

## High School High Tech Success Story Lacesha Owens



When Lacesha Owens first came to Goodwill's High School High Tech (HSHT) program more than five years ago, she was timid and tentative. She was attending Charlotte High School and receiving Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services for a learning disability. While she had a passion for fashion design, she needed some support to start pursuing her goals.

She found that support in Charlotte County HSHT coordinator Angela Hemstreet, who first met Lacesha through a high school ESE liaison.

"Lacesha had low self-confidence and was very shy and quiet, but she had a dream," says Angela.

HSHT is a program that provides career exploration opportunities for students with disabilities and other barriers. Through internships, job shadowing, and leadership opportunities, HSHT increases students' self-esteem and reduces high school dropout rates. Goodwill works with The Able Trust to provide the program at high schools in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry and Glades Counties.

After meeting Lacesha, Angela encouraged her to complete the HSHT self-determination workshops, and the two began setting goals for Lacesha's development.

"One of the first things she did after her workshops was to apply for student of the month at her high school," says Angela. "She submitted her grades for consideration and was selected!"

Through HSHT, Lacesha sought public speaking opportunities, job shadowing experiences, and internships. Goodwill also helped her receive ACT tutoring, as well help with college admissions and financial aid applications.

"We provided opportunities for Lacesha to exercise her skills and helped her to recognize her successes," says Angela. "She just needed to believe in herself."

Lacesha is now a successful college student working towards a degree in business management at Florida Southwestern State College. She is involved in student government at FSW, and also serves as a peer mentor at the Able Trust's annual Youth Leadership Forum in Tallahassee. When she isn't at school, Lacesha can be found volunteering at the Charlotte County Justice Center, the public library, the Visual Arts Center, and Habitat for Humanity. She also works part time at Goodwill's Punta Gorda store, where she continues to pursue her passion for fashion merchandising.

*"Goodwill helped me to better understand retail with job shadowing and understand business with internships," Lacesha says. "High School High Tech helped me gain self-confidence."*

