

**WINTER 2025**



# Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

## Winter 2025 News Brief



The 2025 MidYear Planning Institute Update took place January 22-25 at the Aloft Lake Nona Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Team leaders from approved Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs gathered together for three days of workshops, sessions, networking and learning opportunities to assess current success and determine next steps for growth for their respective programs.

### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Meet Kailey Russell,  
from Titans UP!  
at St. Petersburg College



Kailey Russell is a 2024 graduate of the Titans UP! Program at St. Petersburg College.

Prior to enrolling in the program, academics were a struggle for Kailey but her dedication to doing her absolute best could never be questioned. She always gave 100% when striving to meet the expectations of her teachers. Her parent's highest priority was to keep her confidence and self-esteem levels high.

Continued onto the next page...

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Continued from Page 1...

At age 22, Kailey aged out of high school, and her family wondered what her next steps would be. How would she continue to learn and have that sense of accomplishment she experienced in school? Where would the important social interaction come from that she enjoyed?

The answer for Kailey was the St. Petersburg College Titans Up! Program. Titans Up! provided her with the college experience that she may not have the opportunity to experience.

In addition, the program gave her resources to help her transition into the next phase of life. Kailey's job coaches provided information related to interviewing, as well as help her search and apply for jobs. Kailey was hired at Dunkin' Donuts, where she proudly works and applies that same high level of work ethic she displayed in school.

During her time in the Titans Up! program, Kailey developed many close friendships. She and her classmates still enjoy FaceTime calls every evening, as well as the occasional get-togethers. This has led to Kailey improving her communication skills. Everyone that has known this shy young lady throughout her life relay how much she has come out of her shell. Her parents would never have expected they'd have to occasionally ask her to lower her volume a little while on her FaceTime calls.

Kailey will proudly tell you that she'll forever be a St. Petersburg Titan!

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

### Seahawk NEST Academy, Broward College

### Preparing Students for Employment



By **Melissa Adams**

The Seahawk NEST Academy is a three-year post-secondary transition program at Broward College. The goal of the NEST Academy is to prepare students with intellectual disabilities for meaningful employment in the community through college education experience and real work experience through internships.

Students can attend the program on our North and South campus locations. The first year of the program students attend basic college classes and adjust to their new college lifestyle. The second year of the program is focused on career pathway courses and enhancing employability skills. The final and third year of the program has the students engaged in internships on campus or in the community. This sets the students up for success after graduation by building their skills and knowledge over the first two years and then gaining valuable experience for employment after graduation. The internships of the third year are on

Continued on the next page

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Continued from Page 1...

and/or off campus and are focused on the career pathways students have studied and chosen during their second year. This work experience during school is a strong predictor and indicator of later employment for those with intellectual disabilities.

We have developed 12 different partnerships for internships across the two campuses where the student has the opportunity to gain experience in graphic design, hospitality, office support, or culinary/catering. As we develop and grow our program, we first meet with the department or area manager to discuss the needs and opportunities within the department that the NEST intern can have the possibility to fill. The NEST staff then complete a task analysis of the department. In the task analysis the environment, soft skills, hard skills, and possible accommodations that could be needed for that position are assessed. The NEST staff then goes back to our pool of students to see what skills and interests the students have that may match the department's needs. Once we have an intern or two to fill this position, we allow the department to interview the students. This not only gives our students interview practice for the real world but allows the department managers to see their capabilities.

NEST students are provided support by our student support specialist on each campus during their internship year. We stagger the start times, and this allows the student support specialists to observe the training provided to the NEST students by the department. The department provides training just as they would for any other employees in that position. The student's support is backed off slowly as the student becomes more independent in their role as the intern. On average our students take about

3 weeks to become independent in their tasks. From there, most managers then decide to build on the intern's skills by adding more tasks. Our support specialist will check in daily with the interns at this point.

During the last two semesters in their internship our students attend a professionalism course to connect employability skills and promote their soft skills. The professionalism course is paired with Employment Solutions at Broward College. Employment Solutions helps students develop a resume and practice interview skills. Each week the student and the student support specialist complete an assessment rating the students' employability, professionalism and soft skills used. The students and staff have the opportunity to discuss this form over the following week and the data is tracked over the final two semesters of The Seahawks Academy. The supervisor completes a similar form once a month and feedback is reviewed with the student as well. One of the benefits of this is that the students get to see how they have grown over the internship.

