

Apprenticeship Guidebook

Disability:IN North Carolina | InRoads to Employment

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Forward

This guidebook was developed by Disability:IN North Carolina under a grant from, the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD). The guidebook is one of the deliverables of the InRoads to Employment Initiative which began on March 1, 2018 and ended on February 28, 2021. InRoads to Employment was designed to showcase innovative strategies for expanding employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in North Carolina, with a special emphasis on youth with developmental disabilities. InRoads to Employment focused on three major deliverables including 1) developing at least two pilot paid apprenticeships, 2) assisting two school systems to develop Pre-Employment Transition Services, and 3) creating a postsecondary mentoring program. Each of these three model programs were detailed in individual guidebooks that are distributed by the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities to encourage replication of these strategies. The guidebooks are also available for download at DI-NC.org.

Apprenticeship and People with Disabilities

Business leaders report that the current education and training systems are simply not generating enough skilled workers to meet the demand for the available jobs.

Disability:IN North Carolina is the only private non-profit, business to business network devoted to disability employment Inclusion in the workforce, supply chain and marketplace. Founded in 2012, DI-NC's mission is to empower businesses to achieve disability inclusion and equality.

We serve NC employers through Business Networking, Education and Training, Consultation and Support and Sourcing Opportunities that diversify both their talent pipeline and vender list to include individuals and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Our strength comes from our business members and sponsors across NC committed to creating disability inclusive corporate cultures. Our members are ranked among the best places to work for disability inclusion in NC.

Registered apprenticeships are gaining ground as a cost effective and efficient way to train low-income adults and out of school youth to enter well paid jobs of the future. Despite the high unemployment rate among people with disabilities, people with disabilities are vastly underrepresented in the current apprenticeship programs.

Expanding the participation of people with disabilities in registered apprenticeships is needed to increase the talent pipeline for businesses across the nation.

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Purpose of This Guidebook

As part of a model demonstration program under the InRoads to Employment Initiative, Disability:IN North Carolina partnered with ApprenticeshipNC, The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NCDVR) and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) to develop a pre-apprenticeship and an apprenticeship program focused on serving individuals with disabilities. Our goal is to encourage other organizations to consider partnering with employers and partner agencies to expand pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities for people with disabilities across the state. The guidebook will:

1. Give a brief overview of how the apprenticeship process works in North Carolina.
2. Present information on how to address barriers to enhance the participation of individuals with disabilities in apprenticeship programs and encourage businesses to embrace disability inclusive strategies.
3. Provide information on two case histories of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for individuals with disabilities.

4. Provide resources for further information to encourage other organizations and businesses to partner on developing apprenticeship programs for people with disabilities.

Impact of the Pandemic on the Apprenticeship Programs

The negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic shut-downs on many types of businesses across the nation cannot be overstated. The host companies that DI-NC partnered with to develop the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship program were no exception. For the pre-apprenticeship, the program at Well-Spring Continuing Care Retirement Center successfully launched their program and hired 2 individuals with disabilities as feeding assistants who completed the program by December 2020. Though senior care services had to restrict visitors and non-essential staff from entering their facilities during the pandemic, they largely survived.

The apprenticeship program hosted at Your Local Greens (YLG) located in Burlington however, lost substantial business due to the pandemic. In March 2020, the pandemic shut down YLG operations for several months during which they lost their major retail food distribution customers. Originally, the plan was for Your Local Greens to launch their apprenticeship program in Fall 2020. During the planning process, YLG worked with DI-NC and other community partners to hire 4 individuals with disabilities in 2019, while the apprenticeship program was under development.

As of March 2021, it is uncertain when YLG will be able to resume business and launch the full apprenticeship program. However, the learnings on disability inclusion strategies for apprenticeship programs presented in this guidebook are still relevant to share to enable other organizations to replicate strategies that increase the participation of people with disabilities in apprenticeship programs.

Overview of the Apprenticeship Process in North Carolina

*“According to the US Labor Bureau of Statistics, in 2019, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 7.3%. In 2020, it had jumped to 12.6%. **People with disabilities only represented 20% of the labor market.** Since the pandemic began in March 2020 1 in 5 workers with disabilities lost their employment (representing nearly one million jobs lost) compared with 1 in 7 for able bodied peers. Census Bureau, nearly one of every five people in the United States has a disability.” (Norlian, 2020).*

The Census Bureau reports that nearly one of every five people in the United States has a disability. Barriers to employment among people with disabilities include lack of training, social stereotypes, and prejudices on the part of employers, low expectations among people with disabilities (and their family members) about their ability to work and barriers related to systemic poverty (lack of transportation, access to training, etc.). Apprenticeship programs are an important and effective way to create pathways to high paying careers for underemployed groups, including people with disabilities.

Apprenticeship Programs for People with Disabilities

“The Department of Labor has funded some initiatives to promote apprenticeship however, a majority of disability-serving organizations that work with people with disabilities may not be aware of the potential that exists for creating pre-apprenticeship or registered apprenticeship (RA) programs.

The paucity of apprenticeship programs for people with disabilities suggests that disability service providers need to be made aware of RA and of the important role they can play in partnering with RA sponsors to support making RA opportunities available to more people with disabilities.

Promoting more apprenticeship training through apprenticeship-community college collaboration can help to reduce costs for RA sponsors and disadvantaged students, including youth with disabilities, while also offering apprentices the benefit of earning college credits from community colleges. (ODEP, 2015)”

How ApprenticeshipNC Works

In North Carolina, the NC Community College System manages the **ApprenticeshipNC Program** for the state. Apprenticeship's pair on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction that enables participants to earn while they learn in a highly skilled trade. The goal of ApprenticeshipNC Program is to support the economic and workforce development needs of the state by creating a pipeline of competent employees to fill high demand jobs that require expert technical training.

Participants who successfully complete the program earn state and federal certificates signifying their knowledge and skill set in a field. In some cases (depending on the program design) apprentices also may complete an associate degree or other credential. The ApprenticeshipNC program promotes, develops, registers, and assists in the operation of the state's system of registered Apprenticeships. Having the ApprenticeshipNC as part of the NC Community College System, helps employers develop both the classroom instruction and the on-the-job training requirements of the apprenticeship program.

“ Apprentices are individuals who receive on-the-job learning from a master level supervisor while typically receiving job-related education from institutions such as community colleges or trade organizations. Apprentices can be current high school students, recent graduates, experienced workers who are changing careers) or military veterans” (ODEP, 2015).

Benefits of Apprenticeship Programs

According to the NC Apprenticeship office, the average registered apprenticeship program in North Carolina yields a 170% return on investment ((Apprenticeships Yield 170% Return on Employers' Investment, Survey Finds, 2020).

