



Empowering People Through Work: Coastal Center for Developmental Services

The goal at the Coastal Center for Developmental Services (CCDS) and their subsidiary Quantum, Inc. is to employ and empower the developmentally challenged in the greater Savannah area. Through their employment and supervision programs, they prove that limitations are not real but perceived and every person has a viable purpose.

The CCDS's original concept was conceived in the 1950s by parents who gathered weekly in Forsyth Park to form a social support group for their children, who at that time were not able to attend the public school system. Subsequently, those parents created an environment that they may have never imagined, or maybe they did. Perhaps they had the vision that their children, too, would grow to be skillful, working members of society. The CCDS creates a progressive environment for adults with developmental disabilities to find their niche.

Now seven decades later, the organization now known as CCDS became an established non-profit in 1979. Executive Director Kathy Thomson has worked for the agency since 1976. "We were a program for children and adults at that time. When the law changed, the children went to public school, the pre-school kids were served by the Health Department, and we became strictly an adult program by the '90s. Since then we've worked to be viewed not just as a social service agency, but as a business within the community," she says. Through strategic planning they have employment contracts with L'Oreal, IKEA Distribution, and Oneida Flatware. As the literature boasts, they "play with the big boys." It's true: the CCDS isn't just a social service agency, it's an adventure.



LEFT TO RIGHT: CCDS EMPLOYEES BETH JERNIGA, GREGORY KENNEDY, MARCUS WASHINGTON, KATHLEEN VON WALDNER, CINDY BURNS, PATRICK CURRY AND ANNETTE PRICE ARE PROUD TO WORK ON ACCOUNTS LIKE DOLE, WHICH IS JUST ONE OF THE COMPANIES ON ITS IMPRESSIVE CLIENT LIST.

Featured Article

Message from the
Assistant Commissioner

Empowering People
Through Work

Connecting to
Community Life

Surgeries & Disabilities

Flexibility of Funds

Aging with Disabilities

OLOD Training Events

In The News

Fact of the Day

Leaving the main offices formerly known as the Juvenile Detention Center, one is met with an oasis. The Community Garden is a lush, perfectly landscaped area where benefactors that include Paula Deen and Savannah Hardscapes are honored. Dragonflies dart through fragrant bushes of rosemary and long-stemmed basil. Beauty is combined with function in the garden, where the center's Special Projects Manager, Georgia Miller, the horticulturist responsible for the design and realization of the Community Garden, is tending the third harvest of collard greens, squash, cabbage, okra and Japanese eggplants.

Beyond the Community Garden is a massive building where the center's subsidiary Quantum, Inc., houses four businesses created for the employment of CCDS members. In the Packaging Assembly department, over 100 individuals work diligently for several major corporations, including Dole, Our Life – a local healthcare company – and International Paper. Next is the Electrical Assembly department, which employs those skilled at assembling wiring for Gulfstream jets. The Coastal Center has been in business with the elite manufacturer for 30 years. "We always pass our assessment at 100 percent accuracy," Thomson says. Around the corner and down the hall, Promotional Services offers hand silkscreen printing for items like T-shirts or golf shirts, heat stamping for napkins, matchbooks and pencils, among other products.



Quantum's Catering Services creates meals for Savannah Tech, privately run by Richard Bradham, who is on the Board of Directors. Jarrell Dickey, Communications-IT Coordinator, explains, "We think it's important to have someone from the program represented on every committee we have." The operation is awe-inspiring.

The CCDS's Day Habilitation program is designed for those with severe challenges who require closer supervision. While they are not in a work program, they are taught daily living skills, self-care and receive help with speech. The leaders at the agency are earnest, passionate and dedicated to the people they serve. Dickey has been with the agency for 22 years. "It changed my life watching people achieve – defying all the odds, knocking down barriers," he says. Dickey, Thomson and Cindy Burns, Business Development Manager, have witnessed and felt the joy of achievement. Burns continues, "Watching individuals realize their vision for themselves...her crew have the fortitude to see their goal through to the end." Thomson says, "We hold our people in high regard."

The Coastal Center for Development gives its members the tools to thrive as individuals. ME*Power, a campaign created by Burns, speaks to the idea that all people are valuable and being employed gives the people character and identity in the community. Although there are often initial concerns that developmentally challenged people will not fit in, once they are hired, employers find that a diverse workforce benefits everyone. Also, because people with disabilities have to work harder to get a job, they tend to be more appreciative of their positions, and this enthusiasm creates a ripple effect for the whole workforce. Businesses that hire disabled workers are turning social issues into business opportunities with the bonus of getting a good return on their investment. Disabled employees are known to retain their positions for longer while costing less to recruit and train. Burns continues, "If we work together, we're able to build a better community. When you really believe that everyone should be treated the same and quit putting people in boxes, we will all be able to live a better life."



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT CCDS AND THEIR SERVICES, VISIT www.ccds-sav.org.