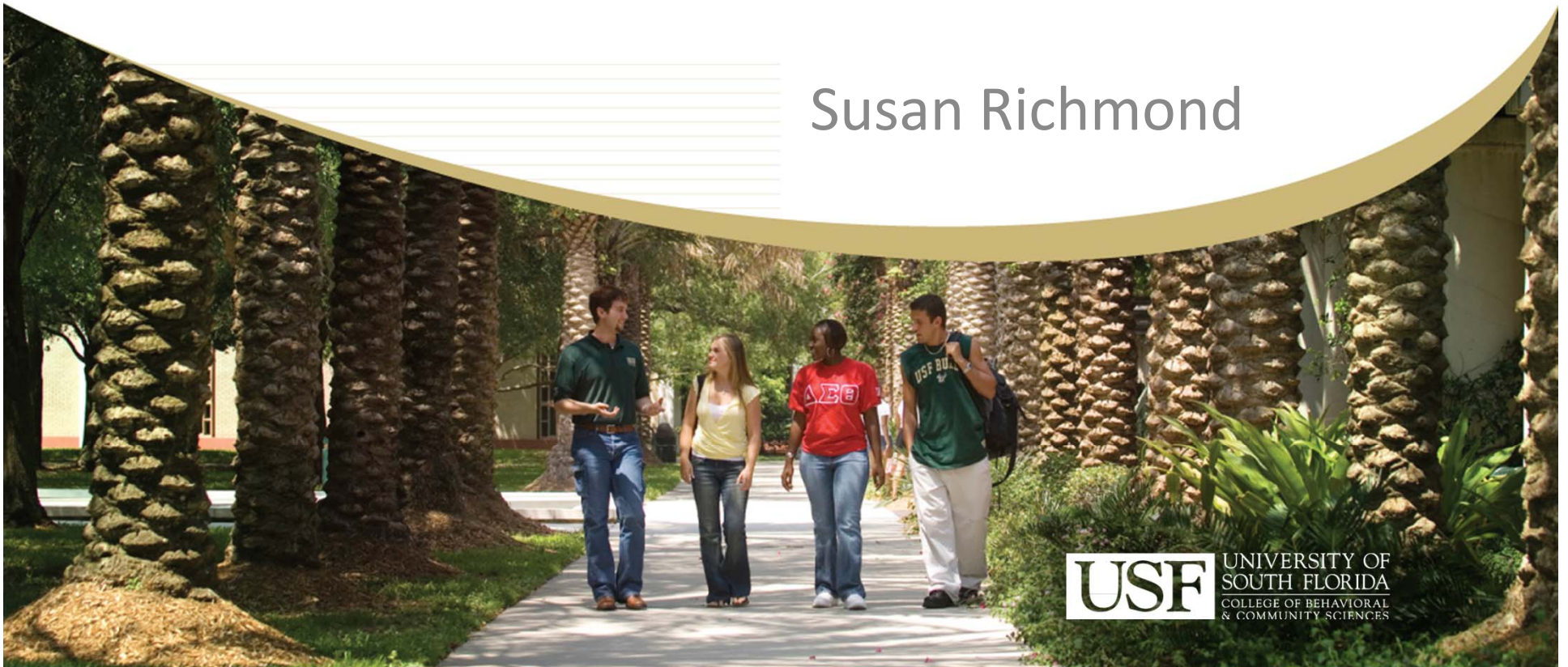




# The Learning Academy & The Learning Academy Employment Services University of South Florida

Susan Richmond



# What Do We Know?

**According to the 2009 U.S. DOE's National Longitudinal Transition Study of 11,000 young adults:**

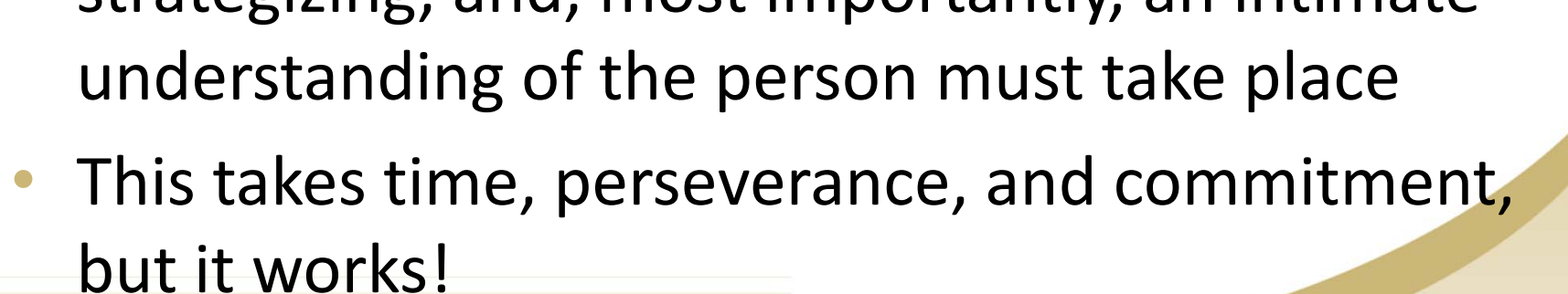
- The % of young adults with autism working was nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  that of all young adults with disabilities (33% vs. 59%)
- Average hours worked per week was 36% lower than that for all young adults with disabilities.
- Young adults with autism with a job earned 86% as much per hour as all young adults with disabilities (8.90/hour vs. 10.40/hour)

# Autism & Vocational Rehabilitation

- From 2002– 2011 the number of people with autism asking for vocational rehabilitation services in Florida increased nearly 265%
- Although the numbers have increased, the number of hours worked and wages have not improved
- The mean % of transition-aged adults with ASD who achieved successful employment in 2002-2011 is 28%

(Burgess and Cimera, 2014)

# What Else Do We Know?

- Individuals with ASD want to and are able to work
  - Jobs must build on their strengths and interests
  - The physical, social and environmental demands of the job must be considered
  - Precise support, planning, collaboration, creative strategizing, and, most importantly, an intimate understanding of the person must take place
  - This takes time, perseverance, and commitment, but it works!
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# Benefits of Work

- Julie Lounds Taylor, Ph.D., and her team from Vanderbilt University examined 153 employed adults with Autism.
- The study focused on how the independence involved in employment responsibilities benefitted individuals with Autism
- Researchers found that the greater the independence the more their Autism symptoms decreased
- Communication with others and social interaction improved
- Interests expanded as independence expanded.
- Employment gave them social and cognitive stimulation that improved their daily habits and ability to accomplish tasks.

[Julie Lounds Taylor](#), Ph.D., 2014


# The Learning Academy

- The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD-USF) received a grant from Autism Speaks to create The Learning Academy
- The Academy provides an opportunity for participants to develop and achieve employment goals and enhance independence

