Mr. Edmund Kuhnlein

C. Bradley Lynch

Mount Dora Lions Club

our Mothers on Mother's Day

Mrs. Marie Cliggett

Leroy Ottensmann

Ms. Marion Ruesink

Lions Dolores & Earle Painter

Mr. and Mrs. Harry J. Detwiler

Ed Pittman

Mary Pezzo

Lion James E. Reid

Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Reid

Joe and Irene Rembaum

Ms. Nancy Rembaum

Hilly Rife

Ms. Jane N. Allen

Louise Shamus

Lion Edmund J. Klukowski

**Stephen Skannel, son and
former Center student**

Ms. Sybil Skannel

Lew Stanley

Mr. and Mrs. Don DeBerry

Bessie Tanner

Mr. Charlie Tanner

Mrs. Wilkins

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Wilkins

PDG Jess E. Wilson

Mr. Ede F. Wilson

**Robby**

Robby came to the Conklin Center at the age of eight months after being diagnosed with crossed eyes, delayed visual development, and brain abnormalities. He was unable to move any of his muscles including his eye muscles.

Eye muscle surgery was recommended by our Early Intervention Specialist and the Pediatric Ophthalmologist at Nemours Clinic agreed to perform the surgery. Robby's eyes were straightened out and he was able to maintain his alignment.

Through extensive visual training activities carried out by both his family at home and at the Center, Robby has achieved visual recovery and is able to maintain focus, scan and locate faces and objects, track horizontally and vertically, and alternate his gaze. In fact, his Ophthalmologist was so pleased with his visual progress, she prescribed glasses for him. After many years of visual and developmental training that was combined with physical therapy, Robby is now able to reach out and grasp objects, touch his mother's hands, smile, laugh, and play with toys. He will be five years old in December and leaving our program to attend kindergarten. He will be truly missed!

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Our adult students come from throughout Florida to our residential training facility in Daytona Beach to learn the skills to hold a job and live on their own. A personalized training program is designed for each student based on their strengths and abilities. Finding competitive employment is key to their being able to achieve their goal of living independently in the community.

Recognition from The Able Trust is an important validation of what we are trying to accomplish here at the Conklin Center. The award inspires us to redouble our efforts to improve employment prospects for our students and to help the business community benefit from employing Floridians with disabilities.



Bite for Sight, Dec. 4
River Grill on the Tomoka
950 N. US 1, Ormond BEach

Night for Sight Feb. 17, 2012
at The Shores Resort and Spa
Casino games, dinner &
silent auction

Win this Bike! Drawing for this
1959 Harley Davidson Panhead
March 18, 2012 at the
Iron Horse Saloon, Ormond Beach

New Life continued

how to prepare meals and how to manage his money without vision. However, learning to read Braille has been quite a challenge, according to Charmin. He makes Braille labels to help him identify canned or packaged food, but says he needs continued instruction and practice to master more complex reading activities.

Charman was so eager to go to work that he said he'd be willing to try anything to get started. Our Supported Employment team arranged for a work experience at Little Caesar's Pizza that allowed him to "try out" the job to see if it would be a good fit. Happily, the experience was successful and he started working at the restaurant three days a week in October 2010. The manager reported that he was "very pleased" with Charman's enthusiastic attitude and his ability to learn quickly. Originally hired as a dishwasher, his duties were changed to "sign spinner" (waving a sign in front of the business) when the business was sold.

His SE Coach also arranged a work experience at Miller's Daytona Ale House to prepare silverware for servers. This, too, went well; he began this job in March 2011 and now works at this second job three days per week. Charman takes the city bus to work at the Ale House and uses door-to-door bus service to travel to Little Caesar's which is a more complex route. Charman's employers confirm that he is committed to doing a good job, arriving on time and being part of the team.

Charman graduated from the Conklin Center's training program in August. He now lives in his own apartment in Daytona Beach. He maintains an active social life, has a girlfriend, and is well on his way to living the kind of life he's always dreamed of. He still meets once week with a Supported Living Coach from the Conklin Center, who helps him with managing his money and reading his mail. He also continues to see his Supported Employment Specialist and he is determined to make further progress in on his employment goals.

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Your fall newsletter is enclosed