- ✓ Registered apprenticeships in the state are small, with 70% of survey respondents currently having five or fewer apprentices.
- ✓ 85% of survey respondents believe apprenticeships provide a net financial benefit to their business
- ✓ 82% of survey respondents are satisfied with the financial impacts of their apprenticeships.
- ✓ Respondents cited benefits such as increasing employees' skills flexibility, improving productivity and improving the employer's ability to find (Freyer, June)qualified candidates.
- ✓ Nearly half said employee turnover among certified journey workers (employees who have completed apprenticeships) is lower than among other workers.
- ✓ More than 88% of respondents that sponsor pre-apprenticeship programs said they are satisfied with them.

Apprenticeship programs are business-led. Apprenticeships are employer-driven training models with a long history of success, dating back to the earliest training guilds, formed in Europe during the middle ages. Modern apprenticeships combine paid-work-based training with related classroom instruction (including virtual training) and include a progressive wage scale.

Apprentices earn higher wages as they gain greater skills over the course of the apprenticeship training. Apprenticeships are starting to be viewed to address the “broken” workforce development pipeline that all too often fails to connect working people to high demand, high wage jobs of the future.

“For every \$1.00 invested in apprentices, employers receive an average of \$1.70 in additional value according to a survey conducted by the N. C. Department of Commerce’s Labor & Economic Analysis Division.” (Home Page NC Community Colleges: ApprenticeshipNC, 2021)

Collaborating Agencies

The following are agencies and organizations that are typically included as collaborators with the host employer that is developing a new apprenticeship program.

- **ApprenticeshipNC**

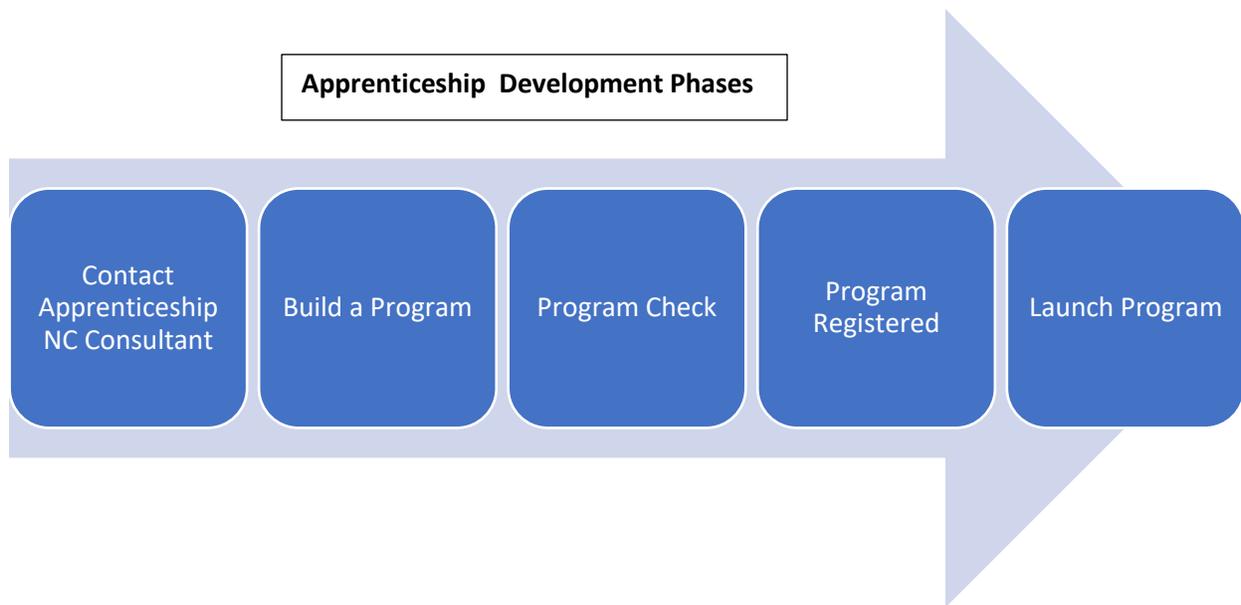
- **Community College**

- **NC Works Career Center**

- **Disability Specific Partner Agencies**

Apprenticeship Development Steps

The process to develop a registered apprenticeship program is straight forward and begins with the host business contacting an Apprenticeship NC Consultant. The NC Apprenticeship Consultant will meet with the host business to begin the process of developing a customized training program (including on-the-job training and related classroom instruction) that meets the federal and state standards for a registered apprenticeship program. Often, the program will include a pre-apprenticeship training to prepare students to enter the full apprenticeship program. Pre-apprenticeship training also permits the host employer to evaluate the student’s level of commitment to the training before committing to the longer-term mentoring relationship of an apprenticeship program



Disability Specific Partner Agencies

The ApprenticeshipNC office, community college and in some cases, the NC Works Career Centers are the key collaborators the host employer are partner agencies in the development of a typical apprenticeship program. However, to meaningfully engage with candidates with disabilities, host employers should consider expanding their collaboration to include organizations and agencies with expertise in disability inclusion strategies.

The following list provides an overview of agencies such as:

1. The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
2. A Local Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs).
3. Disability:IN North Carolina collaborated with these organizations to facilitate the development of apprenticeship programs that fully include candidates with disabilities.



The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) helps people with disabilities achieve their goals for employment and independence. (Vocational Rehabilitation Services, 2021).

Vocational Rehabilitation: Candidates with disabilities may be sourced through partnering with the local North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NCDVR) office in the community where an apprenticeship program is located (or where a new apprenticeship is being developed). NCDVR can support apprenticeship programs in many ways, including (but not limited to) the following:

- **Career counseling and guidance:** For eligible apprentices, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor meets regularly with potential candidates who are receiving VR services to provide career counseling and guidance before they apply to an apprenticeship program as well as during their apprenticeship training.
- **Candidate recruitment :** NCDVR can assist in the recruitment of potential apprenticeship candidates by reaching out to clients with disabilities who have expressed an interest in the industry where the apprenticeship is located or will be developed.
- **Candidate assessment and screening :** A Vocational Evaluator who works for NCDVR can also help with the screening process by developing assessment tools in partnership with the host business . Using these screening assessments with all candidates (not just candidates with disabilities) during the candidate selection process will provide information to inform decisions on candidate selection.
- **Accommodations due to disability:** NCDVR staff are trained to assist individuals with disabilities to explore and identify accommodations that may assist them to work more productively and efficiently. NCDVR staff are familiar with a wide variety of assistive technology, communication services, adaptive equipment and facility requirements for ADA compliance to assist the host employer to accommodate the needs of apprentices with disabilities. In most cases the cost for accommodations is borne by the employer. (However, usually the cost of accommodations is usually under \$500.00).
- **Authorization for job coach training:** If the candidate is eligible NCDVR may be able to authorize job coaching services for apprentices with disabilities who need additional training support beyond what the host employer can offer. Usually, NCVDR will authorize a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) to assign a Job Coach to an eligible client as described below.

Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP)

Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) is a program that is operated primarily to employ and train people with disabilities to enter the workforce. CRPs are widely dispersed across North Carolina and often, work closely with local employers in their communities.

Often the CRP is a no profit agency that provides building - based training as well as job search assistance via job coaches through a services called **supported employment** or **customized employment**.

A professional Job Coach (employed by a CRP) can enhance the apprenticeship training provided by the host employer, by providing more intensive and targeting training strategies to accommodate the learning styles of apprentice with disabilities. For example, Apprentices with Intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) may benefit from having a Job Coach to break down larger tasks into more detailed training steps. Whereas an apprentice who is on the autism spectrum may benefit from having a Job Coach to assist them with learning work tasks as well as social cues.

Services from a CRP are usually authorized and paid for by the Local NCDVR office . When NCDVR authorizes job coach training, the employer is not asked to pay for these services.



Disability:IN North Carolina

is a business to business network that drives success through disability inclusion in the workforce, supply chain and marketplace. We serve NC employers through:

Business Network

Assisting businesses to connect with other businesses to share best practices in their disability inclusion strategies.

Education and Training

Providing learning opportunities from national and state leaders via conferences, events, training sessions, webinars and podcasts.

Consultation and Support

Designing and delivering custom targeted disability inclusion initiatives for businesses and stakeholders with disabilities. We assist businesses with Employment First or Section 503 OFCCP compliance.

Sourcing Opportunities

Connecting businesses to community partners and sourcing opportunities through:

- **Our network** of certified disability owned business enterprises (DOBEs) and service veteran owned business enterprises (SDV-DOBE)
- The **Our Ability Connect** jobs portal where businesses can post openings and source talent among hundreds of candidates with disabilities
- **Mentoring, apprenticeship and internship programs** designed to meet your business needs.

Strategies to Enhance Disability Inclusion in Apprenticeships

Many employers report that they feel reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities due to a lack of understanding of their abilities. (Disabled World, 2020). This reluctance also influences how employers think about engaging individuals with disabilities in apprenticeship programs. Lack of information about the abilities of individuals with disabilities can also influence the design of apprenticeship programs, such that the program is built with systemic barriers to candidates

“As with traditional pipelines, blockages, barriers and holes can stop students from reaching this destination” (Freyer, June 2019).

with disabilities. If the main goal of an apprenticeship program is to create a pipeline of highly trained, competent employees, intrinsic barriers to candidates with disabilities excludes them from the pipeline and limits the diversity of the workforce for the employer. The point of

creating a pipeline is for individuals to enter the apprenticeship during high school or soon after, progress in their training to master a career and reach the goal of a permanent, full time job (with credentials) at the end of the apprenticeship.

Surveys completed by Cognassist, reported that 15% of individuals who drop out of apprenticeships leave because their needs are not being identified and they are not getting the right type of support. (Jolin, 2021) However, there is evidence that when people with disabilities receive the right kind of support they participate and succeed in apprenticeship programs at higher rates. (Discover Apprenticeship: Advancing Apprenticeship Opportunities for People with Disabilities, 2021).

“In 2018/19 12.3% of apprenticeship starts declared a learning difficulty or disability, up from 7.7% in 2011/12” (Jolin, 2021).

The four stages of the apprenticeship cycle are presented below including:

Stage 1: Student (or candidate) exposure and recruitment

Stage 2: Student screening

Stage 3: Student selection into pre-apprenticeship

Stage 4: Student completion of the pre-apprenticeship and full apprenticeship

The strategies to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities at each of these four stages is detailed throughout the apprenticeship cycle.

Stage 1: Student Exposure and Recruitment

As with students of color, the lack of engagement with students with disabilities during the high school recruitment stage, blocks the pipeline of these talented candidates from participating in apprenticeship programs. Engaging students with disabilities requires that apprenticeship programs welcome their participation by presenting images of disability inclusion, role models,

and accessibility strategies to encourage them to apply. The lack of role models of successful individuals with disabilities is a pervasive and systemic barrier for youth with disabilities .

Images of ordinary citizens with disabilities (being included as co-workers, managers, and leaders) are sorely lacking in typical images used for advertising, merchandising, and marketing products and services, including workforce development publications and community college recruitment information. Studies show that young people with disabilities start to think about their lives after high school at a later stage than their peers without disabilities due to low expectations regarding their future career prospects. It can be difficult to engage youth with

*“Studies show that young people with disabilities start to think about their lives after high school at a later stage than their peers without disabilities due to low expectations regarding their future career prospects.”
(Disabled World, 2020)*

disabilities in conversations about their future employment and careers since students with disabilities experience low expectations from others, throughout their lives, especially in career planning.

Students with disabilities need to feel that their career interests are achievable . Having role models and mentors who have disabilities is vital to encourage them to participate in recruitment activities. Beyond expanding the images used to recruit students to include images of people with disabilities, marketing materials should expressly state that the apprenticeship program welcomes the participation of students with disabilities and will offer reasonable accommodations to enable them to explore their options . It is important to share images of disability inclusion and assurances that the program is accessible and embraces students with disabilities with the parents and family members of students with disabilities to encourage them to support their son/daughter’s career aspirations. (Disabled World, 2020)

Stage 2: Student Screening

During the screening stage, students must show that they meet the minimum standards (including academic and GPA standards) to enter an apprenticeship program. The screening stage usually includes events where the student meets with the employer for informal, and sometimes formal screening interviews. If the screening process is not consciously designed to be accessible, few if any students with disabilities will successfully complete the process. Keeping in mind that individuals with disabilities have lived experience with their disability and if asked, can offer the employer specific strategies to accommodate their needs. Additional resources on accommodations include:

- **The Job Accommodations Network** provides a listing by disability, topic, and limitation to help employers and individuals determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Though not intended to address every situation, JAN’s A to Z Accommodations List is a good starting point. (U. S. Department of Labor, 2020)

- **The local North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation office** also helps host employers to determine how to increase the accessibility of their screening process to people with disabilities.
- **Organizations such as Disability:IN North Carolina** can help employers with their accommodation strategies.

Access to transportation can be a huge barrier for students with disabilities, especially if the student is dependent on public transit and requires wheelchair accessible transportation. Public transit systems are notorious for their lack of access to the outlying, industrial areas of a city or town where apprenticeship programs are often located. Despite the proliferation of alternative transportation such as Uber and Lyft and others, these services can too be expensive as an ongoing transportation system for individuals with disabilities living on a fixed, low income.

Accommodation strategies should include removing and/or addressing physical barriers as well as planning for communication needs such as interpreter services for the deaf and hard of hearing, or large print for individuals with low vision, etc. Less obvious, but in many ways more impactful disability inclusion strategies include will also focus on the social requirements of the screening process itself. For example, individuals on the autism spectrum may find it difficult to participate in typical “meet and greet” screening sessions. Having the option to meet for a private screening interview, can provide a more effective and comfortable environment where the candidate with autism can excel in sharing their talents and interests, without the added pressure of a social setting that is not conducive to them.

