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Health Care Heroes: Health Care Innovation - Organization

Winner: Squirrel Hill Psychological Services

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People with mental health issues such as autism face a range of challenges with reading social cues and building interpersonal relationships. The challenges of finding and holding a job can be worse.

To address these issues, Squirrel Hill-based Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh began a pilot program about a year ago called EmployAble through its Career Development Center. Supporting the effort was Squirrel Hill Psychological Services, a division of JFCS.

The intertwining relationship of the sponsoring agencies may seem complex, but the program’s goal is not: to help people with mental health problems find and keep jobs. And the good news is the program works.

Supporting the three-year EmployAble pilot are a \$98,000 grant from United Way of Allegheny County and grants of \$25,000 and \$15,000 from the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust and The Fine Foundation, respectively.

“It’s very individualized,” EmployAble Program Coordinator April Artz said. “Some folks come in and this is all brand new to them — maybe they don’t have a resume or it’s outdated.”

“It’s a pilot program that really grew fast,” added Sarah Welch, director of the Career Development Center.

Under the heading The Services Cliff, a new National Autism Indicators Report by the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute found that about 26 percent of young adults with autism did not receive services that could help them become employed, continue their education or live more independently.



JOE WOJCIK

EmployAble Program Coordinator April Artz, right, and participant Nicole Curcio meet. The organization aims to help people with mental health problems find and keep jobs.

Twenty-eight percent of young adults who were not employed or attending higher education received no services, the report concluded.

One-third of young adults with autism were “disconnected” during their early 20s, meaning they never got a job or continued education after high school, the report found.

And the statistics are bleaker for people with autism than others with a learning disability, emotional disturbance or speech-language impairment.

About 75 people started the EmployAble program, getting help with interviewing skills, resume preparation and other job-related skills. The job placement rate has been 50 percent, “which is huge for this population,” Welch said.

“One of the struggles we see is they miss a lot of social cues,” Welch said. “Inexpensive or free accommodations can mean having an employee who’s wonderful at their job.”

Twenty-one-year-old Nicole Curcio is one of EmployAble’s success stories. The Aspinwall woman started at the program earlier this year, looking for what she calls her “first real job.”

The job search has been frustrating, said Curcio, who suffers from life-limiting anxiety. The problem has kept her from going after the kinds of jobs she wanted.

“It’s really my anxiety that holds me back,” she said. “It’s been really stressful for me.”

Curcio’s therapist at Squirrel Hill Psychological Services recommended EmployAble. Curcio wanted to work with young children who have special needs.

Artz helped Curcio spruce up her resume and polish her interviewing skills, she said. Artz even accompanied Curcio to a job fair sponsored by Allegheny Intermediate Unit, a publicly funded agency that helps school districts with curriculum and other services.

The result? Curcio was hired as an AIU paraprofessional who will be working with preschool children who need special attention.

“It’s my first real job,” Curcio said. “That’s exactly what I wanted to do, work with special needs kids. I’m pretty excited about that.”

Description: EmployAble is a program of Jewish Family & Children’s Service, through the Career Development Center, with support from Squirrel Hill Psychological Services, a division of JFCS.

Founded: 1950

Based: Squirrel Hill

Website: jfcspgh.org

Kris B. Mamula

Reporter

Pittsburgh Business Times





JF&CS News & Notes

A weekly e-newsletter keeping our community up-to-date on JF&CS happenings



EmployAble recognized for serving jobseekers with autism and mental health challenges

This October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month; a special time for jobseekers and employees with disabilities of all kinds, employers and agencies and organizations to raise awareness about working Americans with disabilities, and the services and support available within their communities.

In light of this special month of awareness, EmployAble, a program of Jewish Family & Children's Service offered through the Career Development Center, was recognized yesterday by Pittsburgh City Council. April Artz, EmployAble program coordinator, accepted a proclamation sponsored by Councilman Corey O'Connor, honoring the program's work in helping jobseekers with autism and other mental health diagnoses and challenges find and retain employment in the Pittsburgh region. The proclamation declared Tuesday, October 13, 2015 as "EmployAble Day" in the City of Pittsburgh.

