

How to Navigate the New Normal

By Marc Tannebaum, Associate Director of JEVS Independence Network



Life changed quickly and drastically for all of us during the first few weeks of March 2020. It was no different... whether you were the members, staff or families within JEVS Philadelphia Independence Network program. We all had to endure major changes to our daily lives, as the landscape of life as we knew it continued to shift daily.

The program community as a whole, rose to the challenge in front of us. The staff pushed through their own fears and anxieties, to collaborate on how we could best help our members stay safe, prepared and connected during this time of unprecedented crisis. Whether members went home to stay with family or continued to live in their apartments, we made it a priority to check-in daily, make sure they had enough food and supplies, ensure they were being as safe as possible, and talk about any fears or concerns they had.

We quickly adapted to a virtual platform to stay connected and began creating a weekly calendar of activities to help members

stay socially engaged. Our mission at Independence Network has always been to create a supported community for our members to live as responsible, productive and independent individuals. Many aspects that help define that independence have been put on hold for the moment. However, being independent means being able to take care of your own needs and to make and assume responsibility for your decisions, while considering both the people around you and your environment.

By staying safe, healthy, prepared and connected, our members are proving their independence more than ever. For a group of individuals that have faced and overcome challenges their whole lives, they continue to amaze and inspire me with their strength and perseverance. I have never been more proud to be a part of such an amazing community. The future is uncertain, and there will be more challenges ahead. Of one thing I can be certain—our community will face any and all circumstances head on and persevere once again.

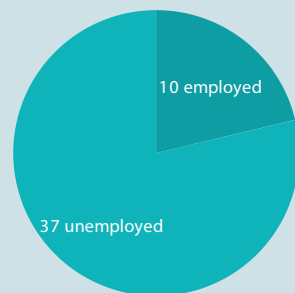
Pandemic Employment Statistics

March Before



■ Employed (82.98%)
■ Unemployed (17.02%)

April After



■ Employed (21.28%)
■ Unemployed (78.72%)

Employment Next Steps:

- Offering virtual Work Skills groups twice a week to prepare members for workforce re-entry; create a safe place for members to support one another through significant employment and life changes; and continue to foster a strong culture of employment
- Conducting weekly individual employment meetings to establish and support individual re-entry strategies
- Providing guidance and support to program members to identify and access available benefits
- Offering weekly individual career planning meetings for those who wanted to use this time to plan for and pursue career advancement opportunities

A Special Thank You to Our Essential Workers on the Frontlines...

The Independence Network community would like to personally thank all of our members who are essential workers and who have demonstrated amazing dedication during this unprecedented time. We are all so proud of your hard work and continued commitment to your positions!

We Are All In This Together! *Members' Perspectives*



"I think I am more independent than before because my mom has had to step back a lot. My mom knows I am fine because I have the Independence Network for virtual support and virtual events, I also got used to my new apartment really quickly." – **Shannon M.**



"I have realized I am helping a lot of people out in the community by still working at Acme. I am not scared because I have faith in a higher power, and I believe things will get better". "Zoom events are helping us because they bring us closer together and we get to hear from other members firsthand." – **Zack P.**



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"I have to be extra careful because of my immune system. I feel trapped. Without the Independence Network I wouldn't be able to get through this. If we didn't have Zoom calls, I would have no social because my mom is still working, I wouldn't have anyone else." – **Shawna D.**



"When I was told I wouldn't be working anymore, it wasn't really a struggle, but it is the first time in my career that I haven't been able to work on a regular basis. The Independence Network helped me to get an interview for a new job." – **Mark C.**



"Quarantine has taught me to be happy for what I have and to slow down. I like that I am still able to accomplish things I want to with virtual support." – **Kelsey B.**



"Being home, I have found myself doing more events with the Independence Network and it keeps my busy. Plus, with having virtual support I am not doing nothing for hours." – **Ben R.**



"The Independence Network has kept me busy, it is not the same as in person, but it has kept me in contact with the Independence Network members and staff." – **Zachary S.**