Often the first step in the screening process is for a potential candidate to complete an application form. The application enables the host employer to gather data on the candidates to understand their entry level skill sets, past work history, previous education and training as well as determine the candidates level of interest with the type of work offered through the apprenticeship. The application should also ask candidates if they require any specific

Partnering with agencies and organizations that serve individuals with disabilities can provide more specific, targeted accommodation strategies for the host business to potential apprentices with disabilities (U. S. Department of Labor, 2020)."

Examples: Accommodations for People with Disabilities

Physical changes

- Installing a ramp or modifying a restroom
- Modifying the layout of a workspace

Accessible and assistive technologies

- Ensuring computer software is accessible
- Providing screen-reader software
- Using videophones to facilitate communications with colleagues who are deaf or hard of hearing

Accessible communications

- Providing sign language interpreters or closed captioning at meetings and events
- Making materials available in Braille or large print

Policy enhancements

- Modifying a policy to allow a service animal in a business setting
- Adjusting work schedules so employees with chronic medical conditions can go to medical appointments and complete their work at alternate times or locations

accommodations in order to enhance their participation in the screening process and ultimately in the apprenticeship.

Stage 3: Student Selection into Pre-apprenticeship

The student selection process is for apprenticeship programs are guided by the job description and skill sets needed to succeed in the job. To assure an inclusive program for people with disabilities, it is critical to have a clear job description and a comprehensive, but relevant analysis of the job skills required. Often job descriptions include requirements that are not truly

Examples Of Job Simulations

Candidates May be asked to:

- Assemble a simple product for a manufacturing job
- Demonstrate how they would use a construction tool for a construction job.
- For a sales position, candidates may be asked to role play how they would talk to a prospective customer about a product or service.

Inappropriate standards may not fully capture the full range of a student's abilities and preparation or may reflect past discriminatory practices carried forward." Freyer, June 2019.

relevant to the skill sets required of the position. In some cases, the list of job requirements can be informed by requirements that are outdated or were carried over and added to groups of job descriptions (especially in large organizations with complex human resources departments). For individuals with disabilities some job descriptions include standards that are not essential to the performance of the specific job under consideration. Companies who are actively seeking to recruit talent from among job seekers with disabilities should review all their job descriptions to eliminate requirements that are not part of the essential functions of each job. Another way to increase disability inclusion in the screening process is to offer different methods for candidates with disabilities to showcase their skills. Besides interviews, employers may consider developing short **job simulation** exercises (asking the candidate to perform certain targeted tasks) associated with the job description to demonstrate their abilities. When well designed, job simulations can be an effective method for predicting job performance.

Skills assessments are another very effective way to assess the innate skill sets of individual candidates. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation employs vocational evaluators who are trained to develop assessment tools for the businesses that need objective screening tools to help them evaluate the skills sets of candidates under consideration for jobs (including apprenticeship programs). The assessment tools created by the vocational evaluator can be used to screen with all candidates (not just candidates with disabilities) during the candidate selection process will provide information to inform decisions on candidate selection. Finally, **creating a relaxed interview experience** will improve the ability of certain candidates with disabilities (anxiety disorder, autism, etc.) to demonstrate their true potential. Holding the interview in a comfortable area, with minimal distractions can go a long way towards reducing stress. Permitting the candidate to meet with their job coach or vocational rehabilitation counselor may reduce performance anxiety.

Stage 4: Student completion of the Pre-Apprenticeship and Full Apprenticeship and College Degree Programs.

Getting accepted into an apprenticeship program is just the first step. The hard work begins when the new apprentice must commit to participating consistently and learning both on-the-job and in classroom related courses for the months or years necessary to earn the credential.

"Completion of a Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program should be considered as a possible option for promoting successful long-term employment outcomes for people with disabilities at competitive salaries and with little or no educational debt (ODEP, 2015)."

Data on the college completion rate among individuals with all types of disabilities who participate in apprenticeships is lacking. However, some studies show that the completion rate

among students with I/DD is extremely low (Hart, D, 2021). National research on the completion rates of people with disabilities on their completion rates from pre-apprenticeships and full apprenticeship programs is sorely lacking. The participation rates of people with disabilities in pre-apprenticeships and full apprenticeships is still quite low. Fear of disclosure among individuals with hidden disabilities contributes to the lack of reliable data.

Clearly additional supports are needed throughout the apprenticeship program to ensure that apprentices with disabilities are able to complete these programs successfully and fulfill their career expectations. Disability:IN North Carolina partnered with business owners representing two different industries (health care and food production), to develop a pre-apprenticeship program and a full apprenticeship program as model demonstrations of disability inclusive apprenticeship training in North Carolina. The following case studies provide an overview of the strategies that we used to develop these programs.

Case Study # 1

The **Feeding Assistant Program** pre-apprenticeship model was originally developed in 2016 by Patricia K. Keul, M.S., CESP, a subject matter expert with over 30-years' experience in program development and implementation of innovative supported-employment services for individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities (I/DD) and/or autism. To further develop this model program replication of the feeding assistant program became one of the objectives of the InRoads to Employment Initiative funded by the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) from March 1, 2018 to February 28, 2021.

The feeding assistant program was designed to create a career pathway in healthcare for students with disabilities who may not have an interest or be prepared to enter a clinical care program. For individuals with a desire to work with senior citizens (often born of past close relationships with a grandfather, grandmother or other senior citizen)

being a feeding assistant is a career pathway that enables them to explore senior care as a pre-apprenticeship that may lead to advancing to clinical care in the future. Though the feeding assistant program was field tested in senior settings, it may also be an effective staff position for respite care and/or hospice care facilities to employ to expand staff capacity and provide a career pathway for individuals with disabilities who want to work in these settings.

Feeding Assistants

“ Any individual who has successfully completed a State approved feeding assistant curriculum in accordance with Federal Requirements 42 CFR 483.160 and who works under the supervision of a licensed nurse, feeding residents; does not include nurse aides or licensed nurses when feeding is performed as part of their regular nurse aide or nursing duties.”

The Role of a Feeding Assistant

The definition of a paid feeding assistant and the requirements to become one are outlined in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published the final regulations for requirements for paid feeding assistants in Long Term Care Facilities (Federal Register/Vol. 68, No. 187/Friday, September 26, 2003/Rules and Regulations, page 5539)*

The regulations state that :

“ facilities must not use any individual employed in the facility as a feeding assistant unless that individual has successfully completed a State-approved training program for feeding assistants, as specified in the regulations. The regulations do not apply to licensed nursing personnel, or nurse aides. They do not apply to volunteers, families, or friends. However, any facility employee who feeds residents, if only for a short time each day or occasionally, must successfully complete State-approved feeding assistant training because s/he is functioning as a feeding assistant. This includes individuals whose services at the facility may be paid under contract with another employing agency.”

