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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**New program and partnership provide skills to work through recovery**

**ATHENS, Ohio** – Sparks are flying for a potentially bright future for Alisha Hogue, a recent graduate of a unique partnership between the Athens County Prosecutor’s Office and Tri-County Career Center in Nelsonville.

Hogue entered the prosecutor’s office Working Recovery program to take part in Tri-County’s Custom Welding Training program. She completed the 60-hour training in September. Twice a week for two and a half hours a day, Hogue grinded on the welder, using Tri-County’s lab and utilizing the knowledge of the center’s instructors.

More than the skills training, Hogue learned confidence and pride in a job well done.

“I enjoyed it. I’m more of a hands-on learner so I liked being able to have the freedom to work on it and ask questions as I went along,” Hogue said.

The prosecutor’s office funded Hogue’s tuition for the program after she entered the Athens County Empowerment (A.C.E.) diversion program following a guilty plea to drug possession charges. Hogue was in a cycle fueled by drugs and Prosecutor Keller Blackburn wanted to afford her an opportunity to break that pattern.

“Education can be a powerful factor against drug addiction. We felt a partnership with Tri-County would allow us to help break the cycle of recidivism for offenders and give them skills that could help them obtain and maintain employment and find a sense of fulfillment without drugs,” Blackburn said. “The Working Recovery program gives people an opportunity to gain experience in a trade that they can put to use helping the community.”

Members of Hogue’s family had welding skills but her first time on the welder was on her first day of class. With the watchful eye of her instructor, Hogue set to work on her first welds, asking questions as she went along.

“This was something I’ve always wanted to learn but to do but I never had the chance to do it. Until now,” Hogue said.

Working Recovery is part of the prosecutor’s office’s Community Justice programs, as is the A.C.E. program. In addition to Hogue, Working Recovery has also partnered with Tri-County to help half a dozen people with job and workforce basics such as resume writing and interview skills.

“I was excited when Keller called me and asked about our willingness to partner with him,” said Connie Altier, superintendent of Tri-County Career Center. “Working Recovery leads to letting those clients understand that they have options. They were engaged, our teachers enjoyed having them and it was an overall good experience. We hope to continue to do more as we add some other programs.”

Hogue recently started a non-welding related job but has plans to purchase her own welding machine and potentially start her own mobile welding business in the future.

In addition to seeing the overwhelming reaction from her friends and family of her accomplishment, Hogue said she is a different person now than she was before starting Working Recovery.

“A totally different person ... I was very angry before but my outlook on things have changed a lot,” Hogue said. “I try to stay positive about everything. Now that I’m where I’m at today, I know the negativity I had was the drugs I was using. That’s a lifestyle I don’t ever want to be back in.”

Hogue continues to work through her diversion requirements, but it no longer defines her. She said “Tri-County is a good school and more people ought to give it a chance. It’s good for kids to get over there and learn trades.”

“Everything happens for a reason,” Hogue added. “I’m thankful everything happened when it did and got me out of the lifestyle I was living.”