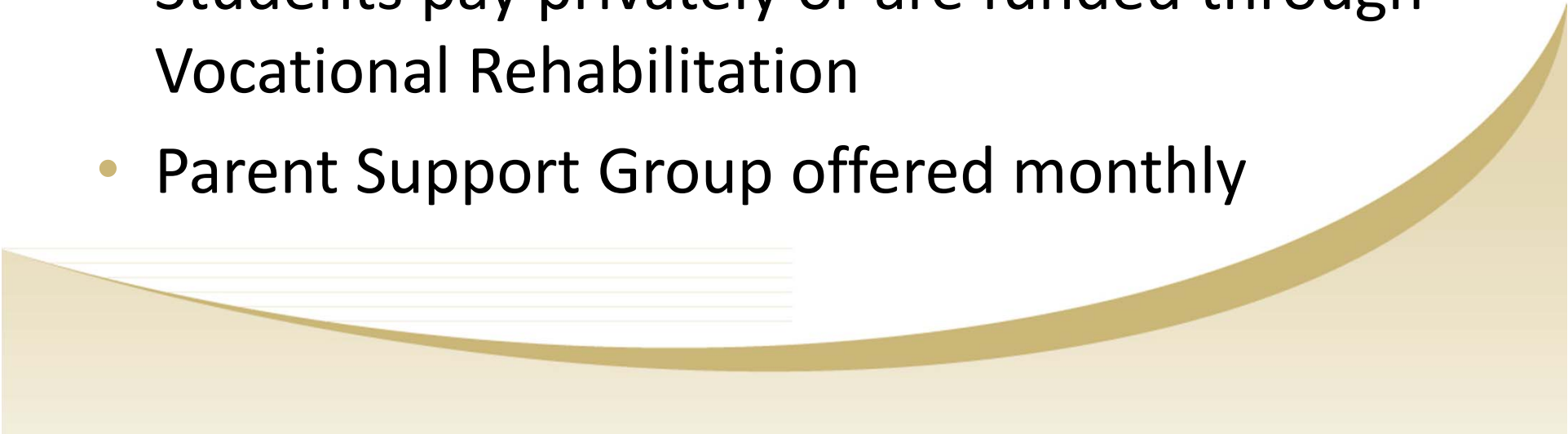




# Learning Academy Components

- **Employment and job preparation** skill building in and out of the classroom
  - **Interaction in a post secondary environment** with many opportunities for social and communication skill building
  - **Self-Exploration** to determine skills and preferences
  - **Relationships with USF student mentors** who serve as role models
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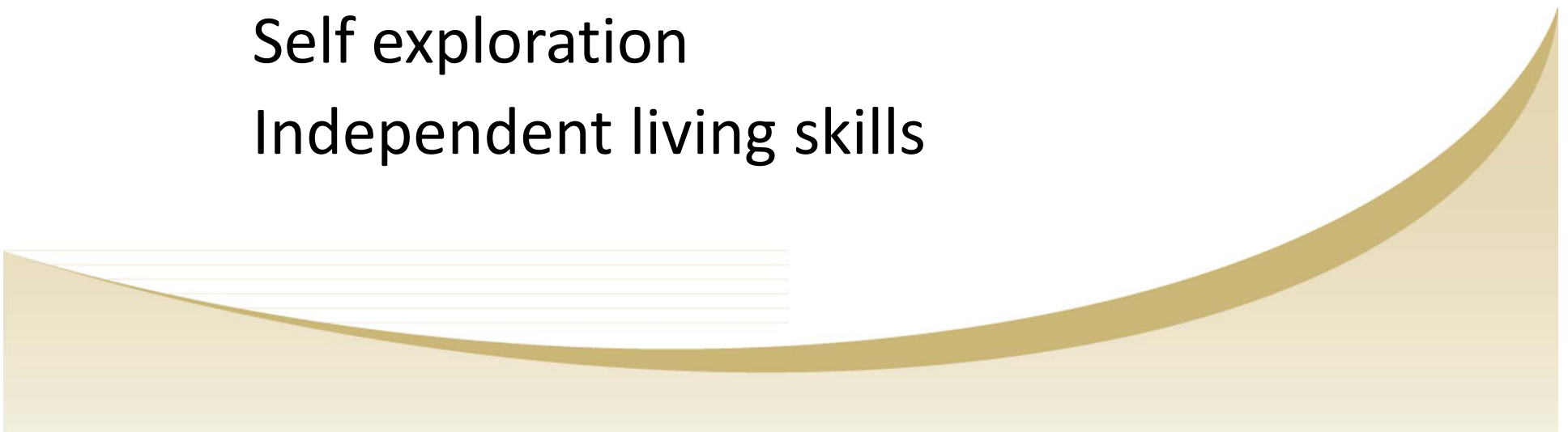
# Learning Academy Format

