

Imagine a world

*accessible to
everyone!*

Community Access
Summer 2022



**ACCESS
SERVICES**
unlocking potential

EXPANDING

Employment

At Access Services, we have always believed in unlocking the potential of everyone that we serve. This belief has led us to new and innovative ways to serve. It has led to new partnerships and programs. It has also led people who share this belief to join and grow us with their ideas. Altec Services has been a leader in the field of employment within the Intellectual Disability and Autism community for 30 years. When they became a division of Access Services in July 2020, they brought new opportunities for us to grow in our ability to serve our communities. There has been a push for "Employment First" from the state of Pennsylvania since 2017. This concept is embraced by Access' staff who believe in helping the people we serve reach their own goals by overcoming any obstacles and barriers they may have through education and opportunities. With this in mind, a new idea was born.

What if we expanded our employment services to those in our programs who never had the opportunity to pursue employment?



From left to right: Melissa at HomeGoods, Annie at Giant, Nika at Amazon, Brett at McDonalds, and Dan at NewRez.

Gabriella Egan, Director of Employment Services, recalled when she was growing up, constantly being asked,

“What are you going to be when you grow up? What career will you have?” Many in the disability community are never asked these same questions.

Instead, assumptions are made about their competencies without being given the opportunity to learn skills that can help them reach their own goals. If we are repeatedly given only one or two options and see the same for our peers, we begin to believe those are our only options. Altec Services has had the opportunity to walk this path with people starting in their Day program and moving through pre-employment training to employment all the way to retirement. Access Services decided to run with this idea. What would it be like to introduce the concept of pursuing employment to the rest of our Day program attendees? What could this mean for them?

This led to the creation of a new position “Employment Transition Coach”. The goal of this position will be to create a curriculum that will introduce those we serve to the concept of employment and start teaching them the soft skills needed to be ready to move into the employment stage. Some of the people we serve have never had to opportunity to pursue employment, for them this will be a first introduction. For some, they work in a “sheltered workshop” style environment where they work

a few hours with their peers. This will help them to gain some of the skills needed to pursue community-based employment in businesses throughout our communities. The Employment Transition Coach will be able to do assessments with each individual to help see their strengths and teach the skills still needed to help them reach their employment goals. The coach will also help to build a curriculum for a 6-to-10-week program that will cover things like: social skills, resume building, technology needs, peer mentoring, career day opportunities, and more.

“We are excited about this newly created position and the potential that it brings for the individuals we serve. As we work to build a bridge between employment and day programs, this person [Employment Transition Coach] will play a vital role in evaluating and preparing those we support for the possibility of gainful employment!” Nicole Smith, Director of Life Day Programs & Megan Brodsky, Senior Director of Life Day Programs

The need for a “Benefits Counselor” has also been identified. There is fear around pursuing employment and the real potential for losing important social security and healthcare benefits that are essential for the people we serve. The Benefits counselor will be able to help the individuals we serve, and their families, navigate the nuances of employment and benefits with confidence. The goal is to remove any barriers that may

keep those we serve from being able to pursue employment. One of our current staff members, Jordan Pfister, who is the Life Enrichment coordinator, will be taking on this role and training to best serve those who want to pursue employment. He is excited about the opportunities that this will open up to the people we serve and their families.

When we talked with two of the individuals who are currently part of the employment services program, this is what they had to say about the program and the transition into community-based employment.

Brendan Mcowen

Giant Grocery Store

"I tried to get my skills together in the workshop. I built bezels and swivel tubes every day. I like community employment. You get vacation time and holiday pay. I like Giant because they taught me how to bag orders and how to do reshops. It's important to me [to work] because it's a place to make friends. I'm very happy and last week I got a raise! I've been there 22 years. I really like Bill a lot- he is a wonderful job coach. I have excellent customer service, and my job coach tells me I am so nice to customers."



Steve Smith

Ursinus College

"I like the job because I get to interact with people. I feel great and excellent about job coaching." He mentioned that now that he knows his job well, his job coach can just check in with him to make sure things are going well and observe him without being hands on."

How you can help

This new initiative will not be possible without the support of our current staff in our Day programs and employment programs. They will help to continue the soft skills training for those who graduate from the new training and may need more time to master these skills. Second, we need someone to fill the newly created role of "Employment Transition Coach".

If you or someone you know feel inspired and passionate about this role, please apply at accessservices.org/careers

Further, our staff, families of those we serve, and our community of supporters can all help strengthen this initiative by providing a network of opportunities for employment for those we serve. **Would you like to be part of our job network?** We will need people passionate about helping make employment accessible to everyone.

- Is your workplace open to allowing work readiness assessments to take place?
- Are you, or someone you know a business owner that may be open to hiring someone with the support of a job coach?
- Are you or someone you know in HR and willing to volunteer to do mock interviews or a training on interview skills?
- Would you be interested in being part of a future "Career Day" with our employment program?

Help us in providing a network of opportunities for employment for those we serve. Visit accessservices.org/careernetwork



Who is Access Services?

For 45 years, Access Services has been developing innovative ways to provide support services to individuals with special needs. Today, we are a large non-profit organization operating in thirteen counties in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Our mission is to empower and serve people in need of specialized supports by providing innovative services that improve their ability to live fulfilling lives in the community.

Opt out of these mailings or request to receive our digital e-newsletter by emailing ktizzard@accessservices.org or calling (215) 540-2150, x1282.



NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
YORK, PA
PERMIT NO. 200

500 Office Center Drive, Suite 100
Fort Washington, PA 19034

ADDRESS SERVICES REQUESTED