

Q JEVS in the news...

PROGRAMS: JEVS hireAbility

DATE RUN: July 7, 2021

SOURCE URL: https://pressofatlanticcity.com/news/local/jevs-hireability-program-helps-find-work-purpose-for-locals-with-disabilities/article_aea8dafc-dda1-11eb-b88e-2f1c9f731d99.html



JEVS hireAbility program helps find work, purpose for locals with disabilities



Rebekah Lovell, left, 25, of Somers Point, rolls silverware with Kim Callahan, career manager for JEVS' hireAbility program, at Texas Roadhouse in Egg Harbor Township. Lovell was hired there through the hireAbility program.

MATTHEW STRABUK, FOR THE PRESS

By Claire Lowe

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP — Rebekah Lovell, of Somers Point, wanted to work, but, diagnosed with a developmental delay and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, she didn't know exactly what she could — or was qualified to — do.

In the past year, she has found her niche polishing and rolling silverware for the Egg Harbor Township location of Texas Roadhouse with help from JEVS Human Services' hireAbility program.

"I sort the silverware, sanitation," said Lovell, 25, a 2017 graduate of Mainland Regional High School in Linwood. "I like it. The managers are nice."

JEVS is a Philadelphia-based social service agency that provides career services to individuals with physical, developmental and emotional challenges as well as those facing adverse socio-economic conditions including unemployment and underemployment.

Kim Callahan, career manager for hireAbility, said the program and others like it in the region are important to help connect people with disabilities with jobs for which they may be overlooked. In her role, she actively reaches out to employers to help connect them with potential employees who have the skills or experience levels required, but may need assistance applying or interviewing for a position.

In 2019, the latest available data, JEVS helped 422 people with disabilities prepare for and find employment and 323 young adults with disabilities prepare for life after high school.

Five mornings a week, Lovell comes the restaurant, says hello to her managers and coworkers and gets to work. She rolls between 100 and 150 setups of silverware in napkins each day after washing and polishing the knives and forks. She also helps set up the ramekins of butter for the evening before departing with her mom, Diane, each afternoon.

Sometimes she and her mom stay for a late lunch.

"She really loves going to work every day," Diane Lovell said. "She's happy to go to work, and she gets her own money to pay for things."

Rebekah's first day at Texas Roadhouse was July 6 of last year — just a few weeks after restaurants were able to reopen for outdoor dining following a shutdown amid the emergence of COVID-19. She had come to JEVS through a referral from the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services through the One Stop Career Center in Pleasantville.

Diane Lovell said her daughter attended Atlantic Cape Community College for a year after high school, but it didn't work out. Rebekah developed some workforce skills through her high school working at a snack stand for students and was ready to start looking for employment.

"She did really well there, so I was hoping she would find something that she would like," Diane Lovell said. "She loves to bake, she helps me, we make dinner together, so it's nice."

Rebekah Lovell said she had eaten at various Texas Roadhouse locations and loved their butter, so she was excited when her mom found a job listing for the new Egg Harbor Township restaurant and brought it to Callahan's attention.

Callahan went to the hiring office the restaurant set up next door to talk to the managers about Rebekah.

"I remember that day," said owner Cody Panetta. "We always would have visitors come in, and I always want to be heavily involved in the community."

Diane Lovell said Callahan and Rebekah clicked right away.

"It's a good experience for a young, disabled adult, it's a very good program. And they work well with you," she said of hireAbility.

Callahan said Rebekah is excelling in her role. In addition to helping her find a job, Callahan helps Rebekah adjust to her position and the workload.



Texas Roadhouse employee Rebekah Lovell and owner Cody Panetta discuss her work through JEVS' hireAbility program with the group's Career Navigator Kim Callahan. (Video frame grab).

"We go in with the person and help them learn the job, and then fade out over time," Callahan said. "(Rebekah's experience) really is what it's supposed to look like."

Callahan said that when she works with people through the hireAbility program, she needs to know not only what jobs they are interested in doing, but also the environmental factors that may be positive or negative for them.

She also has to make sure her clients have the ability to do the jobs they want.

Rebekah was interested in a baking position at the restaurant. After speaking with Panetta, Callahan said they decided to start with a less intense position to get Rebekah acclimated to the restaurant. Now, she helps the baker some days with prep work.

"From an employment standpoint, we try to be an equal opportunity employer," Panetta said. "If someone can do a job, we want them to do it. She is as good of an employee that you can possibly ask for."

For more on hireAbility and other programs, visit jevshumanservices.org/programs.