- Students attend for 30 weeks
  - Classes held four mornings a week
  - Mandatory student mentor activities
  - Internships
  - Students pay privately or are funded through Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Parent Support Group offered monthly
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# Learning Academy Classes

- Weekly interactive classes emphasizing:
  - Individualized learning
  - Skill building
  - Employment assessments
  - Problem solving
  - Self exploration
  - Independent living skills



# Student Outcomes

- A clearly defined employment plan with follow up activities to ensure sustainability of employment
- Knowledge of one's strengths, abilities and preferences related to employment
- Strategies and techniques, based on individualized learning style, to enhance employment success
- Hands on experience in an internship setting based on employment preferences.
- Resume development
- Ability to conduct career research
- Job seeking skills

# Internships

- Internships have been developed in the following areas:
  - Childcare
  - Animal Care
  - Accounting
  - Nursing
  - Graphic Design
  - Library Science
  - History
  - Criminal Justice
  - TV Production



# Partnerships

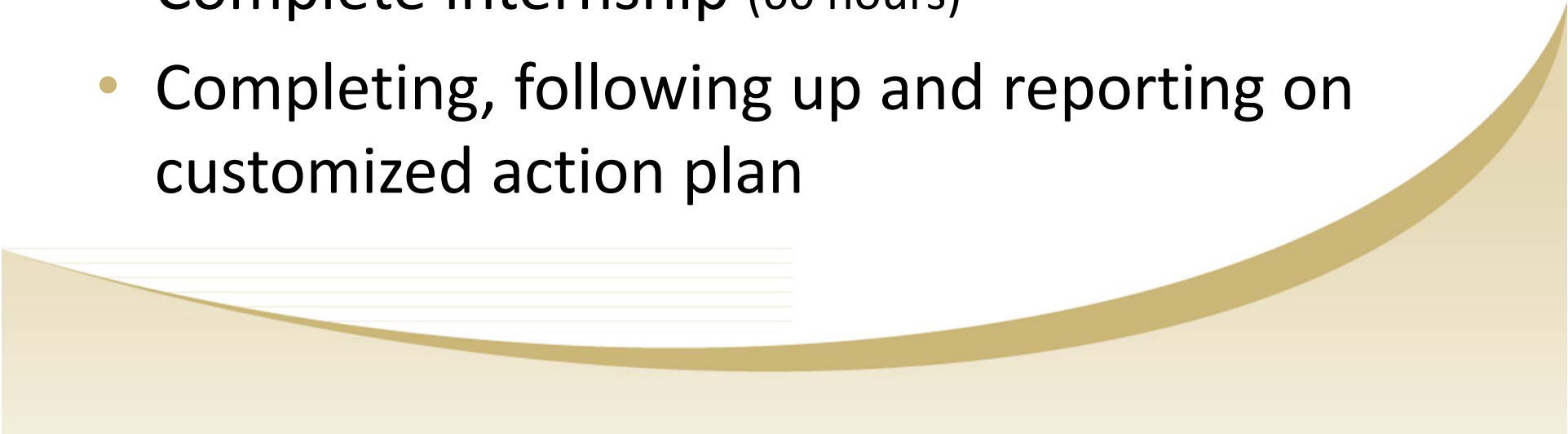
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- USF
- Community
- Autism Friendly Businesses
- USF students



# Eligibility Requirements

- Completed high school and is between age 18-25
- Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Transportation to and from USF campus in Tampa
- Functional communication system
- Clear desire to become employed and can commit to the entire program
- Proven ability to participate appropriately in classroom and/or work settings demonstrating conduct that exemplifies independence, motivation and stability

# Student Participation Requirements

- Attend all scheduled classes
  - Complete assignments and projects
  - Participate in all group activities
  - Complete required mentoring time (120 hours)
  - Complete internship (60 hours)
  - Completing, following up and reporting on customized action plan
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# Family Expectations

