

Placement service finds jobs for developmentally disabled

By Scott Maben
Of the Emerald

McKenzie Personnel Systems, a three-year-old job placement service for developmentally disabled persons, has found employment for two of its applicants at the University. But directors of the program are looking for more job openings on campus to serve a growing list of eligible adults.

Traditional services for individuals with mental retardation have been based on segregation from the non-disabled such as placement in a special workshop where they earned a nominal wage, according to Kristina Smock, a research assistant for the Specialized Training Program. Affiliated with the University's Center on Human Development, STP is McKenzie's mentor service.

Smock said the current trend is to integrate the developmentally disabled into the community. McKenzie, an autonomous, non-profit organization funded through the state Mental Health Division, reflects this trend by matching the abilities and interests of its clients with just the right job, Smock said.

The fact that McKenzie is a personnel service for developmentally disabled is unique, she said.

"It's looking for individual jobs for the people it's working with," Smock said. "And any time we're looking for a job, we're competing with anyone else in the public who's looking for a job."

But the service extends beyond other personnel agencies. "All our efforts do not

culminate with the job placements," Smock explained. "Traditionally, vocational rehabilitation works with a person to get them ready for a job, places them in a job and then leaves them there on their own. We're not only trying to get people ready for jobs and find them jobs, but we provide real intense training for as long as that person has the job."

Once a job is found, a job trainer with McKenzie will work in the position for a short period trying to get a "feel" for what it entails. During this initial analysis the trainer considers transportation and access to the place of business, tasks and work loads, and the frequency and nature of social interactions with management and co-workers.

This analysis establishes criteria of job performance for a non-disabled worker. "If everything is OK by the employer's perceptions, then we set that work as a standard. Then we more or less compare the handicapped worker with that standard of productivity," Smock said.

The information the trainer gathers about the potential job also helps determine which developmentally disabled applicant is best suited for the position. If the applicant is interested, he or she will be hired directly by the business or firm.

The trainer stays on to show the new employee the ropes, retrain the employee if new tasks are added and evaluate the employee's performance.

"And that's a real big difference between traditional vocational rehab programs and what we're doing," Smock said.

She characterized traditional vocational rehabilitation as programs catering only to employees injured on the job and persons with physical impairments or minor learning disabilities, leaving those with severe learning problems to the segregated workshops.

But McKenzie offers indefinite support, whereas many vocational programs sever relationships after the clients have been on the job for a few months, Smock said.

"Our program sort of dovetails with modern vocational rehab in offering up-front training such as medical assistance and on-the-job training," she said. "But we also provide extended support. We'll be there after two years."

McKenzie's 1986-87 budget of about \$52,000 allowed for 12 job placements. Currently, nine developmentally disabled individuals have found employment through McKenzie — two on campus and seven in the community.

Shirley Ell, 28, has been employed as copy-room assistant at the Graduate School of Business Administration — her second job on campus.

Ell, who lives on a farm in Junction City with her family, previously has worked in clinical services at the University. Her present job requires about six hours of work each Monday, Wednesday and Friday. She is paid \$4 an hour, and the position is year-round.

On the job for a little more than one month, Ell receives job orders for copy room work, for which she may be asked to make dittos or photocopies, collate several pages of text and staple them, and deliver the final package. She comes into regular contact with about 10 people in the office, but serves close to 100 throughout the department.

Ell also distributes bulk and individually addressed mail and soon will be trained to operate a mimeograph machine,