Feeding assistants are paid staff who provide non-clinical care for individuals who require assistance during mealtimes and may also provide light housekeeping or stocking duties before and after mealtimes. Feeding assistants can only work with individuals that do not have a medically complicated reason (stroke, swallowing problems, feeding tube, etc.) that requires them to need assistance to eat.

A charge nurse is required to assign and supervise the feeding assistants. Feeding assistant are also called to assist individuals with dementia, or depression who may lose interest in eating and/or forget how to feed themselves during a meal. Individuals who are blind (especially when their sight was lost as an older adult) may need a feeding assistant to enjoy mealtimes. Paid feeding assistants may also perform additional non-clinical tasks for the senior care facility (such as setting the table, clearing the table after a meal, light stocking duties, or passing out ice buckets, etc.). After mealtimes, feeding assistants may read books and newspapers, play games, or interact socially with the residents as part of their duties. As previously stated, hospice care and respite care facilities may also discover that hiring feeding assistants enhances the services and support they can provide to the patients in their care.

Unique Skills Required of Feeding Assistants

Even though the role is non-clinical, being a feeding assistant is not an easy job. Feeding assistants are called upon to be companions and helpmates to older adults who are at their most vulnerable. Feeding assistants must be vigilant, always physically and mentally present to patiently offer food and drink while staying cheerful and engaged with the person they are helping. The idea is to make the meal a pleasurable, social experience for the senior citizen, without calling undue attention to the fact that the feeding assistant is carefully cutting the food into bite sized portions and offering up the fork or spoon to the lips of the person they are helping. For someone who is not compromised, eating a meal might be completed in 15 to 30

minutes, even with conversation. It may take a feeding assistant up to an hour or more to patiently offer food and drinks to someone with advanced dementia.

Seniors who are depressed or experience social isolation, find that the companionship of a feeding assistant, dedicated to them makes the mealtime a pleasurable, social event again.

The work can also be emotionally difficult for senior care staff including the feeding assistants who will witness the decline and death of people that they care for and become close to. (For this reason, the pre-apprenticeship screening process includes questions about how the candidate has handled death of a loved one, and how to overcome one's grief following the loss of someone close to them.) Screening candidates to determine their capabilities to succeed as a feeding assistant requires an assessment of their mental and emotional fit for the job as well as their physical abilities to complete the job duties required.

The Benefits of the Feeding Assistant Role for Senior Care Centers

It is no exaggeration to say that a feeding assistant performs an intimate, sacred role, helping someone who cannot enjoy a meal on their own volition, to feel part of the social experience of mealtime once again. Nurses who observe the residents who have an assigned feeding assistant to help them during meals, often comment that these residents eat more food, eat more healthful types of food (and that in time their body weight stabilizes over time) due to the support of a feeding assistant. Mental health and cognition can also improve for residents who have lost interest in eating, once a regular companion is supporting them during mealtimes. The presence of paid feeding assistants can ease the workload of certified nursing assistants and nurses so that they have more time for delivering clinical care outside of mealtimes, and more time to support those with medical issues that require clinical staff to assist them during meals. Given the shortage of clinical care staff, the role of the feeding assistant may be a cost-effective solution for many senior care centers.

Compassion & Skill

It can be challenging to engage with people who are experiencing depression or compromised cognition. Not everyone (with or without a disability) has the compassion or skill to be a feeding assistant. The work requires patience, a positive attitude, and the ability to provide focused attention on the resident at all times.

How Feeding Assistant Role Can Benefit Individuals with I/DD

For individuals with I/DD who have the skill sets and passion to work with senior citizens, being a feeding assistant can open a new and rewarding career pathway in non-clinical healthcare. Working in the cafeteria or housekeeping are traditional jobs that people with I/DD are frequently offered in the senior care settings. But individuals with I/DD should not be limited to work only in “backroom” support roles for people with I/DD who excel at social interactions and enjoy helping people (versus cooking or housekeeping) being a feeding assistant can be a much better job match than other non-clinical roles in the senior care industry. The feeding assistant pathway creates an opening to permit individuals with I/DD to lean into a rewarding career path that leverages their passion for helping others. Starting out as a feeding assistant can provide the opportunity for a person with I/DD to explore the health care industry and decide if they want to advance to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). The pre-apprenticeship feeding assistant program was designed to enable people with I/DD to explore the healthcare industry as a paid non-clinical level staff. After successfully completing the pre-apprenticeship as a feeding assistant, individuals with I/DD who are wanting to advance to become CNAs can apply to an apprenticeship or other CNA training program provided they meet the eligibility standards for these programs.



“ I have come to love each one as if they were my own grandparent and treat them as such so each of their stories is special to me.”

Lisa Nickerson, Feeding Assistant, Sharon Towers.

Supervision of the Feeding Assistant

(North Carolina State Approved Curriculum for Feeding Assistant Training, 2020)

1. Must work under the supervision of a registered nurse (RN) or licensed practical nurse (LPN)
CMS Requirements to become a Feeding Assistant : Feeding Assistant - Any individual who has successfully completed a State approved feeding assistant curriculum in accordance with Federal Requirements 42 CFR 483.160 and who works under the supervision of a licensed nurse, feeding residents; does not include nurse aides or licensed nurses when feeding is performed as part of their regular nurse aide or nursing duties.

Feeding Assistants:

1. Must complete a state-approved minimum 8-hour training course (see requirement in Attachment A
 2. Feeding Assistants should only feed residents selected by charge nurse.
 3. CNAs or other licensed personnel feed the more complicated resident (those with swallowing problems, feeding tubes, etc.)

2. In an emergency, the Feeding Assistant must call the supervisory nurse for help using the resident call system.

B. Choosing Residents for the Feeding Assistant

1. The facility must ensure that only residents who have no complicated feeding problems are selected for feeding
2. Complicated feeding problems include, but are not limited to: a. difficulty swallowing b. recurrent lung aspirations c. tube or parenteral/IV feedings
3. Resident selection based on the charge nurse's assessment and resident's latest assessment and plan

Senior Care Facilities that Hosted the Feeding Assistant Training Programs

Between 2014 and 2021, three feeding assistant pre-apprenticeship programs were established in North Carolina, of which two are still operating. As previously described in the introduction section, partnering with other community agencies is critical to supporting individuals with disabilities in pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeship programs.

The Feeding Assistant Program Team Members

Partners that collaborate with Feeding Assistant Program include:

- the host employer (continuing care retirement center (CCRC) or skilled nursing care facility)
- ApprenticeshipNC Program (the agency that registers apprenticeship programs)
- the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and.

- a local Community Rehabilitation Program that provides job coaches for the program.