- Attending 3 parent meetings per semester
- Providing support to student to complete action plan steps
- Being a leader/mentor to other family members of future students
- Explore and identify the family and individual's social capital



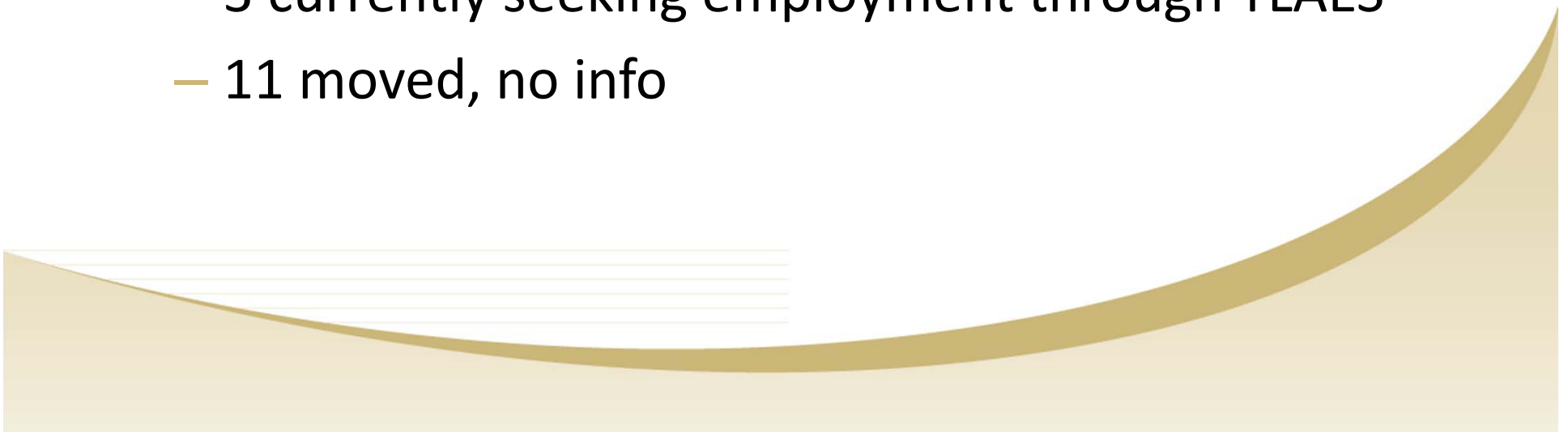


# Evaluation

- Students are assessed at baseline, monthly and at the end of the program
- Evaluation includes course content, student and family satisfaction, collaborator satisfaction, and measurement of the extent to which the program is meeting its established goals
- Tools include surveys, interviews, documentation and monthly student progress reports
- Conducting a formal evaluation this year

# Results Matter

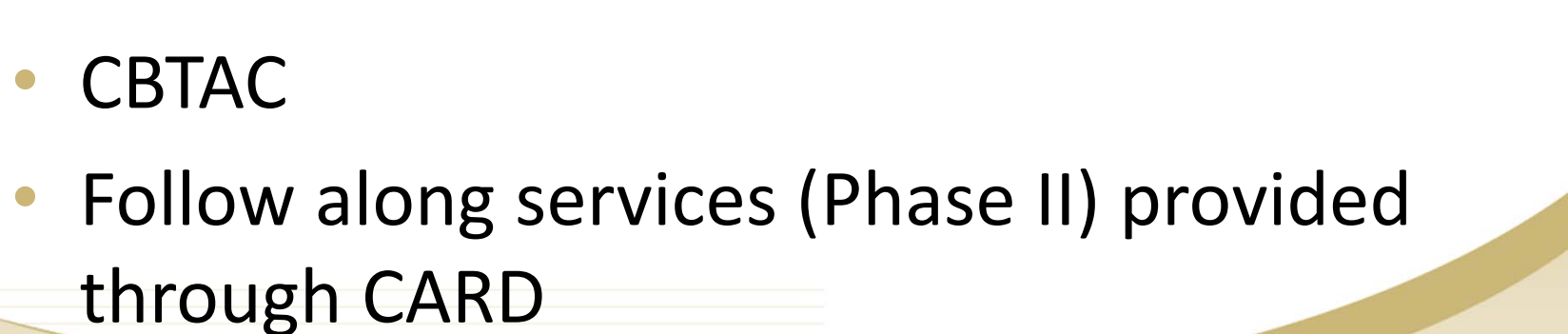
- 61 students have graduated from TLA
  - 14 have continued in higher ed/technical school
  - 28 competitive employment
  - 3 business owners
  - 2 volunteer in their former internship placement
  - 3 currently seeking employment through TLAES
  - 11 moved, no info



