

Director's Report

I have chosen to select submissions we have been asked to make to the Governor's Weekly Report highlighting some of our programs and activities. It is representative of what we have been doing over the last several months.

HireAbility is very pleased and proud to be launching our **4th year of the Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP)**. We are on track to have about 130 youth participate from nine AHS districts around the state. We anticipate that youth in SCEP will be working for nearly 100 Vermont employers. This is the biggest enrollment that we have seen since our inception. This program offers 5 weeks of career exploration curriculum in a classroom with peers and paid employment in an area of interest to youth with disabilities in high school. Our goal for youth participating in SCEP is to use it as a vocational launchpad. For many of these youth this is their first job with a paycheck. Many SCEP participants from prior years have gone on to participate in dual enrollment courses, Project SEARCH, College Compass, credentialed training and apprenticeships, and much more. HireAbility believes that everyone can work if they are provided the right supports and this program provides the what young people need to have a positive first experience with the world of work. Youth improve their self-confidence and belief they can succeed at a job and have a career.

As we launch our fourth year of SCEP, we are **celebrating one success story** from last year's program.

HireAbility began work with this young person in Fall 2022 when he was 15. From the start he was eager to work. His long-term goal is to build log cabins and he enjoys working with his hands learning trade skills. He has been in DCF custody for a few years and is involved with a residential program in Rutland.

He participated in the HireAbility 2023 Summer Career Exploration Program (SCEP) with a work placement at Diamond Pine Ranch. This placement was accepting of his school supervision requirements and his young age as well as being a good fit for his interests and skills. On the job, this participant went above and beyond expectations. Steph, the business owner, noted that he was an over achiever, very motivated, always looking for extra work, a problem solver, and that he would always be early starting work without prompting from her. Steph would've hired him if she had the opening and asked to be a reference for him in the future. In class, this participant would volunteer and share his experiences. He led by example and was polite.

In Fall 2023 after his successful SCEP completion, the youth turned 16 and was connected with Brown's Auto Salvage in Castleton, VT. After sharing feedback from his SCEP employer, Matt Brown was enthusiastic about offering a work experience. Matt was especially empathetic towards a young man struggling to integrate back into his community. Our participant went through a tour and informational interview, then began a paid work experience (PWE) with supervision from the residential program staff. The youth advocated for himself with his employer and treatment team and was able to reduce his supervision needs and work independently by the end of his work experience. A coworker at Brown's said, "We need 10 more of him!" He did so

well, he was offered a job! He started after the new year and is making \$16/hour working independently. SCEP gave him an opportunity to prove himself, develop a professional reference, and demonstrate that he can enhance his treatment programming with a work opportunity.

HireAbility sponsors a **Youth Advocacy Council Summit (YAC)** with support from our community partners at VT Family Network, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and others. Youth and young adults with disabilities, ages 14 to 25, come together throughout the year to advocate for youth resources, and learn leadership skills while providing community service. Annually, the Youth Advocacy Council identifies three areas that are of greatest importance to them. Every year the YAC plans and leads a Youth Summit. This year's summit was on May 24th at the Hilton Doubletree. The agenda included a variety of guest speakers and youth advocacy council members discussing transition, accessibility, and community and sharing their own stories. We had over 80 youth attend.

Connecting Employers with Learn and Earn Opportunities with Students in High School:

The Apprenticeship & Trades Fair, on Wednesday, May 8, took place at the Brattleboro Union High School gymnasium. This was not your traditional job fair. Collier Shutter, Business Account Manager for HireAbility and the Windham Workforce Partners (WWP), Dean Matweecha, Regional Manager for Workforce Development at the Department of Labor, and Matt Bentley, Regional Director of Vermont Adult Learning collaborated on this new way of reaching the students and community of Brattleboro who aren't looking at post-secondary education and want to get to work.

The goals for this event were to introduce area students to local opportunities for "earn and learn" programs leading to industry-recognized credentials and to promote trade and production industries that support local economies. This new idea came about due to HireAbility VT's VT Career Advancement Project and VDOL's registered apprenticeship programs. Mr. Bentley, Regional Director for VAL made the connection to Principal Hannah Parker, who was excited to be part of the inaugural event. She offered to have the students attend the fair 9-11 and invited the public after the students.

