

# LONG ISLAND BUSINESS NEWS

Get our free LIBN e-alerts & breaking news notifications!




At The Nicholas Center, Dean packs an order for one of the organization's clients, Line Of Site. / Photo courtesy of The Nicholas Center

## Enabling the other-abled

By: Adina Genn   April 30, 2021   Comments Off on Enabling the other-abled

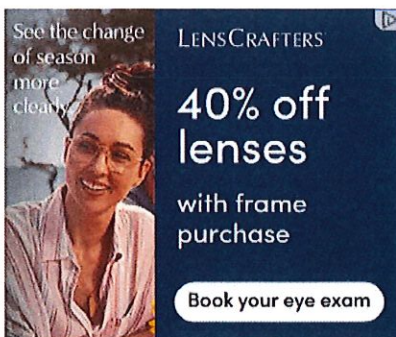
Increasingly, new paths in the workplace are opening up for people with autism as well as people with disabilities.

Along with training for employers and employees, there is boosted awareness among the region's leaders of the benefits of supporting a diverse workplace culture in which all team members can thrive.

Right now, new workforce training opportunities across Long Island coincide with high unemployment among the autism spectrum – experts put this figure at 85 percent. These opportunities may also solve some of the struggle employers have faced finding qualified workers. And with the right training and support, employees are highly proficient, punctual and loyal team members.

For David Thompson, this is a reality he sees daily while working with those on the autism spectrum.

Thompson is the senior director of employment and inclusion at The Nicholas Center, which provides daily support for people with autism and works in partnership with Spectrum Design, a custom apparel and promotional products company. Thompson's experience by remembering your preferences and repeat visits. By clicking "Accept", you consent to



People with autism often "like routine processes," Thompson said. Jobs deemed too mundane for some "r dream job for someone else."

Meanwhile, a new effort is underway to inform employers about tax incentives and credits when they hire with disabilities or who are on the autism spectrum.

This includes "a work opportunity tax credit," Rep. Andrew Garbarino said recently on LIBN|Now, the wee webinar on LIBN and Facebook. "It's available to employers who hire individuals from certain target group faced significant barriers."

Garbarino also spoke of "a disabled access credit" that "provides a nonrefundable credit of up to \$5,000 fr business that incur expenditures, for the purpose of providing access to persons with disabilities, and that includes employment, if you make your small business more accessible."

In the Town of Islip, Councilman Jim O'Connor heads up the Disability Advisory Board. O'Connor has beer time advocate of people with disabilities as the father of Matthew, a 23-year-old who is "severely autistic, verbal" and "a really beautiful person," O'Connor said on LIBN|Now.

O'Connor said that he and his wife bring Matthew "into the community, so the community can see that it's that we incorporate the disabled members of our community into our everyday life."

O'Connor pointed out that "no two children or no two people with autism are alike, and no two disabilities so you always have to have the ability to listen and be able to hear and learn."

"So many people probably have gone into businesses where somebody has already hired someone with a and they don't know," he added. "There are very, very capable children and adults out there with disabilit most people don't even" know about.

For example, Garbarino mentioned a busboy on the autism spectrum that he knows at a nearby restaurar considered "one of the hardest working busboys" in town.

Still, O'Connor said, "there might be a stigma attached to it" for employers, who may think "this might be "I might have to pay more," perhaps unaware of the many programs available to employers that hire peo would otherwise face barriers to employment.



West Babylon-based Winters Center for Autism, opening in the fall, is alreac partnering with Long Island Select Healthcare in Central Islip, or LISH. At LI participants from the center began job training in March through an existing employment program implemented at the corporate office of Winters Bros. Systems of Long Island.

Winter Bros. is "committed to hiring people on the autism spectrum," said C Ponzio, the center's executive director.

rogram

ant experience by remembering your preferences and repeat visits. By clicking "Accept", you consent to



Courtesy of Winters  
Center for Autism

Winters Center for Autism's Transition Work Experience Program is aimed at hands-on skill developments to tap into the potential of each participant as the job that best fits their abilities.

Services at the center include job training, career planning, interview preparation, exploration of volunteer and educational opportunities, and employer assistance to develop employment programs for people with autism.

The partnership at LISH serves as a pilot program, and the participants are gaining supported experience working in a food pantry, in customer service and in performing clerical work, Ponzio said.

Some participants can work independently while others need long-term support. In addition to providing job creation, training and placement, the center helps businesses develop and implement programs to employ those on the spectrum.

Embracing diversity can bring about change that aids society as a whole, Thompson said. He pointed to "Cut Effect," where in the 1970s in Berkley advocates for people in wheelchairs fought for sloping curbs so in wheelchairs could safely and easily cross the street. By 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which included mandates such as curb cuts. The change was good for society according to published reports, from parents navigating curbs with strollers to those wheeling heavy packs.

"There are society benefits to accommodating people that are different than you," Thompson said. "The more diversity you have within your team, the more perspectives you have to look at problems," Thompson said.

Meanwhile, Levittown-based Elija Foundation offers its Transition Programs and Services, supporting people at colleges and in competitive employment. This includes vocational assessment, program placement, career and employer training for organizations that want to employ those with autism. And at its organic farm in Huntington, participants learn agricultural skills, contributing to the farm's productivity.

In Yaphank, Maryhaven's Business Center provides an integrated community environment where those with disabilities work alongside non-disabled persons to provide packaging and assembly outsourcing and document imaging services to companies in the region. The center provides job skills and training, so those with disabilities can find community-integrated jobs, where they can earn a sustainable wage, and become full contributing members of society.

And the Viscardi Center offers transition counseling, job exploration, self-advocacy and work-readiness training individualized work experiences.

Overall, these hires have a "high level of loyalty to the job, the best attendance and are the most punctual," said. "The job training has allowed people to explore and find their employment niche."



Sean Winters is completing his internship at Winters Bros. recycling center. Courtesy of Winters Center for Autism

Email

Share 2

Share

Print



ant experience by remembering your preferences and repeat visits. By clicking "Accept", you consent to