Take Your Legislators To Work Events ~ A Resounding Success

Four stories highlight the successes of workers with disabilities across Rhode Island

Take Your Legislator To Work is RIAPSE’s signature event aiming to inform legislators and stakeholders as to the importance of workforce investment programs that enable people with disabilities to be contributing members in America’s workforce. This is accomplished through an interactive experience where legislators are invited by people with disabilities to tour their place of employment, witnessing first-hand the importance of "empowerment through employment" by speaking with employees with disabilities, their supervisors, and in some cases, patrons of such businesses. The visual format is celebrated as a positive way to demonstrate not only the success of job seekers with disabilities in acquiring positions in the community, but also how hiring people with disabilities is simply "good business."

At RIAPSE, we strive to inform such stakeholders to best assist with the decisions on legislative items directly affect our mission. Outcomes such as the signing of The Able Act and the approval of funds to support workers by the RI House Finance Committee demonstrate the power of an informed legislative body, and how this mission is supported regardless of party affiliation. We continue to welcome inquiries on how to continue to "cover the map" with more stories and show how everyone wins when contributing towards this economic development!

For more information on RI ASPE’s Take Your Legislator to Work events or if you are interested in participating in an event or showcasing a worker, please contact Kie O'Donnell at: kodonnell@fogartycenter.org
Sarah has been an employee of Ocean State Job Lot for 26 years. She works four days a week, averaging 14 hours per week. When she first started working, she had a job coach. Now she is completely independent on the job. Each shift, Sarah cleans the break rooms, bathrooms, peg walls, water fountain and registers. She is also responsible for putting away merchandise that has been returned.

During the April 2016 Take Your Legislator To Work Event, Sarah and her supervisor, Bruce, provided an overview of Sarah’s responsibilities and her exceptional performance to four legislators (Rep. Teresa Tanzi, Rep. Kathleen Fogarty, Rep. Robert Nardolillo, Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee). Sarah shared that she finds it rewarding to have a job and feels happy going to work. Sarah expressed that it is nice to have money for vacations and activities, like going bowling or going out to eat with friends. Bruce added that Sarah “is a good worker. She’s always punctual and very thorough. Once she learns a new task, she is independent and requires no follow up.” Bruce also commented on Sarah’s reliability. He never has to worry about Sarah’s attendance, because she is always on time and asks for time off well in advance.

Sarah was in her element when it came to fielding questions from the legislators. She spoke about everything from her experiences and choices regarding public transportation to the importance of the relationships she has with co-workers and her supervisor. Sarah was positively beaming with joy as she described a surprise celebration, complete with song and cake, presented to her by her co-workers in the break room.

Following the question and answer session, Sarah provided a detailed tour for the legislators, demonstrating the pride she takes in her job and remarkable knowledge of the store’s layout and product placement. Sarah made a point during the tour to introduce her co-workers, who she thoroughly enjoys. Sarah closed the event by thanking everyone for coming and guiding the legislators to the registers where they purchased items found along the tour.
“Our Greatest Untapped Resource”

Well-matched position at a truck stop creates a ‘home away from home’ for long-haul truckers

Kevin has always known that he wanted to work at an active job. When he was hired in late 2015 at TA Services in West Greenwich, RI, Kevin was well-matched for a porter position at the 24-hour truck stop.

During the 2016 Take Your Legislator To Work Event, Kevin gave Congressman Jim Langevin a tour of his workplace and job responsibilities, which include ensuring that the facilities for the customers, long-haul truckers, are of the highest quality. Tony, a regular customer, wanted Congressman Langevin to know how important Kevin's hard work was to making this operation an excellent "home away from home."

Kevin works 20 hours a week with a great team of co-workers. His managers emphasized that Kevin is a “fantastic employee” and one of the most committed. He is diligent at his job as a porter, working with pride and engagement.

In a blog post following the event, Congressman Langevin was not surprised by Kevin’s success. “I don’t mean to sound like a broken record, but I have long said that people with disabilities are one of our nation’s greatest untapped resources. “

Kevin’s employment allows him the freedom to enjoy his hobbies and social life. More importantly, the job at TA Services gives Kevin a sense of purpose and a focus to move forward in his life.
Sophia is a mother and an employee of Burlington Coat Factory in East Providence, RI. Sophia has been employed as a receiving associate for over three years. She first became aware of her career interests by engaging in a Knitting Club in her community, which expanded further into the world of fashion retail. Being a mother herself, Sophia was driven towards the baby clothes offered at the store. As a receiving associate, Sophia is responsible for placing security tags on the merchandise after unpacking and sizing them. Ever a keen eye, Sophia has also assisted with identifying store theft and reporting it to security. Sophia takes pride in the work she does, and absolutely loves the team spirit atmosphere of doing her own job tasks while having people to talk to.

Being an earner, Sophia and her team asked State Treasurer Seth Magaziner to expand “financial literacy” programs to help people like herself continue to work, and make the right financial decisions in the future. Financial Literacy programs inform people with disabilities of their options when planning a financial future. The Treasurer stated that such programs are important because they provide a bridge for people with disabilities to continue to find vocational opportunities from schools to adult programs. As people with disabilities earn and create economic stimulus, financial literacy programs help them to learn about financial resources to make a more informed choice.

For Sophia, informed choices help her to provide her family. Her supervisor explained that “Sophia has shown performance and is treated just like anyone else on the team. She can be counted on and knows how to get the job done right.”
Recognizing Creative Ability

Pawtucket native a perfect fit for customized role

A talented cartoonist, Kenny was eager to find employment in his community and in a job that recognized his abilities. In spring of 2015, the Pawtucket native was hired at Colonial Mills, Inc. on Mineral Springs Ave. in Pawtucket. Kenny was hired to perform a customized role providing the finishing woven details on an array of colorful fabric baskets. The role required the talents of a dedicated employee with a specialized skillset. Kenny has not only delivered in the role but has proven to be a dedicated and hard worker.

At the April 2016 Take Your Legislator To Work Event, the tour of the textile factory highlighted how management values Kenny's dedication to his work and his perseverance as a young adult in his first job. The team at Colonial Mills also shared that Kenny brought not only dedication to his job but he brought endless little gifts that showcased his talent with the visual arts to his favorite office staff.

On Kenny’s walk to work, his co-workers would pull over and offer him a ride. However, for Kenny, RIPTA bus lines in the Pawtucket area get him wherever he wants to go! No matter how he got to work, he was always on the production floor at the factory on time.

Kenny loves working and enjoys spending his money on family needs. He is proud of himself and how work advances his skills and opportunities.

Thank you to the legislators and businesses, as well as other supporters, who made #TYLTW 2016 a success!

Go to www.APSE.org to learn more about Employment First.

Please join us at RI APSE