

## **Madeline's Successful Work Experience Placement** **By Michelle Kunkel, St. Mary C.S.S. Job Coach**

Madeline is a seventeen-year-old student with special needs at St. Mary Secondary School in Pickering. Two of her favourite activities are watching movies and keeping up on current affairs (anything that deals with music and movies). Madeline wanted a work experience position, which consisted of both movies and music. When I approached the manager at Blockbuster video, she seemed a little hesitant in taking on a student with Special Needs. I asked her if it would be possible for her to meet with Madeline before making any decision. She agreed to a meeting.

Need I say more! Madeline was a success. Her personality landed her a work experience at Blockbuster video. Madeline's job entails looking after returns, making sure the movies are in the right place, and assisting in keeping the store clean. She wears the required uniform with pride. Madeline travels on public transportation three times a week. She travels to and from her work experience with an Educational Assistant. So far Madeline is really enjoying her placement. Her goal is to someday work at the Blockbuster in her own community of Uxbridge.

With her family's encouragement and support, along with this valuable work experience, she will reach her goal.

## **Dahlia's Co-op Success at U.A.F. Photo Lab**

Dahlia Hunter, a grade 12 student at Downsview Secondary School in North York, completed a very successful semester at a Co-op placement during the spring of 2004. What makes her experience a little bit different from other co-op programs is that Dahlia is a student in a modified special program that focuses on skills for everyday living. These students can pursue certain college programs after graduation. However, most will go directly to the workplace, therefore acquiring workplace skills needs to be an essential part of their high school career.

Dahlia's interests lay in the area of photography, so she was placed in an entry-level position as a photo-lab assistant trainee. The employer, Lucy Armigida is one of the owners of a family-run business called U.A.F. Photo Lab and PhotoClick, which processes professional and non-professional photography orders from a number of retail establishments throughout the G.T.A. and Ontario. The business has evolved over the twenty plus years since it was first established. It has recently added a digital imaging department in response to the growing demand for this format in the marketplace. The company now boasts state of the art equipment.

Dahlia began learning about this business by following the process that takes place as soon as orders arrive at the lab. She has been trained in each aspect of the photo finishing process, from the arrival of orders to their final preparation for pick up. This has involved learning special coding methods, using computers, cutting and preparing photos, packaging and sorting. She has also been responsible for accurately completing orders in a timely fashion. Dahlia has demonstrated excellent team skills and her contributions in the various departments have been recognized. The company asked her to continue to be a part of the team by offering her a paid position for the summer.

This is truly a success story; one where both student and employer profited from the experience. Lucy was reluctant at first to take on a co-op student, but this experience has opened her eyes to the value of working co-op students. She attributes part of the success to the initial interview where the student, co-op teacher and employer shared their expectations. This proved to be a valuable first step in the process of placing the student.

Dahlia plans to return to Downsview Secondary School in the fall to complete courses and prepare to study photography further at College in the future.

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