A short summary of each of the model pre-apprenticeship sites and their partner agencies is provided below, followed by a description of how the feeding assistant program operates. Each of these facilities adopted the essential tasks listed in the job description of the Feeding Assistant. Likewise, all the facilities followed the training requirements outlined in the Feeding Assistant Training Program described here. Each of the three senior care facilities adjusted the work schedules and modified some of the ancillary work tasks (stocking materials, light cleaning duties, etc.) to the unique needs of their organization.



Sharon Towers Retirement Center, Charlotte North Carolina

Sharon Towers is a Life Plan Community (sometimes called a continuing care retirement community, or “CCRC”) that was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1969 by the Presbyterian leaders in Charlotte, NC. Sharon Towers offers independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing care. A total of 4 apprentices with I/DD entered the Feeding Assistant Program in 2016 and 3 successfully completed the program in December 2017. InReach NC is the local community rehabilitation program that provided the job coaches that assisted in training the feeding assistants during their pre-apprenticeship training on the job. Since the pandemic began in March 2020, two of the feeding assistants were furloughed due to underlying health issues. One individual has continued to work throughout the pandemic. Prior to entering the Feeding Assistant program, this young man (who had a traumatic brain injury as a child) was unemployed for five years after graduating from high school. He was depressed and living at home with his parents. In 2018, he was able to move to his own apartment close to Sharon Towers where he walks to work. He has been working successfully as a Feeding Assistant since January 2017 and recently celebrated his 4th year of employment at Sharon Towers.



Elderberry Health Care, Marshall, NC

Elderberry Health Care is a long-term and hospice care facility that provides multiple levels of healthcare services including: Transitional Rehabilitation, Skilled Nursing and

Assisted Living Care. Located in Madison County just 30 minutes from Asheville, NC, Elderberry was established in 1989. A local community rehabilitation program (CRP), Universal Mental Health services provided the job coaches who helped the staff at Elderberry to train the feeding assistants. Elderberry Health Care originally hired two feeding assistants with I/DD assistants in 2017. One of these individuals did not complete the program, however the other earned her state certificate for completing the program in 2018. She has since had to resign due to underlying health issues.



Well-Spring Retirement, Greensboro, North Carolina

Well-Spring Life Plan Community was established as a nonprofit agency in Greensboro, NC in 1993 by a coalition of nine local churches. Well-Spring offers assisted care, skilled care, and memory care services. The University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program (a local CRP) provided the job coaches to assist the Well-Spring staff in training the feeding assistants. Well-Spring hired 2 individuals with autism in the Spring of 2018 who completed their training in 2019.

How the Feeding Assistant Pre-Apprenticeship Program Operates

The current health care workforce overall is not large enough to meet older patients' needs. The scarcity of workers specializing in the care of older adults – the eldercare workforce - is even more pronounced. (Eldercare Workforce Alliance, 2021). In one decade alone, from 2020-2030, the number of older adults will grow by 18 million as the youngest baby boomers hit 65, according to the Population Reference Bureau. The CNA shortage is part of a larger impending crisis in the long-term care industry, in which the need for caregivers has steadily gained on the pool of available help. As a result, the healthcare industry is seeking and embracing innovative new care models daily. The senior care industry is also looking for ways to build the pipeline of workers they need to meet the needs of the aging.

The feeding assistant pre-apprenticeship is designed to serve young adults with developmental disabilities (including autism, intellectual and cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and multiple disabilities) who have completed all their academic requirements to complete their high school education and or are currently in their last year of high school or community college attendance. The cornerstone of the pre-apprenticeship program is **paid, on-the-job training** in a retirement center or senior care to provide a career pathway into the healthcare industry.

Candidate Recruitment & Screening

As described above, the best candidates for the feeding assistant role have a strong desire to perform service work (catering to the tastes, desires, and welfare of others in fields of personal service). The recruitment process speaks to the fact that the program is seeking candidates with

Feeding Assistant Eligibility Standards

1. 18 years or older.
2. Persons who have a diagnosis of intellectual developmental disability (IDD) as defined by the North Carolina Division of Health and Safety Regulations. *
 - a. Is a person who has attained the age of 18 years, and who has a developmental disability defined as a severe, chronic disability of a person which:
 - b. Is attributed to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments
 - c. Is manifested before the person attains age 22
 - d. Is likely to continue indefinitely
 - e. Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity:
 - i. self-care
 - ii. receptive and expressive language
 - iii. learning
 - iv. mobility
 - v. self-direction
 - vi. capacity for independent living
 - vii. economic self-sufficiency.
 - viii. Reflects the person's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic care, treatment, or other services which are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated.
3. Be a current client with a community rehabilitation program (CRP) who will provide job coaches to deliver on- the- job training to each feeding assistant.
4. All candidates are screened by the DI-NC staff to determine their:
 - motivation to work in senior care, including any past- experience (work history, volunteer work and/or care services they provided for an elderly relative)
 - appropriate hygiene required to provide care in a senior facility
 - social skills to engage appropriately with seniors, co-workers, and supervisors.

** Candidates for the program must provide produce proof of their I/DD diagnosis (psychological, medical reports and or school records). In most cases the CRP or NCDVR will assist the candidate to provide the proof of diagnosis.*

experience working with senior citizens in another job (cafeteria worker in a hospital or senior care facility), volunteer work and/or someone who has helped an older family member. Likewise,

during the student recruitment process, discussions about past-experience with how the individual has handled illness and death of people close to him/her are part of recruitment flyers and the screening interviews. Screening information is gathered by the DI-NC staff through individual interviews with every candidate using a standardized set of interview questions in some cases more than one interview session is needed to complete the candidate screening process. DI-NC and the staff from the CRP provide assistance and support to the individuals and/or their family members to complete the screening information.

Host Employer Interview Process

After the screening process, candidates are interviewed by the senior care facility that will employ them during the pre-apprenticeship training on the job site. The three senior centers that implemented the pre-apprenticeship program used the same interview process that they use to interview candidates without disabilities for the same (or similar) positions as that of the feeding assistant. When needed, interview questions were simplified to enable the candidate with I/DD to understand and respond to the questions with greater clarity. DI NC reviewed the interview questions ahead of time to flag questions that may be misunderstood by some individuals with I/DD or autism and offer alternative ways to rephrase certain questions. For some individuals with autism or I/DD, abstract questions can be confusing. Rephrasing the question to be clear and concrete can make the interview process more accommodating for these candidates and give the hiring manager a more accurate understanding of the candidate's true capabilities. DI-NC also was also present during candidate interviews to support the individuals with I/DD, as needed, to understand interview questions.

For Example: Instead of a theoretical question

“Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict with someone at work and what you did to resolve the situation ?”

Use a concrete question.

“Have you ever disagreed with someone at work or had a problem with someone at work? What did you say or do to make things better?”

During the interview process the host employer will also review the work schedule that will be required and discuss the job duties with the each of the candidates. Candidates are also taken on a tour of the facility where they may be working if they are selected for the position. After the tour, the host employer and DI-NC asks each candidate to share their feelings and ask questions about meeting the residents and seeing the area where the feeding assistants are assigned to work.

