



Ohio  
Developmental  
Disabilities Council



*Employment First Initiative*

# COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT



**ON THE COVER:**

Jen Walkup serves up a cup of coffee at the Higher Grounds Coffee Shop at Willard Mercy Hospital. Higher Grounds, which is operated by the Huron County Board of Developmental Disabilities, employs six individuals with disabilities. “This has given six of the individuals we serve an opportunity to work in the community, interact with the public, and develop business skills,” said Dr. Dee Zeffiro-Krenisky, superintendent at Huron County DD. “It has been a real success. All the employees are Willard residents, so they have the opportunity to interact with other members of their community.”

# COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT:

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT JOBS;  
IT'S ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES



CAROLYN KNIGHT  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
OHIO DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES COUNCIL

In March of 2012, Ohio Governor John Kasich signed the Employment First initiative, making community employment the first option for individuals with developmental disabilities. In doing so, the old model of sheltered-workshop employment was no longer the first choice for individuals with disabilities.

Employment First is a cultural transformation.

The movement shifts expectations for those with developmental disabilities. Individuals with disabilities have the right and opportunity to work at a community job where their talents and strengths will be utilized. Employment First enhances

lives and creates opportunities for all people to advance their careers.

There are many reasons why this move was necessary.

Once upon a time, families were embarrassed to have a family member with a disability. They were hidden away from the public or warehoused in institutions. Blessedly, we no longer view people as an embarrassment and the institutions have been shuttered.

Employment was the next logical progression.

By giving individuals the opportunity to work in the communities in which they live, they earn a salary, pay taxes and develop friendships and relationships in the community.

We now understand that individuals with disabilities can be valuable employees. I could tell you about the benefits, but I think it's better to let you hear from the individuals and those who work with them on a regular basis.

We have looked around the state of Ohio for examples of individuals who are successfully working in the community.

I hope you enjoy the stories of their success.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn Knight". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carolyn Knight



*Williard*

## BECKY SHEPHERD: A “ROCK STAR” OF COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT

Becky Shepherd remembers the day she first walked into Fair Publishing in Norwalk.

So does her boss, Charlie Doyle.

“The minute she walked through the door she started joking,” Charlie said.

Nearly 20 years later, the joking and the great work ethic haven’t changed.

“Becky’s positive attitude is just great,” Charlie said. “She puts a smile on everyone’s face. We love having Becky here.”

Becky worked a couple of jobs before finding a home at Fair Publishing, which produces ribbons and printed literature for county fairs and festivals. She worked five days a week until just recently when she backed off to four days a week.

Lisa Cossin, head of community employment for the Huron County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said Becky’s run at a single job is an example for others who seek community employment.

“She’s a rock star,” Lisa said. “Her mother instilled

quite the work ethic in Becky. She found a job she likes and works hard at it.

“Nobody at Fair Publishing looks at Becky and sees an individual with a disability. They see her just as they should – as another employee contributing to the success of the company.”

Becky does a variety of tasks, which she describes as working “here, there and everywhere.” Two of her regular assignments include performing custodial work and the ribbon cutting machine.

Becky, 49, has a positive, infectious attitude. When one of her co-workers begins complaining, she is quick to tell them, “Call 1-800-wah-wah-wah-wah-wah.”

“Becky is seen for her true potential,” said Huron County Superintendent Dr. Dee Zeffiro-Krenisky. “She is a great example of how an individual with disabilities can contribute to the success of a company.”



Marion

## DILLON STRAQUADINE: FOLLOWED PASSION TO NURSE ASSISTANT JOB

Dillon Straquadine always wanted to be a nurse. His caring personality made him a natural for his dream job.

He may be well on his way.

“I come from a family of nurses and a lot of my friends are nurses,” Dillon said. “I think it’s a great job, and I like working with the people at Kingston. If you want to help people, what better job could you have than to be a nurse?”

Dillon, 19, is working at the Kingston Residence, a senior living community, in Marion while he studies to be a nurse assistant at Tri-Rivers Career Center, where he is on target to earn his degree in the spring of 2015.

He began working at Kingston in March 2014 as part of his training at Tri-Rivers. However, he did such a good job that he was hired as a full-time employee.

