



By **STEVEN J. SMITH**  
**SUN CORRESPONDENT**

Sunday Feb 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 - Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities has been helping people with physical and mental disabilities in northern Sarasota County and Manatee County since 1954. Now it is reaching out to clients in North Port, Englewood, Venice and, Port Charlotte. "Out of roughly 200 clients in our Transitions, Community Employment Services and Occupational Training programs, almost 50 clients served live in those areas," said Kim Clark, the organization's fundraising and marketing manager. "Teens in the Transitions program in North Port and Venice are either in a work track or a high school program that will further their education and employment opportunities."

Marla Doss, Community Haven's interim president and CEO, said the Transitions program helps high school students with physical disabilities to keep in step with their peers by assisting them with transportation or securing scholarship and employment opportunities. We help them find work at local restaurants and grocery stores, retail stores," she said. "It might be a local landscaper, it could be Wendy's. And Publix is a huge, huge supporter of hiring individuals with disabilities. They might be cleaning the dining room in a restaurant, stocking shelves, cashier-ing, bagging groceries, (doing) maintenance, or even working as an aide in a child-care setting, if they're qualified."

Doss added Community Haven's early intervention; physical speech and occupational therapy services help children from infants to age 5. "More than 90 percent of our 4 and 5-year-olds came to us as infants", Doss said. "We've had the opportunity to share the first five years of their lives and make a huge impact by offering all these wraparound services. To help a child with cerebral palsy or epilepsy, for example, we can help them with speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy. We can help children with vision impairment with special equipment to help with their sight, or help them learn Braille. We help children with hearing problems by providing doctors who can fit them with cochlear implants. It's all about getting a critical early start in their lives that's the foundation to making a difference."

For disabled adults, Community Haven offers a community employment program. "This is for people who have gone to one of our facilities somewhere and have graduated from or outgrown it." Doss said, "They want to be working for competitive employment and we help them find it." Kathy McCabe, community employment services coordinator for Community Haven, helps supply staffing to businesses in the South County area such as Wal-Mart, Bentley's Boutique Hotel, TJ Maxx, and Bonefish Grill. "Our people are an underserved and misunderstood population" McCabe said. "We find that there are a lot of societal barriers. People see the word 'disability' and don't see the 'ability' portion of the word. We take a lot of pride placing our people in jobs in which they will be successful and beneficial to an employer." Doss agreed. "We look at what their support plan is and what their future holds for them," Doss said. "We really try to tailor-make and fine-tune opportunities for our people to grow and be independent."