After Interview Review

After the interview, the senior care staff and DI-NC staff will meet with the partner agencies (CRP, NCDVR, and any other collaborating agency) to discuss the candidate's responses to the interview, review their screening documents and decide on whether to move the candidate to the next step in the hiring process. Following this team meeting, candidates who are selected to move to the next stage of the interview process are usually asked to complete the following pre-employment requirements.

1. A clean criminal background check
2. Immunization records
3. A current Tuberculosis (TB) test
4. A flu shot (may be optional)

In most cases the Senior Center paid for the screening tests listed below. The CRP was also able to pay for some of these screening assessments as needed. The host employer (senior center) always makes the final hiring decisions based upon their hiring process and procedures as well as the requirements of the NC Feeding Assistant Curriculum.

Pre-apprentices in Feeding Assistant Program follow the schedule provided by their host employer. If apprentices are also engaged in additional classroom training (via secondary school or community college) to prepare them to master additional training, the course schedule will be included in the work schedule for the week. The feeding assistants that were employed at Sharon Towers Retirement Center in Charlotte and the Well Spring Retirement Center in Greensboro usually worked 3- hour shifts during one of the meal- times (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) five days per week. Whereas the feeding assistants who worked at Marshville Retirement Center worked during the lunch and dinner meals for 4 hours shifts.

Training Requirements

After completing the First Aid/CPR course and the 8-hour required Feeding Assistant Training cited above, students are be hired by the continuing care retirement centers (CCRC) as pre-apprentices in training. Candidates who are selected to enter the pre-apprenticeship feeding assistant program are paid throughout the program. The first two days on the job, all candidates take part in the initial 8-hour required training (conducted by a registered nurse (RN or licensed practical nurse (LPN)). Completing the remaining three

Sample Daily Calendar for Feeding Assistant Program at Sharon Towers

7:00am to 10:30 = Breakfast
11:30 to 2:30pm =Lunch
4:00pm to 7:00pm =Dinner

Senior Care is a 24/7, 365 day per week industry. DI-NC took care to inform all potential candidates that weekend work is required in this industry. All feeding assistants were required to work over the weekend every other week as detailed below

Sample Weekly Shift Requirements at Sharon Towers

Week A: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, (Off Sunday &Friday)

Week B: Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday (off Tuesday & Saturday)

training requirements (Basic First Aide, Communication & Advocacy Training and Work-Based Training) takes between six months and one year. The Feeding Assistant Pre-Apprenticeship program consists of three (3) continuing education courses and one work- based learning course (6 months minimum) where training is provided on- the- job by a Job Coach who is usually an employee of the CRP partnering agency.

The Role of the Job Coach

During their training, each apprentice is matched to a job coach who works for the community rehabilitation program (CRP) partner agency, Job Coaches who are experienced and trained to support individuals with IDD to learn their job tasks on-the job. Job coaches work beside the apprentice to “model” the feeding techniques , communication, and social interaction that the feeding assistant needs to master. Some feeding assistants require minimal training support (a week or two) than others to learn how to interact with and support the senior residents they are assigned to. Others feeding assistants may need 4 to 8 weeks of training support from a job coach before they have fully mastered the social and physical requirements of the job. Job coaches start their on- the job training by being present for the entire shift of the feeding

NC State Approved Feeding Assistant Curriculum

(North Carolina State Approved Curriculum for Feeding Assistant Training, 2020)

The state approved curriculum complies with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) published final regulation for requirements for paid feeding assistants in long term care facilities (Federal Register/Vol. 68, No.187/Friday September 26/Rules and Regulations Page 5539). The regulations are founded under 42CFR 483, Subpart B483.35, 483.75, Subpart D 483.160 and 42 CFR488 Subpart E 488.301. The feeding assistant training is conducted by a registered nurse (RN), or licensed practical nurse (LPN).

To meet the requirements of S 483.160 the course includes

- a. feeding techniques,
- b. assisting with feeding and hydration,
- c. communication and interpersonal skills,
- d. appropriate responses to resident behavior,
- e. safety and emergency procedures, including the Heimlich Maneuver,
- f. infection control
- g. resident rights
- h. recognizing changes in residents that are inconsistent with their normal behavior and the importance of reporting those changes to the supervisory nurse.

assistant they are training. Gradually over time, and as the feeding assistant becomes more proficient, the job coach will reduce the number of days and length of time that they work

alongside of the feeding assistant. Job coaches also support the staff of the CCRC to make sure each apprentice learns all aspects of their job requirements to the satisfaction of the host CCRC. The course titles and descriptions are as follows:

- 1. CMS Approved Feeding Assistant Training (First 2 Days on the Job) : Conducted by an RN or LPN :** The Feeding Assistant training uses the North Carolina State Approved Feeding Assistant Training Curriculum. A minimum of 8 clock-hours of instruction, including skills competency is required. Evaluation of student progress is made based upon instructor evaluation and documented skills competency to determine successful completion of the course, as proscribed in the CMS regulations. To accommodate the needs of the individuals with I/DD the 8-hour training course was split into two half day training sessions. The registered nurse (RN) or Licensed practical nurse (LPN) worked in partnership with DI-NC staff to create a set of simple PowerPoint presentations to cover all the topics required by the state approved curriculum. During the initial training, DI-NC staff were present to assist the RN or LPN to accommodate the learning needs of the individuals with I/DD.
- 2. Basic First Aid and Cardio- Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR): Conducted by a Certified First Aid Trainer:** Though the feeding assistants are not expected to administer first aid or CRP while in the continuing care retirement facility an understanding of basic first aid/CRP training enhances their knowledge. During the basic first aid/CPR training the pre-apprentices learn how to administer basic first aid as well as how to conduct chest compressions (even though it is unlikely that they will be called upon to use these skills at work) as they will be a witness to medical interventions provided by registered nurses, certified nurse assistants and doctors and basic first aid/CRP training prepares them to understand the procedures they will see while working in health care. Basic First Aid/CRP is usually offered by staff at the senior care facility but can also be offered by the CRP or another partner agency.
- 3. Communication & Advocacy Training: Delivered on the job by a Job Coach:** Communication skills are central to the role of a feeding assistant. By working closely with Job Coaches, who support them during their on-the-job training, feeding assistants learn how to communicate with senior citizens, co-workers, and supervisors in a CCRC. Job coaches model how to speak to a senior resident respectfully and with compassion and patience. They also model how to clarify statements to make them easier for seniors who are compromised by dementia, to understand them. Job coaches teach each feeding assistant how to communicate with co-workers and managers and assist them to learn how to use self-advocacy skills in the workplace. Training is focused on the “soft skills” and social skills required in the workplace and includes discussions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and how to ask accommodations, when needed.

