

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

Interview Series

C3 STORE & BISTRO: EXPANDING CAREER READINESS

Q: What is your favorite thing about Project Discovery?

My favorite thing about Project Discovery is the real-world job skills taught throughout the curriculum. The lessons and materials give students a real sense of what it would be like to work in that industry. The lesson plans are also easy to follow and easily adaptable to a variety of settings and levels of students.

The employability skills at the end of each career module are also super beneficial. There's so much that goes into keeping a job, not just learning the specific job tasks, and I think those employability skills lessons do a great job of teaching students about them.

Q: Can you tell us more about bistro and store you run with your students?

After a few years of using the Project Discovery curriculum in the classroom, we wanted to test our skills on real customers with real merchandise and the Casselman's Crew Corner (C3) Store was born. It started out with just a few tables of merchandise donated from a local second hand store, items Life Skills students had made (dog bones and greeting cards) and a couple of teachers who sold things on the side (candles, jewelry, soap, etc.). Now we have donations from over 60 local businesses and over 20 local vendors. We're open to staff, parents, community members and small groups of students for three days before the winter break. Students use the Square point-of-sale system to ring in items and track sales for our vendors. They are also sales associates, straightening merchandise and assisting customers on the sales floor.

A few years later once the C3 Store was pretty well established, we wanted to test our skills on real customers with real food and the C3 Bistro was born. This is a newer endeavor for us but the last few years we've hosted two C3 Bistros in the second semester of the school year. One is cold sandwiches with chips and drinks, the other is pasta with breadsticks and salad. Food is catered by local restaurants so students focus on skills needed to plate food, deliver food to customers, and take customer payments (again, using the Square POS). We plan on having a third C3 Bistro in May in which we will work with the Culinary program at the high school to cater the meal.

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Money generated from the C3 businesses is used to pay for community trips and to improve the C3 Store and Bistro each year. For example, purchasing clothing racks and table decorations. We also donate to Emma's Art Kits and other local charities. Emma is a former student of mine who started this charity through the Cancer Support Community to send art kits to people in the hospital.

Q: How do the bistro & store impact students' career readiness?

There are so many ways the C3 Store and Bistro impact students' career readiness. There's a lot of responsibility and time management that comes with working the store and bistro. We do not follow the school's bell schedule so students must be aware of their schedule and the time.

Not only do they have to be responsible for following the schedule, they must also remember their work shirt (and keep it safe for the next store or bistro!). We also talk about the importance of hygiene when working. Students often miss classes to work, so they must make time in their day or at home to complete any missing assignments.

Work ethic and having a positive attitude are also very important. I believe most employers are willing to train workers on a variety of skills but they will not train someone to have a positive attitude and good work ethic. I've "fired" students who have a poor attitude towards working. They are hired back the next day, or even later that day, because they are still learning.

I want them to understand what it takes to not only obtain, but also maintain, paid employment. When students are asked to work a 2 hour shift without a break, it can be eye-opening for some of them! They are often in classes that are 20-30 minutes of instruction and then they get a break. That's just not how the workforce is structured, so this gives them a little taste of what that's like.



Q: What do you like to do in your free time?

The canal in downtown Indianapolis and my reading room at home are my happy places. I like to read, go on walks, and visit new restaurants and shops with friends. My Russian Blue cat, Boris, keeps me company at home. I also have two beautiful nieces who I try to get back to my hometown to visit as often as I can.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your program, Project Discovery, or what you love about being an educator?

Another great way we support the lessons from the Project Discovery curriculum is through community trips. For example, while learning about food service, we found a local restaurant that was willing to let students come in and help with prep work before they opened. Then students took turns waiting on their partner, ringing in the order, and serving them lunch. We've gone on tours of several restaurants in the area, getting to see how the

kitchen and server stations are set up, learning about the point-of-sale systems, and more. When learning about retail, we have gotten behind-the-scenes tours of different retail stores to see how the stock room is set up, how curbside service works, where the deliveries come in, and students have rang in a few items for each other.

We also visit places of employment that are known for hiring people with disabilities, some of which have job coaching staff on site to assist employees. I think anything I can do to help students learn about the opportunities out there and to see it firsthand will be beneficial to them in the future.



MORE ABOUT JEN

Jen is in her 14th year teaching Transitional Academics at Center Grove High School. She is also a sponsor for the Best Buddies club. Before CGHS, Jen was an Instructional Assistant in a Life Skills classroom for 3 years at Hamilton Southeastern High School. Since she was old enough to answer the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?”, the answer has always been “teacher”. Jen loved school so she wanted to be in school forever! While volunteering for Special Olympics throughout the years, she discovered her passion for working with people with disabilities and switched to a Special Education focus sophomore year of college. Jen love teaching Transitional Academics because she gets to work on all the subjects while really focusing on job-ready skills students will need to obtain paid employment after graduation.