"I opened my heart in different ways. For me, when I first started, it opened a whole new world for me. I didn't fit in with my friends from high school any more because they were having babies and getting married. In the program, I now feel apart and feel whole again. You guys made me whole again. Now I have friends." – **Sam O.**



"I am staying at home with my parents and have been practicing my cooking skills a lot. The PIN team still reaches out to me even though I am not staying in my apartment in Narberth. Having the Zoom events has helped me to see and talk to my friends." – **Chrissy B.**



"I think people have become more patient. The PIN team has given me different support since my routine has changed so much. I am not working or volunteering, and I had to adjust to a lot of changes." – **Jon S.**



"People seem to be more "good" when something bad happens. The coronavirus seems that it has made people more sensitive and focused. It makes you think more about people you care about." – **Dillon S.**



"I prefer face to face interaction, but during Zoom I feel less distraction than when I am in person in a group." – **Jonathan S.**



"It is really interesting that when we are on Zoom we seem to connect more. In the past when we were in person, some people would be on their phones and others would be coloring or doing something by themselves... Now we all connect. I really appreciate that there is more attention to each other." – **Ethan C.**



"I do one day at a time. I like that every day there is something different to do through Zoom. I also really like how it connects us. I especially enjoy meditation." – **Chrissy A.**



"The PIN community is more than just a place or specific space. It's the people that make it. As long as we have each other we are still a community. When this is over I plan to continue my participation in PIN both live and virtually." – **Laura K.**



"Tough times don't last, but tough people do. I think PIN can make it together. PIN members are tough and can get through this." – **David M.**



"What I have learned is all of my friends are right behind me and I am improving people's lives everyday at my job at Acme." – **Sean B.**



Lockdown and Lessons Learned

By the mentors of JEVS Independence Network: Stephanie, Annalisa, David, Brittany, Natalie, Debra, Missy, Charlene, Vy

The Lockdown: Thursday, March 12

We all learned that the entire county was going to be on lockdown the following day. This left many members finding out that work and their daily schedules were on pause, we can't meet in groups anymore, everything in our Independence Network program communities in Narberth and Collingswood were starting to close, and there was nothing we could do to stop it. We all felt anxious, uncertain, scared. We, as staff, put on strong faces and helped to explain everything to our members and to prepare them with groceries, cleaning supplies, and other necessities. This was the worst day, and the following day was too, but we all got through it together and immediately started to innovate.

The Quarantine: March 16 and on

Since the lockdown, our entire program has evolved into something we never imagined. Our in-person supports have shifted to mainly virtual. At first I know we all felt a little awkward video chatting instead of being together. That feels weird for everyone! Over time, members have become more flexible when it comes to switching to this form of communication. More members have been engaging online, a lot of whom would not have engaged as much if we were holding our regular in-person meetings. It's refreshing! The flexibility our virtual schedule provides is helpful because a lot of members would like to attend events, but are unable to because of their busy schedules.

We have stronger relationships forming with members and staff. We are all truly alone, together.

New Challenges & New Ideas

From the start of the quarantine we knew that we wanted to offer a wide variety of virtual events to Independence Network members to keep everyone stimulated and connected. To achieve this quantity of events, we have begun to specialize in areas that we are most interested or experienced in. For instance,

- Jill and Debra have been leading members in self-care activities, such as learning relaxation techniques.
- Stephanie has taken over game night using newly discovered gaming websites and apps.
- Vy also has been using technology to bring members and staff together.
- Annalisa has been hosting cooking events to help individuals work toward their independence goals while in quarantine.

We have worked together to develop creative care packages that include supplies that can be used during self-care and art activities such as origami or meditative drawing.

Also of great importance is the number of member-led events that we have all enjoyed! Lena gave a riveting short-story reading. Connor treated us to a hilarious puppet show. Nathan showed us how to cook an emergency meal, and Jackie showed us how to properly apply makeup.