“Dillon is a true success story,” said Job Coach Jan Dunn. “How great is it that someone can follow their passion and turn it into a career? He is a

diligent worker, eager to learn and better himself, and he is very well thought of at Kingston. The residents just love him, and they should because he’s a great person.”

Dillon began receiving services from the Marion County Board of Developmental Disabilities when he participated in Bridges to Employment, a local jobs experience organization. His success has been the result of the collaboration between Marion County DD, Tri-Rivers Career Center and Kingston Residence.

“I think if they could clone Dillon over at Kingston, they would,” Jan said. “He has such a positive attitude and is a solid employee. Dillon is a great example of how an individual with a developmental disability can positively interact with the community, contribute to the success of a company, earn a living and develop relationships. And, in Dillon’s case, he is positively touching the lives of others.”



## RAMIRO TREVINO: FOUND HIS SWEET SPOT AT BAKERY

When Ramiro Trevino straps on his apron, he does it with a smile. Ramiro is 41 and had spent most of his adult life working in a sheltered workshop. Last year, however, Ramiro ventured out and took a job at Mrs. Goodman's Bakery in Worthington.

The affable Ramiro has the important job of washing the many pots and pans used to bake the goodies found in the bakery's glass cases. He also takes out the trash, sweeps, prepares fruit, and fills in for other employees, working up to four days a week during the holidays and busy times.

"I like my job a lot," Ramiro said. "I like doing the pans and taking out the trash the best."

Job Coach Robinson Dunham said Ramiro had never worked outside of a sheltered workshop before taking the position at the bakery. He has made steady progress in his job skills and has become a favorite at the bakery.

Rachel Alderman, owner of Mrs. Goodman's Bakery, appreciates Ramiro because of his positive attitude, strong work ethic and flexibility with scheduling. Although Ramiro works a set schedule each week,

Rachel knows she can always rely on him to pick up a shift during busy seasons or when others call off.

"He has excellent attendance and he's always on time," Rachel said. "Ramiro likes his work and his co-workers. He's a valuable part of our operation."

Ramiro is one of four people with developmental disabilities working at Mrs. Goodman's.

"This job has done wonders for Ramiro's confidence," Robinson said. "Being out in the community and interacting with his co-workers - those with and those without developmental disabilities - has made him more confident."

Ramiro, who is blind in one eye, has difficulty reading an analog clock. So, one of the first purchases Ramiro made after starting his new job was a digital, waterproof watch. He uses the watch to make sure he reports to work on time and while he has his arms elbow-deep in sudsy water.

"This job is creating social dynamics and interactions for Ramiro," Robinson said. "He is developing the kind of relationships that can only occur while being an active member of the community."



# ASHLEY JOHNSON: LEFT WORKSHOP AND HAS NEVER LOOKED BACK

Ashley Johnson just wasn't sure. She wasn't sure she wanted to leave the safe confines of her sheltered workshop, and she wasn't sure if she would like working in the community.

Once she took the big step, she never looked back. She has excelled in a job that puts money in her pocket and has given her confidence in her abilities.

"I love my job and the people I work with," Ashley said. "I was a little worried at first, but my trainer said, 'Ashley, you can do this.' I can do it."

Ashley was recognized as a good worker at the sheltered workshop. Her job developer, Nathan Cates, said when he first suggested community employment to Ashley, she "firmly stated her disinterest."

However, Nathan and the staff at the workshop nudged her to venture out into the community. "I've always been impressed with Ashley's work ethic and her internal drive to succeed," Nathan said.

Ashley is employed by Goodwill Columbus, which has a contract to clean the State of Ohio Computer Center in Columbus. She works 40 hours a week, with healthcare benefits. Ashley works the afternoon

shift and is responsible for cleaning the fourth floor.

"When Nate brought me over for my interview, they asked, 'What makes you think you would be a good fit for this job,'" Ashley explained. "I told them, I like to clean. That's my thing."

Apparently so! Ashley works with little supervision, cleaning her floor and then helping her co-workers. She has earned praise from the individuals who work on the fourth floor and her job coach.

Robinson Dunham, Ashley's job coach through the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said the strides Ashley has made at work have helped her in other aspects of her life.