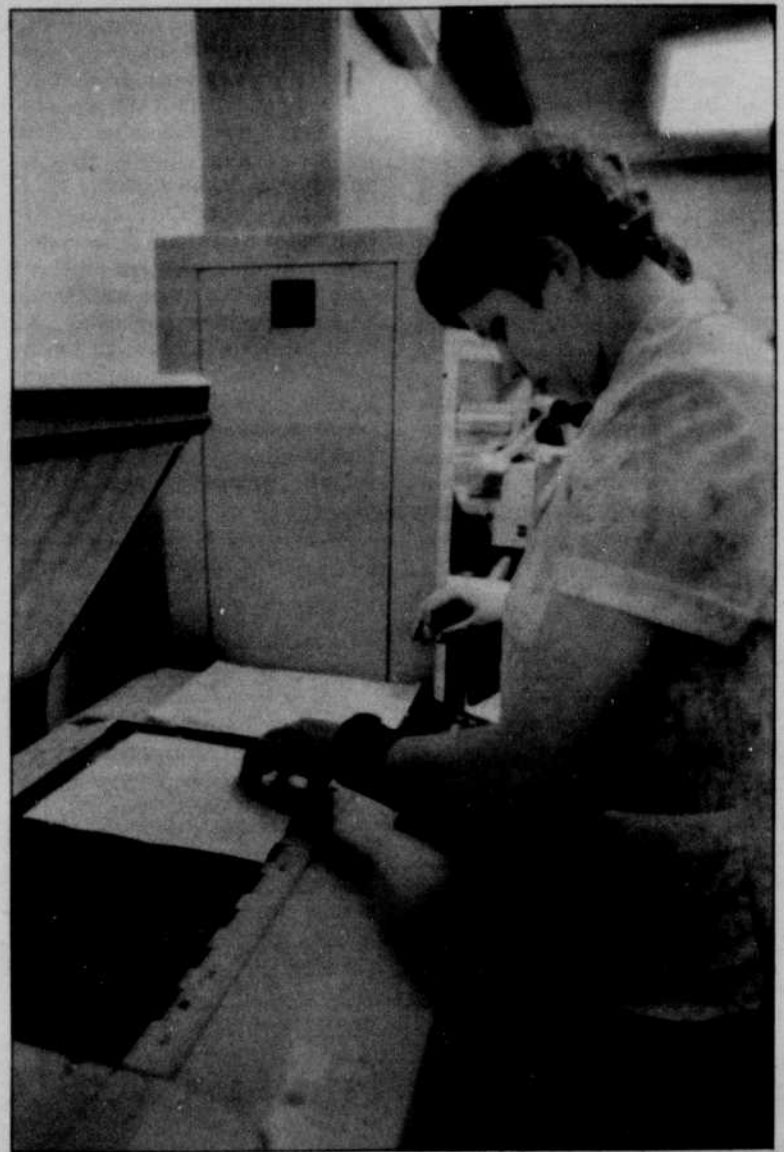


Photo by Scott Maben

McKenzie Personnel Systems placed Shirley Ell (above) in a copy-room position at the Graduate School of Business.

according to her McKenzie job trainer, Jim Johnson, a junior in human services.

Johnson, who will continue to train Ell until he and office supervisors decide she is capable of working independently, said he is surprised at Ell's progress.

"Shirley's just gone a whole lot faster than we're used to. She's almost completely independent (on several tasks)," Johnson said. "She's really going strong."

Ell's independence and meticulousness were two important deciding factors in her receiving the position, Johnson said. "She loves to be independent and so is real motivated to learn and to do it alone by herself," he said.

Sue Sullivan, management assistant and office manager with the student affairs office, praised McKenzie Personnel Systems based on her experience with Ell.

"What we really like about it for us is that it's something that is consistent. When you have the work-study students in there, it's not real consistent. During finals week, they're not

able to work a lot of times. By having someone from this group, we're able to have them in there all the time," Sullivan said.

"Some people might get real bored in there, but so far Shirley's really enjoyed it, and I hope she continues," she said.

Ell confirmed her intentions to stay on the job "for a long time."

According to Smock, the flattery from Ell's employers is typical of most employers hiring McKenzie applicants.

"We've worked with employers who found that our workers are doing more than they anticipated would be done. They're doing a higher quality job," Smock said, adding many of the disabled are promoted to an expanded work load or increased hours.

"We want the person to earn as much money as possible. We also want to be fair to employers," Smock said. "We don't want to overcharge them for work that's not being done."

Ideally, McKenzie seeks to have its employees working

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