

## The Culmination of 20 Years: A DPS Program with a Safety Net

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Recently, Chaffey College students in the Disability Programs & Services (DPS) department hosted the CAPED Officer's Council meeting. The students are participants in a special transitional job readiness program at the Learning Development Center, a branch of DPS. The students volunteered their time and services in hosting the event. They felt honored and were excited to have this excellent opportunity to take what they have been learning in the program and apply it to a real life situation. Students were involved in planning, setting-up, decorating, preparing, and serving breakfast and lunch. Of course, clean-up was an invariable aspect of their participation as well. Most importantly, this experience gave students the chance to gain valuable work experience and training. As a result of their excellent work (to say we were very proud of them is an understatement!), it became evident that sharing information about this 'special' program could help our colleagues assist those students who sometimes "fall between the cracks" when it seems there is not an appropriate program for them.



This branch of Chaffey DPS began in the early 80's. A dream was born. The vision began with Dr. Robert Harris who recognized the need for a flexible, progressive program designed to meet the nature and needs of students with disabilities who did not fit the typical student mold of transfer or certificate/degree acquisition. He recognized the importance for a program which would serve students who in essence "fell between the cracks". At the time, there were no educational/vocational services for students who had higher level skills but did not demonstrate the potential to achieve academic success in mainstream community college classes.

The ILDC (Independent Life Development Center) began in 1980 with a few classes for students with disabilities. The goal of the program was to teach independent living and work skills to students, especially those who experienced academic challenges. In 1983 the educational setting moved from leased space at an elementary school campus to an off-campus industrial setting. This allowed the program to expand to include a simulated work lab in addition to classrooms. Through the years, this DPS component has weathered budget cuts, staff reductions and reorganization. But the program staff was committed to keeping the dream alive, culminating in the establishment of a program focused on instruction leading to the transition, placement, and retention of students in competitive employment.

The Learning Development Center (LDC), which is what it is called today, meets the needs of students with disabilities by providing educational and support services leading to transition and retention in competitive employment. Students who meet the program criteria are those who have a verified disability and who have the potential to be competitively employed. They must also be able to benefit from instruction and continue to make measurable progress in classes and labs. The 'ability to benefit' criteria is used to evaluate students' status and continuance in the program. Referral to alternate services is made if an evaluation indicates the need.

Many of the students in the program have a developmental disability, and the majority of students come to the program directly from high school. They must be ready for competitive employment within two years of entry into the LDC. A student may be referred for job placement at any time within this period depending on successful progress. An extension of the program may be granted if a student is close to being job ready upon the completion of two years.

The program offers job readiness classes, job skills practicum labs, job placement classes and job club to assist students with disabilities in the transition into successful employment.

Job Readiness classes focus on:

- Interpersonal Awareness
- Money Management
- Online job seeking skills in conjunction with the identification of students' job skills and realistic job goal setting
- Interview Skills
- Job Success Skills
- Current Events
- Basic Computer Skills

Job Skills Practicum labs focus on:

- Basic job skills training in a simulated work environment
- Behaviors and attitudes for success and retention in the work place
- Assessment of job readiness

Job Placement classes focus on:

- Job seeking skills (job search, resume, applications, interview skills)
- Online computer job search
- Community integration (Taking what is learned in the classes/lab and applying it in an actual experience. Confidence building is also included.)

Job Club focuses on:

- Support and instruction in job search techniques (job search, resume, applications, interview skills)
- Confidence and motivation issues
- Job success and retention
- Participation in independent job search

Job placement services are available to all eligible students. The LDC has partnered with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to offer DOR/Chaffey clients/students services as part of the WorkAbility III contract. The Job Placement Specialist assists students in obtaining competitive employment, offers supportive services, develops job sites, interfaces with employers in the community on behalf of students, provides individualized career guidance services, contributes to job club, and networks for job contacts.

Short term job coaching services are also available. In the event that a student needs assistance or support in performing duties on the job, the Job Coach may assist the student in successfully transitioning into employment at the worksite. Follow-up services are available as needed for up to one year after job placement.

When asked what they've learned at the LDC, one student said "I learned about what it takes to be successful on the job and keep it. I also learned that getting a job is really



important. One of the key goals of getting a job is getting as many applications as you can get. I think a job is hard work. Thank you for your time.” Another student said, “What I learned was how to be a good worker and that the LDC helped me a lot the 2 years I have been here. This school has helped me so much that when I leave the school I will miss all the people here at the LDC.”

Recently, one of the students became employed as a lot porter at Home Depot. He said, “I have learned that you must be serious in a work environment. I now remember stuff that you should do in order to get along with co-workers. I have learned how to safely operate equipment and tools that we use on the job. I have come to appreciate those who have to work long hours and do not easily get upset when someone working in a store screws up.”

It is both a joy and privilege to work with the students and staff in the LDC program. To witness the transformation of students as they develop their skills and enhance their ability to achieve competitive employment with true purpose, real contributions, and personal ownership is an awesome experience. Many of the students who have met with success throughout the program had not previously thought that they could be contributing members of the community. One of the fundamental American virtues is to have a sense of being a fully participating member of society. To realize that the LDC program has had a small part in assisting students with disabilities to become full participants in meaningful employment and to see the pride and enhancement of self-esteem that comes as a result is truly rewarding.

Today, Chaffey College’s Learning Development Center continues to follow the college’s mission to “improve lives within the diverse communities it serves through equal access to quality, learning-centered occupational, transfer, general education, and foundation programs”. May we all endeavor to keep the dream alive and transform it into reality!

If you wish to learn more about the program contact:  
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Pictured from Left to Right: Briana Berniger, Sara Perez, Robert Salas, Donald Gardner, Latisha Byley, Jacque Lacroix, Brandon Cowden, Louie Kerr, Anthony Garro