



News from THE WALLACE GROUP

P.O. Box 21303, Eagan, MN 55121
3750 Pilot Knob Road, Eagan, MN 55122
(651) 452-9800 (651) 452-3504 fax

ProAct, Inc.

For Immediate Release

For further information, contact:

Aaron Hustedde, The Wallace Group, 651-452-9800, hustedde@wallacegroup.com

Ken Gray, 651-686-0405, kgray@proactinc.org

EAGAN HARDWARE STORE GIVES REAL WORK EXPERIENCE TO TEST CAPABILITIES OF PROACT'S PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

**Hardware Hank's 12-year relationship with ProAct proves mutually beneficial,
increasingly important as nonprofit prepares people for jobs**

Tucked in the back room at Hardware Hank in Eagan, far behind the lawnmower lined sidewalk out front, Jeremy Hintz carefully sorts new store products by number for stocking, as ProAct Vocational Specialist Deb Ulrich works alongside him. This "situational assessment" is a real work experience that will help determine the type of job he'll have in the future.

"He's picked up on it pretty quickly," said Ulrich, who coaches the young man at multiple job sites. "When I asked him the other day, he said he liked this one the best." With a learning curve constantly in front of them, people with disabilities brought in by ProAct make noticeable contributions. Hardware Hank Owner Allan Funk welcomes this tradeoff. "Today, it turns out we were understaffed, we usually have to get it going as soon as we can," he said.

Business partnership/page two

While mixing paint for a customer, Funk offered specifics about spraying paint versus rolling. He has hosted ProAct work assessments for the past 12 years. “It’s helpful to have them around ... and if somebody learns something from it and gains something, that’s great,” he said.

Removing the newly arrived products from boxes, Ulrich scanned each item so Hintz could take them out to the display shelves. Their work frees up store staff members, who carry on the small retailer’s business lifeline, close customer advice and help.

As Hintz and Ulrich kept the stock flowing, matching paints and cleaners with shelf locations, store workers were busy answering questions, fixing yard machines and working the checkout counter. Ulrich observes Hintz’s work habits closely, offers direction and evaluates his responses. She monitors his interaction with coworkers and supervisors and tests his ability to take redirection. And, she gives dress and grooming advice. After several work days where case notes are taken, she’ll put together a thorough assessment for Minnesota Rehabilitative Services, the referring agency.

“What we’re looking for when we do assessments is their strengths and interests, likes and dislikes,” said Ken Gray, vocational coordinator with ProAct. ProAct also identifies the type of support that’s needed for someone to work. Future jobs can range from packaging and assembly at ProAct to group work settings in the community or independent and competitive employment, he explained.

Business partnership/page three

As Ulrich prepares to write her case notes for the day, she's determining the elements that would fit as an ideal work setting for Hintz. Situational assessments in the workplace are individualized to each person, and many prefer to try different jobs. Some people haven't worked for years, but have a number of skills and abilities and simply lack confidence, she explains. Others need work adjustment training to prepare them for full-time employment. Hygiene, grooming, attendance and productivity are all taken into consideration.

While judging talent, Ulrich also gauges each environment. One person may work better while sitting, while another may have difficulty working around crowds. The hardware store setting offers a welcome and collegial atmosphere. "They treat everyone we bring in here with respect, regardless of the disability," said Ulrich.

Her counterpart, ProAct vocational specialist LeAnn Prins, has brought clients to this store for eight years, and established a strong rapport with Funk. "He just sees that we're a benefit to him as much as he's a benefit to us," said Prins. "I come in and say 'Hi' to everybody, 'What needs to be done?' and we go at it."

ProAct is headquartered in Eagan and maintains additional sites in Red Wing and Zumbrota. Its mission is to serve individuals experiencing barriers to employment and self-sufficiency due to intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health issues, traumatic brain injuries, and other challenges.

#