Over 900 students walked through the gymnasium to meet with the 24 vendors. In attendance were representatives of The Town of Brattleboro, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, G.S. Precision, Hubbard Farms, C & S Wholesale Grocers, Dartmouth Hitchcock, Lawrence & Lober Electric, Cota & Cota, Vermont Agency of Transportation, and Bayada Home Care. Although not all these employers offer a registered apprenticeship, they all talked about earn-and-learn and training opportunities within their companies. All had careers with growth opportunities. Employers said they had no problem engaging with the students. They were impressed with turnout, and the great questions they asked.

The **Vermont Career Advancement Project (VCAP)** at HireAbility is increasing opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities to access training and advance their careers. The project will have a special focus on Earn-and-Learn opportunities such as paid work experiences and registered apprenticeship programs. Five key industries with high growth and higher wages were identified: advanced manufacturing, financial services, health care, information technology, and

construction trades. VCAP recognized the need for an Employer Advisory Group from these five occupational areas to provide input on industry access and to promote apprenticeship opportunities.

The Employer Advisory Group includes representation from Forbitol Factory, Spates Construction, Mascoma Bank, Vermont Veterans Home, Copley Hospital, ReArch Company, Beta Technologies, Husky, and Davis & Hodgdon CPAs. The group meets bimonthly and is facilitated by the director of VCAP and the Employer Services Manager from HireAbility.

The Employer Advisory Group is a critical resource to identify and build pathways for recruitment, promotion, and retention. The Group has provided input on the benefits and challenges of registered apprenticeship programs and expanded to include Earn-and-Learn opportunities that meet the needs of the specific industry. Through VCAP, HireAbility will become a key resource for employers looking to increase their candidate pool, provide training to their staff, and meet their labor force needs.

VCAP has enrolled 239 participants in the grant to date, half of whom are actively engaging in education towards their career goal including registered apprenticeships with 52 completed degrees, certificates, or credentials. By the end of the grant, HireAbility will have developed a system of Earn-and-Learn opportunities and best practices for supporting participants and meeting the needs of the business customer. The results of this effort will lead to increased use of apprenticeship programs, credentials held by working Vermonters, and partnerships with business customers, education and training providers, and community partners.

National Governor's Association Disability Policy Summit

The National Governors Association hosted the Disability Inclusive Workforce Policy Summit and State Action Lab in Washington DC October 23rd thru the 25th. Vermont was one of seven states selected to participate – other states represented were North Dakota, Minnesota, Tennessee, Colorado, Maryland, and New York. Vermont sent a team of five people representing the Community College system, Department of Labor, the State Workforce Development Board and HireAbility to participate in the action lab which ended in the state team identifying priorities and next steps to positively impact policies that support people with disabilities to obtain meaningful employment. The priorities the Vermont team focused on were:

- Interagency Collaboration and Coordination
 - o Better collaboration between the Department of Labor, Agency of Education and Vocational Rehabilitation programs to support a pathway to meaningful careers for all Vermonters.
 - o Regularly scheduled meetings with clear agendas and intention between leadership for these entities will allow for more collaboration and shared goals that lead to better opportunities for people with disabilities to enter into and advance within meaningful career paths.
- Employer Engagement
 - o Understanding the needs of the labor market to identify relevant training and career opportunities within communities.
- Accessible Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Eliminating barriers to people with disabilities to engage in training opportunities.
- Making sure the content of trainings is fully accessible for all.
- Transportation and Access to Broadband

One area highlighted by summit presenters was setting a priority on “Making the State a Model for Hiring People with Disabilities”. HireAbility has been working with the Department of Human Resources and the Governor’s Workforce Equity and Diversity Council to offer a range of employment options for people with disabilities in state government.

JOBS Program Celebrating 30 Years of Success

Since 1994 the Jump on Board for Success (JOBS) Programs have supported youth disconnected from their communities and facing barriers to successful transitions to adulthood. On June 4th, over 75 people joined HireAbility to share the program’s impact over the last three decades, recognize program staff, hear from youth supported by the JOBS program, and honor long-standing program leadership and staff. The JOBS Programs have supported through a unique partnership of HireAbility Vermont, the Department of Mental Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living, the Department of Corrections, and the Department for Children and Families as well as local Designated Agency and Restorative Justice partners around the state. The program was incredibly well received and renewed all our commitment to the value of the JOBS program for Vermont’s at risk youth.

Diane Dalmasse, Director