In the last semester, our students have chosen an agency through Vocational Rehabilitation. In the best scenario NEST students will start the last half of the final semester with an employment specialist from the agency and will be ready for employment. In this transition we hope we can do a soft hand from the Student Support Specialist to the employment specialist to help ease the transition from graduation to meaningful employment.

There are many benefits of work experience for students with intellectual disabilities. One of our goals and benefits for the students' is to engage and use soft skills, professionalism and build confidence. This also allows others to see the potential NEST students have. Once the NEST student graduates with the Broward College Professional Certificate they are expected to be fully prepared for meaningful employment.

## NEWS ALERT

### Project ACCESS, The College of the Florida Keys



Dr. Nina Medyk and Geraldine Darius speak about CFK's Project ACCESS program at the NRF Foundation Honors in New York City.

Congratulations to the College of the Florida Keys for being recognized as the NRF Foundation's 2025 RISE Up Partner of the Year. The award was presented to Project ACCESS at the tenth annual NRF Foundation Honors, held on January 12 in New York City and recognizes the college's implementation of the NRF Foundation's RISE Up training and credentialing in CFK's Project ACCESS program for students with intellectual disabilities. The award included a \$10,000 donation to support Project ACCESS.

"The College of the Florida Keys is an exemplary RISE Up partner, utilizing the training program to provide its students with the knowledge and skillset to navigate their entrance into the workforce and secure jobs in retail and elsewhere," NRF Foundation Executive Director Adam Lukoskie said. "The NRF Foundation is honored to recognize The College of the Florida Keys as the 2025 RISE Up Partner of the Year."

Congratulations to Project ACCESS at the College of the Florida Keys! [Watch the video](#) recognizing Project ACCESS for their dedication to preparing students to enter the workforce.



### Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

The Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities was featured in an article by [Florida Politics](#) discussing the Center's efforts in implementing and supporting postsecondary comprehensive and transition programs for students with intellectual disabilities at institutions of higher education across the state.

### Christian Zimmerman Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities



Christian Zimmerman, a technical assistance coordinator at the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities, is featured in an [article](#) by the Association for Career and Technical Education, where he discusses his career in career and technical education and the importance of career and technical education.

# WINTER 2025



**FCSUA offers monthly webinars on the first Tuesday of the month at 3:00 p.m. eastern time to support the development and continuation of FPCTPs.**

## **Join us for our upcoming webinars:**

**February 4:** Linking Career Pathways for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs

**March 4:** Building Relationships that Foster Employment for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Programs

## *Save the Date!*

**2025  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES  
AWARENESS DAY**



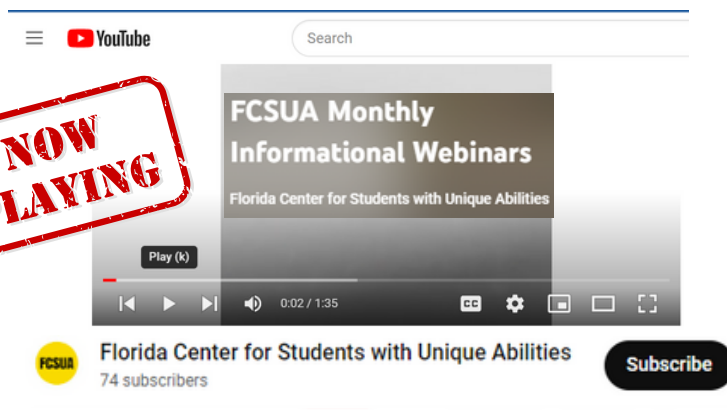
Florida  
Developmental  
Disabilities  
Council, Inc.

**DD AWARENESS DAY:  
MARCH 11, 2025 - TALLAHASSEE, FL**



Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day is March 11, 2025.

Want to raise awareness in your local community? Visit the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council [website](#) for more information.



**The video recordings from previous webinars are located on FCSUA's YouTube channel.**

**Professional Development Opportunities  
Read, Attend, Present**



Florida Association on Higher Education and Disability  
Spring 2025 Conference  
Feb. 26-27, 2025  
Gainesville, Florida  
Registration



Florida Association for People Supporting Employment  
2025 Conference  
Feb. 19-21, 2025  
Orlando Florida  
Registration Information