Hoefs Selected for UP Program

Aaron Hoefs has been selected as one of four individuals to participate in the University Participant (UP) Program at Western Carolina University this fall. The program is limited to three to four new participants per year based on a competitive admission process. The UP Program is a collaborative effort of The Arc of Haywood County and the Western Carolina University's (WCU) special education department.

The model program was developed by Dr. David Westling, WCU Adelaide Worth Daniels Distinguished Professor of Special Education at WCU, to provide a way for young adults with developmental disabilities to experience university life and learning.

Hoefs is active in the community as a Special Olympics athlete participating in bowling, golf skills, bocce and track and field. He not only participates in the local, regional and state games, he was also selected in 2003 to compete in the Special Olympics World Games in Ireland. Hoefs is currently the Global Messenger for the North Carolina Special Olympics. In this position he speaks on behalf of the organization and its athletes throughout North Carolina.

Hoefs works as a trainee at Haywood Vocational Opportunities and is active in church activities at Long's Chapel United Methodist Church and Nineveh Baptist Church. In his free time, he enjoys sporting events, travel and meeting new people. "Wow, I'm going to Western," said Hoefs. "I am looking forward to a good semester. It is exciting."

The University Participant (UP) program is designed to provide a two-year, on-campus living and learning experience for persons with developmental disabilities between the ages of 18 and 25. The goal of the program is to facilitate the transition of participants from secondary school to adult life. Selected participants receive $6,500 per year for tuition support. During the two year period, participants are expected to complete requirements for receiving a UP certificate of accomplishment based on successful completion of an Individual Plan for College Participation. Many of the activities and goals for this certificate involve participation in various activities (i.e., social, academic, vocational, personal, community) that are individually designed to address specific interests and future goals related to education, independent living, and employment for each participant.

Partial funding for the program is from a sub-grant through the The Arc of the United States (The Arc) and the Walmart Foundation. The Arc of Haywood County is one of 45 local chapters of The Arc across the United States to be awarded a Sub-Grant of $100,000 as part of the Walmart Foundation School-to-Community Transition Project.

Kelly Kelley, a doctoral candidate at UNC Charlotte completing her dissertation research at WCU, will serve as a part-time project coordinator to oversee the daily operation of the project. "I am so excited to be a part of such an innovative program that will further enhance the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities. I consider it an honor and privilege to work on a project I am passionate about and helped develop," said Kelley, WCU UP program coordinator.

The Arc of Haywood County has been serving individuals with developmental disabilities and their families since 1976. Visit www.arcofhaywood.org.