



Saint Anthony's Wins National Award

September 7 2012 9:51 AM

(Alton, IL) – Saint Anthony's Health Center received The National Award of Excellence from the National Rehabilitation Association (NRA) for outstanding achievement in creating opportunities for people with disabilities. The organization commended the partnership between Saint Anthony's and the Alton School District's STEP program last week at its annual meeting in Chicago.

The STEP (*Secondary Transitional Experience Program*) hospital work program started at Saint Anthony's in 1994, led by Karen Botterbush, now the supervisor of special education for the school district. The work-training program helps students with disabilities better prepare for transition to employment and community participation.

Funded by the Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the Alton School District, the student workers receive minimum wage scale, working up to two hours each day and receiving school credit for that time as well. In March, Saint Anthony's was awarded the Organizational Rehabilitation Service Award for the Southern Illinois Chapter by DRS, and then in May, received the State Organizational Rehabilitation Award.

Saint Anthony's President and CEO, E.J. Kuiper, accepted the award on behalf of the Sisters of St. Francis and the Mission Partners. "It is a privilege to partner with the Alton School District on creating a program that advocates for individuals with disabilities," says Kuiper. "And I would like to thank and recognize the Saint Anthony's Mission Partners who work each year with these high school students to provide meaningful work experiences."

Since the program began, Saint Anthony's has trained over 500 students throughout the years and has competitively employed some of these individuals. Three former STEP students are currently employed with Saint Anthony's, including Thomas Grindstaff in Food Service.

Grindstaff, now 21, trained in the STEP program in 2010. He was hired in the Saint Anthony's Food Service department over a year ago and said he appreciates the program's training. "I was a good worker before entering STEP," he noted, "but the job coaches and staff here taught me to be more organized in my work."

This school year, 27 students are employed on both Saint Anthony's Health Center and Saint Clare's Hospital campuses, working in a variety of departments, including Food Service, Supply Chain, Environmental Services, Groundskeeping and Saint Clare's Villa. The program coordinator is Jackie Hudock, who shares her time between the two hospitals. Ron Wright is the Job Coach for Saint Clare's and Melissa Smith is the Job Coach for Saint Anthony's. The job coaches are always on site with the students.

Students accepted in to the STEP program must be 16 years of age, a special education student with an Individualized Education Plan, and receive at least two recommendations from school staff. The students typically stay in the program one year, then transfer into the Community Program to find competitive employment.

"The program really helps the students mature and learn socialization skills," says Hudock. "Through STEP, the students develop desirable work habits and realistic career goals."