

# Essential Pittsburgh: Placing Pittsburgh Adults with Mental Health Issues in STEM-Related Jobs

By Essential Pittsburgh • Apr 2, 2015

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Thursday, April 2nd is World Autism Awareness Day.

Becky Wetherington/Flickr

In commemoration of World Autism Awareness Day, Lu Randall, Executive Director at [Autism Connection of PA](#) and April Artz, Coordinator for the [EmployAble](#) program at the Squirrel Hill [Career Development Center](#), are working to place adults with mental health issues in STEM jobs. The EmployAble program, which provides supportive services along with their job placements, acquired the funds to include services for adults on the autism spectrum in 2014.

Asked about the challenges faced by job seekers on the autism spectrum, Artz explains:

"When people go to apply for a job, there's still a lot of concern on their end about disclosing or talking about it to their employer. And I think in some ways that is justified because there is still a lot of misunderstanding despite the fact [that] this is very prevalent, and this is sort of being a human, we still have a lot of stigma and anxiety around this."

Explaining her outlook on helping the people she works with to seek employment, Randall says:

"I see my role, in particular, as providing kind of a cross-cultural explanation of a group that's really not well understood. And it's very similar, when we listen to the issues, to any other minority groups in the past or currently who have a hard time being taken seriously, being respected, not having

| stereotypes put out there that are untrue."

**Also in the program, Pitt professor Michael Kenney talks about why some Americans become interested in joining ISIS, and travel contributor Elaine Labalme gives suggestions on where to go for some extra March Madness.**

Listen

49:15

#### **Countering Violent Extremism (starts at 0:00)**

Federal authorities recently [arrested a National Guardsman who supported the Islamic State of Iraq](#) and Syria, or ISIS. The guardsman was allegedly planning an attack on a military post in Illinois. How much of a threat are terrorist-inspired attacks to the United States and Europe? How should they be addressed? We'll pose those questions to our guest. Michael Kenney, associate professor of international affairs at Pitt. Kenney is the organizer of the upcoming [conference](#) at Pitt "Countering Violent Extremism in the US and the EU."

#### **World Autism Awareness Day (starts at 26:22)**

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#### **March Madness Travel (starts at 41:31)**

It's April and March Madness is still at the forefront of office pools and sports pages. As the final four get ready to play contributor Elaine Labalme, who tweets about food and travel under the Twitter handle [New Girl in Town](#), has some travel suggestions connected to the teams headed to the big dance.

**More Essential Pittsburgh segments can be found [here](#).**

Related Program:



## JF&CS News & Notes

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



### World Autism Day shines a blue light on employment challenges and advantages

Tomorrow is World Autism Awareness Day. Every year on April 2nd, organizations, agencies and communities around the world aim to raise awareness of autism and how the diagnosis affects individuals and families.

This year, World Autism Day is focusing on employment. Individuals on the autism spectrum face special challenges before, during and after the hiring process, but they also can offer unique advantages to employers and co-workers. Unfortunately, it is estimated that more than 80% of adults with autism worldwide are unemployed. As a result, employers are missing out on abilities that people on the autism spectrum have in great abundance--such as heightened abilities in pattern recognition and logical reasoning, as well as a greater attention to detail.

At JF&CS, we recognize the need for vocational programming for autistic individuals and those struggling with mental health disorders. Help is needed not only throughout the initial hiring and employment process, but also to provide ongoing coaching and support to co-workers and their employers to ensure the best experience possible.

For professionally-oriented young adults with autism and/or other mental health disorders, EmployAble, a program of JF&CS offered through the Career Development Center, provides



support, career counseling and ongoing guidance through the job search, interview, hiring and retention processes. In addition to one-on-one counseling and specialized group workshops for jobseekers, 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 as needed to ensure a smooth transition into the workplace.

"Individuals with diagnoses on the autism spectrum may not interview well due to lack of eye contact and other social skill deficits. They may not understand that they need to provide more than just the facts of their previous work or educational experience," said April Artz, EmployAble program coordinator. "Often there is a tendency to become very focused on details, which can be an asset once they are hired. At the same time, they may have difficulty seeing the big picture related to the process of job-seeking and employment. But people with autism are often loyal and diligent employees."

EmployAble began nearly four years ago with a focus on helping jobseekers with mental health disorders. In 2014, this program received funding to expand to address the unique employment challenges of individuals on the autism spectrum. Above all, EmployAble aims to promote inclusiveness in the workplace. The program is designed to work with regional employers to help them understand the value of a diverse workforce and provide an adequate and individualized level of accommodations and support.

"Autism is sometimes considered an 'invisible' disability, and so it may not be apparent that someone is struggling because of their diagnosis. This can lead to difficulties, tension and frustration in the workplace," April said. "There is a saying within the autism community that 'when you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism.' There is no doubt that this is a very true statement, because the abilities and challenges one person with autism may experience may not always translate identically to those of another person on the spectrum."

"EmployAble is such a valuable program because we are able to provide support to everyone involved in the employment process. In addition to supporting individuals on the spectrum, supervisors, co-workers and others in the workplace many need coaching on their approach and working style when interacting with someone who has an autism diagnosis."

*- April Artz, EmployAble program coordinator*

EmployAble is offered through JF&CS's Career Development Center in collaboration with Autism Connection of PA, Achieving in Higher Education (AHEAD), 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 the Cindy & Murry Gerber Foundation.

To learn more about how to enroll in the EmployAble program or how make your workplace more inclusive, contact April Artz, program coordinator at 412-904-5942 or by email at [aartz@careerdevelopmentcenter.org](mailto:aartz@careerdevelopmentcenter.org).

## 5 ways to learn more about autism on World Autism Awareness Day

- 1. Learn about 10 iconic international landmarks going blue for World Autism Day** - *Niagara Falls, the Empire State Building and even the International Space Station are all among this list of landmarks lighting up for autism awareness. Click [here](#) to read more.*
- 2. Read about celebrities and famous figures with autism spectrum diagnoses** - *It's been speculated that Mozart and Andy Warhol may have had autistic tendencies. Click [here](#) to read more.*
- 3. Watch documentaries and movies that feature real individuals or portrayals of characters with autism** - [Temple Grandin](#), [Aspie Seeks Love](#) and [Autism: The Musical!](#) are movies depicting the real and fictional struggles and achievements of those on the autism spectrum.
- 4. Find resources for yourself or a loved one who is managing an autism spectrum diagnosis** - [WrongPlanet.net](#) and [AutisticAdvocacy.org](#) are a few of many websites to find resources and support. [TED talks](#) on autism can also be a great education and supportive tool.
- 5. Volunteer with an organization that provides programs, resources and support to those with autism** - *The best way to learn about autism is to experience it directly by getting to know and learning from individuals living with the diagnosis. Whether you are on the spectrum or not, volunteering your time can be an extremely beneficial way to learn more about what autism is and how it affects individuals and families while giving back to the community.*



### 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

Family Hope Connection is dedicated to placing children in permanent, loving homes and works with birth parents, families considering adoption and families who have adopted at all stages of the process.



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## Jewish Family & Children's Service

### Mission, Vision and Values

#### VISION

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

#### MISSION

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Supporting people through life's changes and challenges.

#### VALUES

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**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.

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