



## JEVS Independence Network Gets a New Clubhouse

*By Zack P., NJ Independence Network Member*

I am excited to announce that we will have a new clubhouse in NJ by early 2022! A lot of work has gone into cleaning out the old building, removing floor tiles, and making plans for the new space. Many of my family members helped. My Mom owns the building, and my whole family cares about the Independence Network and wanted to help us grow.

In May of 2021, every member of the JEVS Independence Network signed the wall in the clubhouse before construction began.

We did this so that we could all put our individual mark on the evolution of the program. This was the first time we all got together in person since the pandemic began in March of 2020. It felt like a reunion!

It will be exciting to have a place to hang out, meet up and do events together. The clubhouse is located right on Haddon Ave.—the main strip of Collingswood. The building will help sell artwork and other community members might be able to sell things, too. We will have celebrations,

cooking nights, movie nights, video game nights – the list goes on!

I am looking forward to help manage the building and share a place with my friends where they can get their own projects going. The new clubhouse will help bring us together and be an opportunity to even get closer as a JEVS family. This has been a long time coming and I can't thank everyone enough who has helped with the production of the NEW JEVS CLUBHOUSE!





# Celebrating Our Staff

By Lois F., PIN Parent

For over a decade, the Philadelphia Independence Network (PIN) has been supporting young adults with disabilities as they learn to live independently. The success of the program is due to several factors:

1. The affiliation with JEVS Human Services;
2. The collaboration among JEVS, PIN members and families;
3. The safe, welcoming and convenient locations of the programs;
4. The diversity within the PIN community.

A fifth component, while crucial for PIN's achievements, is probably the least discussed and recognized. The passionately dedicated and compassionately effective staff deserves much of the credit for all PIN has accomplished.

PIN has grown dramatically in many ways since Jill Gromen became its Director. When Jill arrived in Narberth, there were 14 members, one full-time staff member, one part-time, and, briefly, a career navigator. Six years later, there are two Independence Network locations serving approximately 60 people, and a staff of 14, including an Associate Director and a Career Navigator for each site, Mentor Associates and Community Support Counselors in both the Narberth and Collingswood locations. The program options are varied, creative, and plentiful, as are the social activities, even during this time of pandemic restrictions on in-person gatherings. Jill deserves credit for much of this expansion, thanks to her experience, engagement, and commitment to hire the best candidates for staff positions.

Jill's experience began as an undergraduate, where she had a direct support role in group homes. After graduate school, she worked as a case manager for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This was in the 1990s, when person centered planning was

a new concept, and she participated in a Philadelphia citywide pilot project. After that, she joined JEVS to oversee training, and program development in the Community Living and Home Supports division. After leaving JEVS, she provided training and technical assistance to service providers in her role with Networks for Training & Development, a regional consultation organization.

Luckily for PIN, she missed her role in direct support, and didn't want to work in a traditional program. She wanted the opportunity to use what she had learned in her career, and liked PIN's emphasis on family involvement, and that this would be a collaborative effort.

Jill feels that the most meaningful part of her job is relationships. "We're navigating different relationships; everyone has a voice. It's challenging, and the right thing to do. We support members to achieve their goals and grow in their independence. It's a privilege to walk through life's journey with members and their families, through good times and really not good times."

As the Independence Network has expanded to two programs, in two states, the role of Associate Director has taken on additional importance and responsibilities. Meghan McHugh, Associate Director of the Independence Network in Collingswood, started as a Mentor for PIN in Narberth in 2014, and has been a part of the program longer than anyone else on staff. Meghan came to PIN shortly after graduating college with a degree in elementary special education. She spent one year as a substitute teacher, and then worked, one-on-one, at a camp for people with autism. She enjoyed being out in the community with the camper she was working with, and realized that classroom teaching would not afford her the same opportunity for interaction and flexibility. When Jill came to PIN, Meghan was the only full-time

staff person. The members' trust and affection for Meghan, both well earned, helped PIN during this transition period.

Meghan became the Associate Director of PIN when the NJ program started and Jill had overall responsibility for both locations. PIN members were saddened when she was named Associate Director in NJ, but joint activities, both in person and virtual, keep her in touch with members of both programs. Plus, her commute is much shorter and easier.

Working directly with members is Meghan's favorite part of her job. She enjoys seeing the changes that allow them to lead full, meaningful lives., and shares the fun in many activities. She also finds the program is a creative outlet for staff, who worked on their own professional development plans last year.

Marc Tannebaum joined PIN as a Mentor Associate four years ago. It was a time of rapid growth for PIN, and Marc's responsibilities grew as well. When he started, Jill, Meghan and the career navigator were the staff. Not long after, it was just Meghan and Marc at PIN while Jill was getting the NJ program started. Marc says he had to learn by doing, and got to know the members well in his first six months. By the time Meghan left for Collingswood, Marc was ready for his new role as Associate Director of PIN.

When Marc came to PIN, he had been managing restaurants to pay the bills and coaching high school basketball. He studied elementary education in college, and knew he wanted a career where he could work directly with people. His mother was a social worker and he grew up with an understanding of the complexities of peoples' lives. He says that the relationships with members, family, and staff – people with all different backgrounds – feels natural.

Marc likes looking back to where members started, and seeing the progress in their lives. He says he is "doing a job where I can make a difference, is never dull, and has lots of challenges." He also appreciates that he, and the rest of the staff, are given the freedom to be creative and grow.

