

ClemsonLIFE students learn the ropes at SC Works

By Stephanie Jadrnicek

The Journal

CLEMSON — Sometimes a flyer's just not enough.

When Gov. Nikki Haley declared October 2015 as Disability Employment Awareness Month, Matt Fields with S.C. Works didn't want to spread the word with flyers at the next staff meeting. Instead he felt inspired to reach out into the community.

Dunkin' Donuts and Columbo's Pizza provided food for ClemsonLIFE students' workshops at S.C. Works. The first-year students loved the large Atlas pizzas from Columbo's.

"S.C. Works connects job-seekers with employers," Fields said. "We help job-seekers who are unemployed or underemployed. We also have a business team that works strictly with employers by posting jobs and providing programs to reimburse employers for the first few weeks of a new employee's wages."

Wanting to make a bigger impact, Fields picked up the phone and called ClemsonLIFE — a program at Clemson University designed for students with intellectual disabilities who desire a post-secondary experience on a college campus.

The students become self-sufficient young adults by learning about employment and independent living while developing social, leisure, health and wellness skills.

Fields asked if S.C. Works could partner with ClemsonLIFE to help the students with their resumes and interviewing skills. After a little coordinating and scheduling, the plans were in place.

A group of first-year students visited S.C. Works in mid-October, and a group of second-year students visited on Friday.

Fields tailored each group's visit to their current placement in the program.

"The first-year students participated in interviewing workshops. So when they go out next year to interview for their internships, they know what questions to ask, what things to take with them and the importance of a good handshake," he said.

Second-year students learned how to update their resumes. Fields said the students have resumes from interviewing for their internships, but once they graduate from the program they'll need to know how to update those resumes when they apply for jobs.

During their visits to S.C. Works, the students toured the office and met staff members. From dealing with unemployment matters to helping disabled veterans and providing training opportunities, the many faces of S.C. Works spoke with the students about each of their services.

Several of the second-year students are already employed, such as Tripp Johnson, who works at McAlister's Deli, Gold's Gym and with EMS fire and safety. In his time off, he enjoys working on computers.

“I’m more of a fixing computers kind of guy,” Johnson said. “ You tell me the problem, give me five minutes and I can tell you what’s wrong.”

After a tour, orientation and a hands-on workshop, the students went into the computer lab, where resource staff helped them conduct job searches. Representatives from vocational rehabilitation and Palmetto Youth Connections also spoke with the students about potential careers.

“We want to show these students all the things they can do once they complete their program,” Fields said. “Luckily, they’re learning a job during their internship. But if they can’t find a job immediately after they graduate from the ClemsonLIFE program, they now know a face and a name of someone who can help them with that next step.”

—

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686