# Results Matter

- 46 % employed
- The mean % in Florida is 28%
- 82% of Learning Academy students have completed the program objectives and either work or are attending school to gain employment.

# TLA Employment Services

- Approved to provide employment services in October, 2011
  - Employment
  - Supported Employment
  - OJT
  - CBTAC
  - Follow along services (Phase II) provided through CARD
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# Employment Services Results

## 7 Employment Referrals

- 4 employed
- 3 actively seeking employment

## 19 Supported Employment Referrals

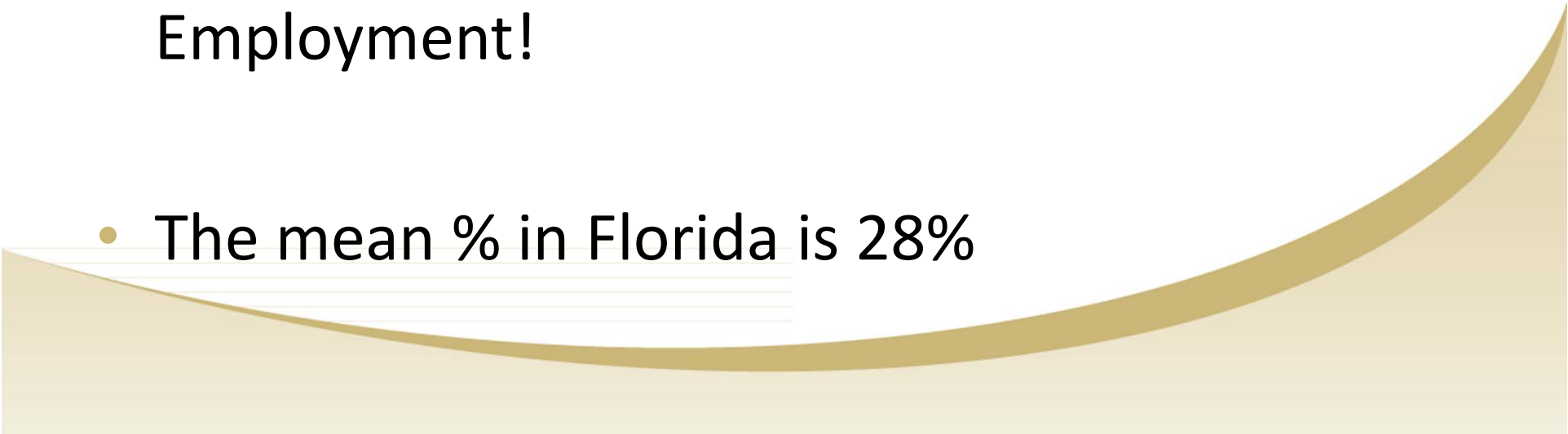
- 13 competitively employed
- 4 actively seeking employment
- 2 withdrew

## Business owners

- Received first referral



# Results Matter

- 65% employed
  - 92.3 percent of Learning Academy Employment Services Customers are employed or currently actively seeking Employment!
  - The mean % in Florida is 28%
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Questions?





# Contact Us

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