



Woodworking shop creates employment opportunity, develops skills

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OTTAWA - The twin brothers envision careers in the public eye. They want to be politicians. Sales managers. Pub owners. Place them in behind-the-scenes fast food and custodial work and they don't exactly blossom into their potential. That's about to change for the twins and other adults with intellectual disabilities in the Ottawa community who seek jobs that better suit their talents and interests.

LiveWorkPlay, a charitable organization formed in 1995 to address the needs of young people with intellectual disabilities, opened Against the Grain, a woodworking shop, last Thursday. It offers employment opportunities in the trade itself, direct sales, financial tracking and marketing and a chance to develop skills.

"We're looking for ways for people to develop confidence," says Keenan Wellar, co-founder and CEO of LiveWorkPlay.

"We're giving people a leadership role. It's not about an assembly line of people doing repetitive tasks."

Against the Grain happened quickly. When local craftsman Dale Kerr joined LiveWorkPlay in August 2002, the team began to build on the concept of a woodworking shop. One day when Dale was at the popular Byward Market, he began talking to a vendor about the Canada Clock and Canada Makes Scents woodworking business. The vendor was looking to sell. LiveWorkPlay acquired the business and by May, will be selling products in the market.

The woodworking shop received the majority of its funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and secured space through Heartwood House, where LiveWorkPlay headquarters is based.

"One of the major motivators has been our involvement in employment," says Keenan. "Employment at all costs is not the goal here; it's to meet people's needs."

Keenan says the purchase creates an opportunity for people to make a contribution, develop a new skill set and move on to other employment endeavors in the community.

The woodworking shop is equipped with modern equipment, including a computerized router and top-of-the-line saws and other machines, able to handle all sizes of lumber.

The products primarily appeal to tourists because of their Canadian theme and will be available at the market, eventually in duty-free shops and online, Keenan predicts. Against the Grain is currently working on a large order of wooden maple leaves from a Toronto-based media company.

Keenan looks forward to getting the twins on board selling at the kiosk, which will be staffed for almost 12 hours a day, seven days a week.

"I think it's going to be a phenomenal experience."

The co-founder hopes Against the Grain will dispel myths and increase the profile in the community of people with intellectual disabilities. Visit www.liveworkplay.ca for more information.

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