Additionally last month, the EmployAble program was honored by the Pittsburgh Business Times as one of their 2015 Health Care Heroes in the category of Health Care

Innovation. Health Care Heroes celebrates the people and organizations in Pittsburgh who are instrumental in making our region one of the premier health care centers in the world.

"We are so proud of EmployAble and the recent recognition we've received for our program's work and success," said Sarah Welch, director of the Career Development Center.

"EmployAble is unlike any other program in this region. It strives to work closely with individuals who have a mental health or autism diagnosis, as well as the organizations that employ them, to create meaningful and successful job placements."

For professionally-oriented young adults with autism and/or other mental health disorders, EmployAble, provides support, career counseling and ongoing guidance through the job search, interview, hiring and retention processes. EmployAble also trains employers about the assets of hiring these individuals and how to accommodate them in the workplace. After individuals are able to obtain employment, they and their employers receive continuing support from EmployAble staff to ensure a smooth transition into the workplace.

EmployAble is offered through JF&CS's Career Development Center in collaboration with Autism Connection of PA, City Connections and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), with funding provided by the United Way of Allegheny County, the Fine Foundation, the Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust and others.

The recognition EmployAble has received in recent months is for everyone at JF&CS. Most of all, it is for our clients, who put their trust in us and look to us for the services and support needed to help them change their lives.

To learn more about how to enroll in the EmployAble program or how make your workplace more inclusive to those with mental health challenges or autism, contact April Artz, program coordinator at 412-904-5942 or by email at aartz@careerdevelopmentcenter.org.

Pictured: April Artz, EmployAble program coordinator, received the proclamation from City Council on Tuesday, October 13th.



Jobseekers won't want to miss the next WorkAble career fair on October 29th!

WorkAble, a partnership of the Career Development Center of Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh (JF&CS), North Hills Community Outreach (NHCO), South Hills Interfaith Ministries (SHIM) and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh will hold a career fair for adults throughout the region on Thursday, October 29th from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Millvale Community Center, located at 416 Lincoln Road in Millvale (15209).

Launched in the fall of 2012 and supported by the United Way of Allegheny County, now part of United Way of Southwestern PA, WorkAble is a county-wide employment and critical needs service for struggling adults. WorkAble serves unemployed and underemployed individuals throughout Allegheny County at NHCO sites in Allison Park, Millvale and Bellevue, SHIM offices in Bethel Park, the Oakland location of the Carnegie Library and JF&CS offices in Squirrel Hill.

The upcoming career fair will include employers from Allegheny County, Allegheny Health Network, Rivers Casino, the University of Pittsburgh, UPMC and others.

The career fair is appropriate for all levels of professional experience and available positions

range from entry level to director level. Available positions include jobs in administration, finance and customer service, among other opportunities. Attendees can expect to meet one-on-one with recruiters for brief in-person interviews.

Individuals wishing to attend the career fair are encouraged to dress professionally, bring multiple copies of their resume and research employers and available positions beforehand. Attendees should be prepared to discuss specific positions that they have found and applied to online in advance.

Those wishing to attend the career fair must register in advance by calling 412-586-3773. Those who are struggling and need assistance can call the WorkAble hotline at 412-904-5993 or visit www.workableac.com.



Volunteer

At JF&CS, volunteers and interns are vital to our work and mission, whether they are generously giving their time on a regular basis or providing a particular skill to our agency when needed. [Learn more.](#)



Service Spotlight

Squirrel Hill Psychological Services provides comprehensive psychological services that help individuals, couples, families and organizations move beyond difficulties and make positive changes. [Learn more.](#)



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Without the help of partners and supporters like you, the work of JF&CS would not be possible. Your donations help us continue serving individuals and families in our community. [Learn more.](#)



Jewish Family & Children's Service
Mission, Vision and Values

VISION

A caring community where all people have the opportunity to reach their potential.

MISSION

Supporting people through life's changes and challenges.

VALUES

Responsiveness: We respond to the needs of people in the Jewish and Greater Pittsburgh communities.

Respect: We support people of all abilities by building on their strengths.

Quality: We deliver high-quality services.

Collaboration: We embrace collaborations in order to better serve our clients and community.

Stewardship: We manage our resources to achieve the greatest possible community benefit.

Support JF&CS today!

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5743 Bartlett Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15217

info@jfcspgh.org · 412.422.7200