The twelve Mentor Associates, Career Navigators and Community Support Counselors in Narberth and Collingswood present a broad range of backgrounds, experience, and talent. Staff are educated in psychology, education, social work, electronic media & film, medical assistant, anthropology, accounting, and deaf studies. Their prior work experience includes business, management, direct support, behavioral health, and more. There are staff members currently completing undergraduate degrees, and others working towards graduate degrees. Some joined the staff with little work experience, others with up to 30 years. This diverse staff gives the members the opportunity to interact with people of different race, age, gender and gender identity, experience, and education. Members learn to work with a variety of people, all of whom are deeply committed to their jobs.

Thanks to the commitment, competence, and kindness exemplified by the entire PIN & Collingswood Independence Network staff, over 60 young adults are able to develop job skills, social lives, and the capacity to live independently. The members' families have the reassurance of knowing they have entrusted their adult children to a dedicated and caring group. As PIN completes its 10th year, there is much to celebrate.

Jill asked staff members ***"What is most meaningful/important to you about your current role in the Independence Network?"*** These samples from their responses demonstrates why they have such a positive impact on the members lives:

*"It is so fulfilling to watch meaningful change happen, but to also know that these changes will assist in the member leading a meaningful life for the rest of their lives."*

**– Stephanie, PIN**

*"I couldn't ask for a group of more talented, funny, or compassionate people to find community with."*

**– Alex, PIN**

*"The most meaningful part of my role... is helping members achieve their full potential in different aspects of their life."*

**– Ny'Asia, Collingswood**

*"To me, one of the most important and fulfilling aspects of this position is being able to help people learn new things and get over hurdles."*

**– Shania, Collingswood**

*"Being able to be with them through their process of learning how to become independent is rewarding."*

**– Vy, Collingswood**

*"I enjoy being there for them, that they feel I am someone they can trust and confide in."*

**– Samantha, Collingswood**

*"What is most important to me is to be effective and able to help the members in their journey."*

**– Kim, Collingswood**

*"It's been great to see so many of our members flourish over the past few years and do things they may not have thought possible!"*

**– Natalie, Collingswood**

*"Feeling that my contribution will result in members reaching their life, health, and personal goals."*

**– Charlene, Collingswood**

*"Supporting them throughout the whole process of getting hired, to thriving at their job and feeling good about themselves; being valued at their place of work is an incredible feeling."*

**– David, Collingswood**

*"I am humbled every day to watch these amazing young adults learn and achieve independent living skills."*

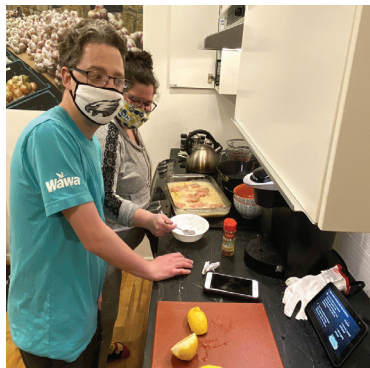
**– Missy, Collingswood**

# Independence Network Members Benefit from Assistive Technology



Members of the JEVS Philadelphia Independence Network (PIN) often use technology to support their independence. Over the last year, JEVS Human Services has invested in developing Assistive Technology (AT) services with the help of community partners such as Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation, Temple University, and the internal expertise of Madeline Lacquer, a certified Assistive Technology Professional (ATP). Madeline begins by performing AT assessments. She found that some members could benefit from the use of smart home technology like Amazon Echo devices. “They’re great because they are commercially available and low cost. One member is using her Echo device to develop a morning and nighttime routine to improve her health and wellness.”

“It has changed my life,” said Independence Network member Chrissy A. “The Echo device reminds me to leave for work on time.



Now I am trying new recipes for dinner. The Echo Show makes it easy to look up new recipes.”

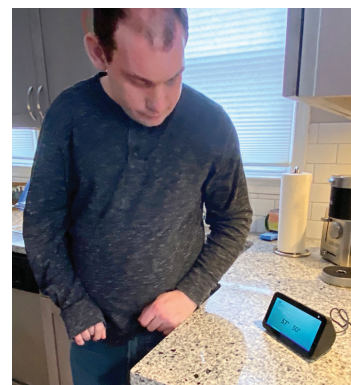
*Independence Network members Chrissy and David use their Echo Show to find new healthy recipes and cook more meals at home.*

Fellow IN member David M. agrees: “I think it has changed my life because it is helping me to stay organized. The device reminds me of things like what time to take the train to work and what time to leave for work. I think the Echo devices are amazing and cool. I wish I had it years ago.”

Independence Network member Josh S. uses his Echo mostly for emergency calls in case he doesn’t have his phone and has a medical emergency. And since Echo Show has a camera that can be covered with a slide, his parents or staff members can drop in on him via video.

“I think the Echo devices are fun and helpful,” said Josh. “It’s going to change my life by making things easier and helping me to remember things. The devices help me to be more independent.” The newly established AT work and access to try out devices to support independence is enhanced through a state program run by Temple University called TechOWL. It functions as a free AT lending library where it is possible to borrow equipment for short term use.

“TechOWL is very helpful,” said Lacquer. “We are starting to build our own library within JEVS. Right now we have some Echo devices, some switches, and a Tile for losing keys – yes, that’s assistive technology! We are also hoping to get a 3D printer to make simple devices like prescription pill bottle openers, zipper pulls, key holders — the possibilities are endless.”



*Independence Network member Josh S. uses his Echo for emergency calls. He is also looking into other forms of Assistive Technology to help him at work.*

Assistive Technology Services allow individuals to work around their challenges and perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. Along with specific devices, software or equipment, Assistive Technology (AT) also includes direct training and instruction to the user and supporters. AT often means increased independence, safety, and autonomy.

For more information please contact us at **267-350-8611** or email **AT@jevs.org**.