



## **An Introduction To Something Truly Unique**

The human body is incredible. Typically, when one capability is impaired, other capabilities improve. For example, individuals who are deaf often have increased visual and tactile acuity. Because the words we use shape how and what we see, when looking through the lens of the word "disabled," we tend to see what's missing. As a result, we often miss seeing the unique capabilities of people - how they are "uniquely abled".

The goal of The Uniquely Abled Project is to shift the societal paradigm from "disabled" to "uniquely abled".

### **The Uniquely Abled Project**

In July 2013, in collaboration with the Exceptional Children's Foundation (ECF), we began to explore what possibilities would appear if ECF clients were viewed through the lens of "uniquely-abled." What were they particularly good at? How might these talents be useful to A&D companies?

The answer to the first question was that many were good at repetitive work with clear instructions, work which could not be done solely by a machine (human intervention is required), where they are mostly working as an individual.

When we asked A&D companies whether such talents would be useful, we received a resounding "Yes." For example, Hawker Pacific Aerospace generates about 5 feet of paper for every one of the 450 landing gears they refurbish annually. To date, this paper has been stored in over 1,000 file cabinets. Hawker received permission from the FAA to scan all these paper files into the cloud to reduce storage costs and improve access. This work was ideal for ECF adult clients.

Everyone benefited by this Hawker-ECF partnership. The initial three people hired has grown to 12, with 2 working full-time. These individuals might have been on welfare or in a lower-skilled and lower-paid job – but they are now employees of a respected aerospace firm, with benefits combined with pride and motivation. Hawker benefits because a necessary project is completed – and it may have been difficult to fill these positions (most of us would go crazy feeding paper into a scanner all day), receives tax-benefits, gets recognition for hiring adults with developmental disabilities who have unique abilities, and gets a on-site job coach until the new employees are fully incorporated into the company. The community benefits because those individuals who may have received welfare and non-profit support are now taxpayers.

In addition another 3 individuals have been hired by United Aeronautical Corporation.

Our plan is to expand this aspect of the UA Project for those situations where significant training is not required for job placement.



### **The Uniquely Abled Academy**

Next we investigated matching unique abilities to market demand. It's been observed that jobs requiring individuals with a high degree of focused attention to detailed repetitive processes, and following clear objective instructions are well suited for a person with high functioning autism. Indeed, these characteristics are a perfect match for the duties of a CNC (computer numerical controlled) machine operator, of which there is a huge shortage in the manufacturing industry today.

### **Matching Unique Skills To The Unique Needs Of Manufacturers**

The Uniquely Abled Academy, the second aspect of The UA Project, is targeting this shortage through a groundbreaking 10-week CNC training course, with job placement support for 20 students offered through Glendale Community College, starting on June 20, 2016.

Developed with the help of a multi-disciplined team of over 40 individuals, including specialists in education for those with autism, representatives from state and local social service agencies, as well as businesses from the private sector, the Uniquely Abled Academy will train and help place qualified students in skill-specific, well-paying jobs in local manufacturing companies.

The California Department of Rehabilitation and the Verdugo Workforce Development Board have agreed to pay the cost of training CNC operation and job readiness skills. A \$30,000 donation will be used for scholarships and other educational expenses. We plan to hire a full-time UA Academy Coordinator for overall administration of the Glendale CC UA Academy.

### **On The Right Course To A Better Future For All**

We envision the CNC course at Glendale Community College Course acting as a foundation for building similar Academy enabled courses, which will address a wide range of unique abilities and job opportunities, and one day stretch across the nation. The next two sites have already been identified. This path will lead to beneficial outcomes for many sectors of society - from the unemployment and underemployment of the uniquely abled, to the under utilization of Community College resources, to the economic cost of welfare and an understaffed manufacturing industry.

For additional information contact *info@uniquelyabledproject.com*.