

BOCES SPOTLIGHT

February 2013

WORK BASED LEARNING PROGRAM JOB COACHES AND

Related Services

"...these young adults just want to feel a part of something, understood, and successful on any level. It is our job to empower them with a means of success!" Pat Smolenski

The Related Services team provides speech and occupational therapy to students in preparation for the Work-Based Learning Program (WBLP). Through observation, advisement, and on-the-job collaboration, the resources provided by Related Services are IEP-requested to assure that students have the information they need to perform at optimum levels while at the job site. Related Services works to ensure that both students and job coaches have the resources they need to have a successful and rewarding work experience.

The Related Services team, led by Barbara Cesario, includes Pat Smolenski, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, and Nicole Murphy, Speech and Language Pathologist. They work closely with Roger Risko and his team of job coaches at the WBLP. Norah Merritt, Executive Director of Educational Programs, coordinates this collaboration to provide Related Services at the job sites, creating a comprehensive



educational experience for students. Each student performs differently and has unique reactions to sensory stimuli, including lights, sounds, and odors. Students also react differently to coaches and peers. The Related Services team looks at the big picture, serving as a medium between student and job coach to increase everyone's understanding of both tasks and needs. When conducting job site observations, the team seeks out ways to increase productivity and feasibility for the students, which strengthens their skills and self-esteem.

Easing students into the WBLP is a team process that is approached from three directions – job coaching, occupational therapy, and speech therapy. Job tasks are worked on in school in



order to streamline the process of moving into the work environment.

For example, if a student's task will involve boxing shoes, the job coach will send a shoebox to the classroom so that the student can practice placing shoes in the box correctly as well as closing the lid in a way that will allow the boxes to be neatly stacked.

Working with occupational therapists, students have also practiced assembling pizza boxes. When the therapists later visit the job site, they not only observe the task being performed, but they offer suggestions that reveal students' strengths or previously acquired skills. They also help to explain a student's individual limitations and challenges to the job coaches, and advise on just how long to pursue a difficult task without the student becoming too frustrated to be productive.

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Another goal of the Related Services team is to improve communication. If a job coach is working with a new student, they are not immediately familiar with how the student best communicates. Related Services will demonstrate and model for the coach, effective communication in the student's expressive language. This enables the job coach to communicate with the students in ways that they understand, such as through visuals or choice-making.

Speech therapy is helpful in teaching students to use language as a guide for controlling behavior, remaining attentive to tasks, and speaking while in public. The use of visuals in the classroom can help students identify appropriate voice levels with minimum explanation, which can sometimes escalate a problem instead of correct it.

On site, the speech therapist analyzes the types of situations and distractions that the students encounter and assists both the students



and the job coaches with developing coping strategies. One student cited being taught appropriate communication while at his job. After learning professional and appropriate ways to address the public while at work, such as using the terms "Ma'am" and "Sir", as well as learning to sing to himself in his head while he works, the business hired him, which illustrates the success of the Related Services program.



Pat Smolenski remarked, "We will do whatever the task is and be successful. We may do it a bit differently and even change it where it would appear drastic to someone else, never the less, the difference would facilitate success for our students/young adults. We set them up for success; however insignificant it may seem to the average eye, it is MAJOR to them."

It is the goal of the Related Services team to bring this type of success to all students and job coaches in the program. One of the therapists commented, "I sincerely love what I do. I love and respect the kids, as well as all who work with them. They are special beyond words, and to be honest, they have taught me more than I could ever teach them. They are honest in who they are and an inspiration. They persevere while overcoming so many more obstacles than others and yet strive for success in spite of the difficulties."



Norah Merritt, Executive Director for Educational Programs

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