“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

—Henry Ford

Your organization is an integral part of the community in which you work.

As a committed member of that community, you can play a crucial role in helping young people with disabilities gain useful skills they will use throughout their lives.

**Become a CES WorkTogether Partner**

We invite you to join a growing league of employers in Hampshire and Franklin Counties who are partnering with the Collaborative for Educational Services to provide volunteer intern experiences for students with special needs.
Many residents of The Arbors Retirement Community look forward to the arrival of CES students each week, so they chat with the young people as they play scrabble or do a holiday craft.

Betsy Spry, Activities Director at The Arbors in Amherst, says many of the CES volunteers have been coming for years and can now run many of the activities. And while the volunteers have been helpful in enriching the activities seniors can participate in, she finds great reward in watching how working with the seniors has helped the students grow.

As the students gain confidence, they also start to open up with the residents. “I’ve seen some of the students go from being totally shy to hugging everyone when they leave at the end of their senior year,” Spry said. CES staff members, she adds, “have always been very helpful and cooperative. They are very good about communicating with me about the program and about logistics.”

Sean Porter, Executive Director of Look Memorial Park, a Northampton nonprofit, says that being a community partner in CES’s volunteer internship program has been rewarding on many levels.

While CES students gain skills and experience interacting with an employer, “We get volunteers who are supported very well and have a strong willingness to learn and achieve.” Porter said his experiences working with CES students have been extremely positive. “They’re always very polite and very helpful.”

Each spring, summer and fall, CES students clean up park grounds, help staff with routine maintenance, and make sure the zoo animals do not have access to garbage thrown by visitors that could be harmful to them.

While many of the students work in teams with their teachers, some work independently. For example, Porter said Doug has worked at the park for the past several years. He usually works by himself with a CES staff member on a variety of tasks, checking in with maintenance staff after completing the task, every hour or so.

“He always ends up at the train station,” said Porter, “which is the attraction he likes the most, he loves the trains, but he’s also a big help, assisting staff with ticket sales and talking with kids and parents waiting in line.”

“It’s great to watch the kids grow…by senior year, they have become so much more mature…they can take a task on themselves and get it done.”

— Betsy Spry, Activities Director, The Arbors
“How do you like the CES students?” Kate Albrecht shouted from the middle of a large sorting room at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. The group of several dozen retirees, college kids, senior citizens and housewives cheered. “Say it LOUDER,” Albrecht urged them, and the group shouted their approval. “They’re great!” many yelled. The handful of CES students working alongside other volunteers beamed with pride.

Albrecht, who coordinates food sorting at the Food Bank’s warehouse in Hatfield, likes to ask that question whenever a group of students donates their time and labor to help others in the community can gain access to fresh, wholesome food. Every Wednesday, CES students inspect food donations, ensuring quality of food donations before they are shipped out to food pantries across western Massachusetts. They check to make sure grocery items have proper ingredient labels and that packaging is secure so the food inside is not contaminated. They also inspect produce donated from local farms and retail stores to make sure it is fresh and healthful.

CES students work in teams with other volunteers of all ages. Their youthful energy is often an important contribution to work teams which often include senior citizens. “They really help lifting and opening boxes as they are so much stronger than volunteers in their 70’s and 80’s,” she said.

Albrecht encouraged other employers to utilize a team-based approach when possible. “It’s very wonderful for the students to work as part of a team. In addition to the skills they build through the quality control inspections, working on teams creates a community of people contributing to the work at hand which deepens the experience for everyone.”

Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

Jason Graves, the owner of Full Circle Bike Shop, is no stranger to young people.

Full Circle Bike Shop

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Full Circle Bike Shop

Every afternoon, youth gather on the steps of his bicycle shop in Florence talking about their favorite bikes, and the latest stunts they pulled off on the BMX event course.

Whenever business lulls, Graves joins them, encouraging their interest in the sport of BMX and bicycles in general.

And so it was on one of those days, as afternoon rolled into evening, that Graves met Joe.

Joe, who was a student at HEC Academy in Northampton from 2010 until he graduated in 2012, had challenges focusing on his school work and controlling his impulses in and out of school. “But I could see he loved bikes we made a connection about that,” Graves said.

So when one of Joe’s teachers approached Graves about Joe doing an internship at the bike shop, Graves said yes. For the next year, Joe was dropped off at the shop by his teachers for several hours a week.

He worked under Graves’ supervision, organizing the shop before it opened, setting bikes for sale out front, taking out the trash, and learning basic bicycle maintenance skills. Throughout the year, Graves said he could see Joe gain confidence as the young man matured. Over time, he was better able to check himself before saying or doing something impulsive.

“It’s cool to see kids grow up and learn stuff and mature,” said Graves. While Joe no longer has time to hang out on the steps of the bike shop after school, he stays in contact with Graves. They still share a deep passion for racing and riding BMX bikes, and the conversation never lags.
Your business can help young people with disabilities gain useful skills they can use the rest of their lives. The volunteer internship experience offers students invaluable, real-life opportunities to use and develop social/emotional and academic skills, and to connect with adults in the community. The important workplace skills and habits developed through the experience can be transferred to other jobs and settings.

**Is the WorkTogether program a good fit for your organization?**

Our students have worked successfully with a wide variety of local employers, from large corporations to businesses owned and operated by a single person. But each employer who partners with us shares an interest in helping young people gain critical skills so they can be productive members of their community.

We expect partnering employers to provide:

- A supportive and positive workplace atmosphere
- A few hours of work each week for the volunteer interns
- A liaison to the CES staff members who supervise students

**CES will provide:**

- Courteous and positive staff members who will help model appropriate workplace behaviors for students
- The appropriate level of supervision on-site to address individual student needs
- Guidance to the employer, as appropriate, on task adaptation for individual needs to ensure maximum participation and success of the volunteer intern(s)
- Full insurance coverage for each volunteer intern

**How do I get involved?**

The first step is to contact our staff and open a dialogue about whether your workplace would be a good match for the needs and interests of our students, and how our volunteer interns might best work within your business or agency.

We will then schedule a site visit to your organization to see the workplace first-hand, discuss further with you how we can create a WorkTogether partnership, and determine the particular tasks and guidelines pertinent to the students’ upcoming work experience. These details will help us identify which student(s) may be the best fit for your environment. Once we have established our WorkTogether partnership, we will bring our student(s) to the site to meet the employer and receive an orientation to the environment and task expectations.