

Restek and Skills of Central PA Offer Career Training to High Schoolers with Disabilities

The preemployment program helps students learn skills and explore options so they can find rewarding work after graduation



Curtis Clouser and Maren Dotoli at Restek's Founder's Point fitness facility.

Curtis Clouser loves his job at Restek — the chromatography supplies manufacturer in Bellefonte, PA.

For a half day, three days a week, he leaves Bellefonte High School, where he is a senior, to help keep Restek's employee wellness center clean and tidy by wiping down all the equipment, cleaning the windows and mirrors, and folding towels. For a young man with disabilities, an opportunity like this is incredibly important for getting a job and helping support himself after graduation.

Curtis is the third student to cycle through Restek from this new preemployment program offered through Skills of Central PA, a nonprofit pioneer in developing comprehensive, community-based programs and services for people with disabilities.

Mike Perlozzo, the wellness coordinator at Restek, said the program is a win-win.

“The program benefits both parties because with him cleaning, we can focus on other things we have to get done during the day,” he said.

Maren Dotoli, a job coach for Skills who works with Curtis when he goes to Restek, said he loves having the responsibility.

“He loves having a job and making money and talks about having a pizza party when he's finished,” she said. “It's great to see that enthusiasm and it's honestly the best part of my job.”

Currently, Skills works with eight students with disabilities from Centre County thanks to a grant from the state's Office of Vocational Rehab (OVR). The students are paid for 90 hours of work at one location and then transferred to another location to maximize exposure to available options. Elizabeth Koch, a manager at Skills, said any time you can get high school students with disabilities out into the real world, they can better identify what kind of work they prefer to do and are good at.

“Our primary goal is to improve the lives of people with special needs by focusing on their abilities,” she said. “And with this program, we get to see what their skills are so we can help place them in a job they will love after they graduate.”

While Restek and Skills have only been working on this program for a little more than three months, their relationship goes back decades. For more than 20 years, Restek has relied on a partnership with Skills' industry services warehouse, where adults with disabilities assist with the final assembly of many Restek products.

To learn more about Restek Corporation, visit www.restek.com and to learn about Skills, visit www.skillsofcentralpa.org

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