The Take-Aways

We believe that our team was able to adjust quickly and efficiently despite the abruptness of the quarantine. Everyone was on board and willing to learn how to navigate through different online mediums to provide many different virtual options to our members. We all took our own personal experiences and brought it all together and cooperated with one another to make this adjustment for both members and staff as smooth as possible.

While the future is uncertain, going forward we would like to use the technology and skills that we have learned during this difficult time to enrich our day-to-day activities. Staff members are excited by the possibility of continuing to use Zoom to facilitate more interactions between members in both program communities. Video conferencing may also prove useful to staff members as a tool for support. While leading cooking events on Zoom, multiple members are able to receive support at once while also using their own kitchen equipment.

Some of the events that we have found very successful may become regular events. Furthermore, while our community has always been open to member-led events, this period of quarantine has caused us to schedule them more regularly. In order to keep events diverse and engaging, we have had to reach out to our members more than ever as a resource and hope to continue to draw from members' interests and skills for future events.

My Thoughts As A Parent As We Faced This Pandemic

By Keri, mother of JEVS Independence Network member, Zack

By Sandi, mother of JEVS Independence Network member, Ethan



Tues March 3rd: So excited. Zack got a job at ACME!

Monday March 9th: First day at ACME went great! Directors Jill and Meghan are going to provide job coaching to give Zack every opportunity to succeed.

By Friday, March 13th: The world as we knew it changed. I'm working safely from home indefinitely due to COVID-19. My younger son is home safely from college completing spring semester online. My 3 sisters and 6 nieces and nephews are all either working from home or taking classes online.

The only one still out there is Zack.

My thoughts:

- How can I leave Zack out there exposed to the public day after day while the rest of us are safe at home with no exposure to the public?
- How can I bring Zack home to stay with us when he just started this new job, a job that overnight became vital to the community?
- How can I bring Zack home now when he's made such great progress living independently?
- How is Zack going to learn this new job without job coaching?
- How will Zack manage on his own without mentor support?

So, Zack stayed in his apartment in Collingswood, NJ, and I prayed he would stay healthy. I prayed that he would be ok.

The mentor support continued! The job coaching continued! Virtual activities were added! Zack's hours increased! Zack and his roommate cooked together! and went for walks together!

My thoughts now:

- Grateful for the JEVS Independence Network program!
- So proud of Zack!
- Amazed at the caring and creativity of Jill, Meghan and all the mentors.
- The Independence Network will come out of this stronger than ever!

I have been a parent and advocate of Philadelphia Independence Network (PIN) for seven years, having recognized the community's value from the beginning. Although none of us ever planned to be staying home for extended periods of time under "shelter in place" orders, it's comforting to know that Ethan has a second home in Narberth, Pa., where people support each other like a family.

Ethan came back to stay at our family house during the pandemic. However, even home-cooked meals can't replace the relationships that he has continued to foster with fellow members, albeit virtually, during these challenging times. When all of this started, Ethan quickly became immersed in JEVS staff-led Zoom trainings for career skills, meditations and other exercises, cooking classes, and of course, virtual game nights with his PIN friends; filling his days with positive, "growth-oriented" activities.

Although the stay-at-home orders limited Ethan's ability to physically see clients for work, thanks to the program, he has been able to remain productive and continue learning skills for the future, all while staying connected with the community. Independence Network also took action to help people who have been affected the most by COVID-19, making masks and providing food to those in need.

Daily walks have been another important part of Ethan's new routine, serving as a time to reflect on his progress toward goals. Our typical "check-in" conversations have been transformed from "Are you OK?" to "Here's a list of Zoom activities from today..." or "Marc, Stephanie, Annalisa and the NJ staff are doing..." Tremendous credit goes to the JEVS staff, because they treat each member as if they're their only priority.

Ethan remains immersed in the PIN community in Narberth while living in Huntingdon Valley until the quarantine gets lifted. We love hearing Ethan explain what he's learning about and accomplishing virtually through the program, and are excited for when he'll be able to rejoin the physical community to fully leverage its resources for work, community-involvement, and the sense of belonging that he takes great pride in. These ideals are what we all want for our kids. #grateful