"She now wants to move into an apartment on her own so she can be close to her work," Robinson said. "The success she has enjoyed in this job is going to change Ashley. I've told her many times, 'Your future is going to look a lot different than your past.'"

"When I see my friends from the workshop, I tell them, 'You don't know what you're missing.' I'm making money. I get a paycheck, and I can pay my own bills. That's important to me."



# TONY BLASINGAME: HIS BOSS WISHES HE HAD “10 TONYS”

Tony Blasingame is a pickle packer extraordinaire.

“I wish I had 10 Tonys,” said Jim Albrinck, manager of the Kaiser Pickles packing house in Cincinnati, where Tony has worked for 17 years. “He’s always on time and works hard. All you have to do is show him something once and he picks up on it quickly.”

Tony is part of a crew that packs jars of pickles, peppers, sauerkraut and relish. He is recognized not only for his hard work, but also for his amiable personality.

Tony, 55, has been deaf since he was age 3. He does not speak, but has developed a unique system of sign language that enables him to communicate with his co-workers. “Believe me when I tell you that Tony is always in the middle of it,” Jim said. “He gives as good as he gets.”

Mark Brislin is a job coach at Easter Seals who works with Tony. “I don’t have to do much job coaching,” Mark said. “I check in and make sure everything is going well with Tony, but he doesn’t need a lot of hand-holding. I’m not sure you could find a better example of how community employment positively

impacts a person’s life. It’s one of the best examples I’ve ever seen of how community employment works.”

Tony takes the bus from his group home to Kaiser four days a week, where he works 10-hour shifts. The job, its regular paycheck and healthcare benefits have given Tony a degree of independence he would not have otherwise enjoyed.

Jim said Tony is keenly aware of the money he makes. “When he sees a raise in his paycheck, he understands that,” Jim said.

“We are thrilled with the unique and successful partnership that Tony, Kaiser Pickles and Easter Seals TriState have built that has resulted in long-term employment for Tony,” said Alice Pavey, Superintendent of the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities. “It’s a shining example of what can be accomplished by supporting those we serve and businesses in building community employment capacity.”

He was nominated for a 2012 Ohio Public Images Award for Personal Achievement.



## JOSH SHROM: DEPENDABLE, RELIABLE AND COMMITTED

Josh Shrom is happy with his job as a mail sorter at Pitney Bowes in Springboro. But that isn't a lifetime job for Josh. He wants more.

"I've improved my skills, especially my weaker skills," Josh explained. "Now, my weaker skills have gotten better. I'm learning so that some day I can get a job with more responsibilities."

The 23-year-old receives services from the Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities. He has been working at Pitney Bowes for two years and sees the job as a stepping stone to a bigger job.

"He wants to advance," said Keith Banner, employment services coordinator at the Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities. "Josh is going to be an asset to any company."

Support Coordinator Cassandra Fuller concurs. "Josh is exactly the person who should have a job in the community," Cassandra said. "He's dependable, reliable and committed to doing a good job. Josh is not defined by his disability. He's simply an outstanding employee."

Josh has worked hard to memorize bin numbers and names on the mail slots at his job. He has become

so proficient at the position that he now helps train new employees. Asked if he likes being considered the expert, he grins and says, "Yes."

"My job helps me be more confident and more independent," Josh said. "I like pay day because it makes me feel like I've achieved my goals."

Cassandra has watched Josh grow as a person and believes much of his growth is a result of the success he has enjoyed at work. "He is more independent," she said. "There was a time when he was pretty shy. Now, he is more outgoing. He has great communication skills and advocates for his rights."

With one of his first paychecks, Josh bought a camera. He enjoys take nature photographs. Josh also is a proud graduate of Project STIR, having completed his training in 2014. He is active in the Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities' self-advocacy group, Speak Up.

"Josh is a recognized leader at Speak Up," Keith said. "He's a leader and a role model."



## **Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council**

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The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council is one of a national network of state councils, committed to self-determination and community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities.

The Council consists of at least 30 members appointed by the governor. Members are people with developmental disabilities, parents and guardians of people with developmental disabilities, representatives from state agencies, and nonprofit organizations and agencies that provide services to people with developmental disabilities.

One of the Council's goals is to educate and inform how state and local government services and policies can be improved, expanded or strengthened on behalf of people with disabilities.