4. Work-based learning in the CCRC : Delivered on the job by the CCRC RN in partnership with Job Coaches:

As describe above, the job coach works in tandem with the CCRC staff to provide one-on-one training to the feeding assistant as they learn to support seniors during mealtimes. To make this engaging for the seniors receiving care, the job coach will sit at the table and work with another senior citizen while the feeding assistant works with their assigned resident. In effect, the four parties at the table become a “social group”, and together, have conversations while eating in a relaxed manner. During the meal, the job coach will model actions such as how to: cut food into bite sized pieces, hold the utensil correctly for the resident to eat in comfort, offering a drink safely, etc. Instructions are given discretely, while the job coach and feeding assistants focus on talking to the residents, encouraging them to eat and exchanging pleasantries to make the meal a social experience.

As the feeding assistant gets to know the senior residents they are helping, they become very proficient in anticipating their needs and responding to the cues that signal when the resident wants more food, needs a drink, or is finished with the meal. Feeding assistants are taught to notice when a resident does not like a food that is offered.

At all times, the senior resident is in charge of their meal choices. The CCRC staff and feeding assistants will offer alternative foods whenever possible to satisfy the senior resident’s needs. Residents may refuse a meal and choose to eat ice cream for dinner if they want!

Other Tasks Feeding Assistants May Perform

In addition to training the feeding assistants to assist seniors to enjoy a comfortable meal, job coaches will partner with the CCRC staff to train the feeding assistant to perform other tasks that take place before and after mealtimes. For example: Feeding assistants assist with setting and clearing tables, rotating stock in the kitchenette, stocking linens and going to resident rooms to refreshing their ice buckets.

Feeding Assistant Program Course Descriptions				
Course Title	Requirements	Site	Hours required	Trainer & Evaluation
Feeding Assistant Training	NC Required Training on Feeding Assistant curriculum	Continuing Care Retirement Center (CRCC)	8 hours (4 hours X 2 days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RN or LPN delivers training • RN or LPN approval of satisfactory participation
CPR	Basic/Introductory CPR training	CCRC or the CRP location	4 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified CPR Instructor • CPR Instructors approval of final exam
Advocacy & Communication	Contextual instruction on workplace communication & advocacy at the CCRC during the workday	On-the-job training at the CCRC	32 hours (minimum) Individualized on the job training that is supervised by a Job Coach from the CRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Coach approval of satisfactory participation • Job Coach documentation of pre-apprentice's progress notes
Work-Based Learning at a CCRC	On the job training provided at the CCRC during the workday	On-the-job training at the CCRC	60 hours (minimum) Individualized on the job training that is supervised by a Job Coach from the CRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master the job duties and receive a satisfactory evaluation from the job coach and on- site supervisor (RN/LPN) • Job Coach documentation of pre-apprentice's progress notes

Summary

A feeding assistant performs an intimate, sacred role, helping someone who cannot enjoy a meal through the social support that comes from one-on-one interaction between the senior resident and their feeding assistant. The nursing staff report that residents who are paired with feeding assistants eat more food, eat more healthful types of food, and may even see their body weight stabilize. Once a regular companion is supporting them during mealtimes many

residents also experience an improvement in their mental health and cognition. For individuals with I/DD, becoming a feeding assistant means reaching a career goal to work in healthcare as a care giver instead of the more stereotypical roles of cleaner, housekeeper, kitchen staff or grounds keeper (the jobs people with I/DD are usually offered).

Unfortunately, progressive illness and death are frequent outcomes for residents of CCRCs and other senior care facilities. All staff that work in the senior care industry must learn to manage the many “goodbyes” that take place among residents in their care. Managing loss and grief, while moving forward to help the next resident, is a natural part of the work of all senior care staff. The feeding assistants who were selected and trained via this pre-apprenticeship program have all risen to the challenge when faced with the loss of a beloved senior whom they had cared for. Individuals with I/DD who are “people lovers” form close bonds with the seniors that they support during mealtimes, and even get to know family members and friends of these residents. Frequently, the feeding assistant with I/DD will seek out the family members as they clear out a resident’s room after the resident dies to express their condolences and share stories about the resident with the family. It is truly a sacred thing to give care to people near the end of life. The role of the feeding assistant permits people with I/DD who have a passion for caring to share their gifts in an industry that needs their service.

Through this guidebook, Disability:IN North Carolina hopes to encourage others to replicate our pre-apprenticeship training model. To ask for technical assistance to replicate the feeding assistant pre-apprenticeship program contact Beth Butler at beth@disabilityin.org

Case Study #2



As discussed in the forward, Your Local Greens developed an apprenticeship program that was due to be launched in Fall 2020. During the planning process, YLG worked with DI-NC and other community partners to hire 4 individuals with disabilities in 2019, while the apprenticeship program was under development.

Unfortunately, in March 2020, the pandemic shut down their operations for several months during which they lost their major food distribution customers. The launch of the apprenticeship had to be delayed, while the business recovered. As of March 2021 it is uncertain when they will be able to resume business and launch the full apprenticeship program.

However, the learnings on disability inclusion strategies for apprenticeship programs are still relevant and are presented in this case study.

Your Local Greens City Farm produces safe, sustainable, and nutritious greens near where our customers live and work. We partner with community organizations and educational institutions to promote a wide range of positive outcomes. Welcome to the all-inclusive world of post-organic city farming.

- Ethically growing simple produce that inspires healthy lifestyles.
- Sustainably growing environmentally conscious agricultural practices.
- Innovatively growing food security one community at a time.

The second company to receive technical assistance from Disability:IN North Carolina as they developed an apprenticeship for youth with disabilities is a city farm located in Burlington, North Carolina. DI-NC began meeting with the owner/founders of Your Local Greens in 2018 as the company was just beginning to remodel an old warehouse in the industrial section of Burlington, NC and outfit the building with hydroponic growing systems. The Founders and investors in Your Local Greens included some family members who had son or daughters with

intellectual developmental disabilities (I/DD), autism or mental illness. Your Local Greens was established with the dual purpose of growing leaf lettuces and micro-greens to food suppliers and to provide an integrated worksite where individuals with disabilities could work alongside of peers without disabilities while earning at least \$15.00 per hour.

The leadership of Your Local Greens learned about the InRoads to Employment Initiative and became interested in developing a registered apprenticeship program to create a pipeline of well-trained apprentices to staff the city farm. The following describes how the typical apprenticeship development process was modified to make the process accessible to youth with disabilities

About Your Local Greens City Farm

Your Local Greens, Inc. (YLG) was founded to accomplish the following goals:

1. Establish, operate and grow a profitable company that pays an above average return to its investors,
2. Make a positive and measurable impact on the community where it does business.

YLG seeks to accomplish these goals by creating an inclusive, diverse work force, including employees with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and service-disabled veterans working alongside of co-workers without disabilities who are all part of the YLG team. YLG participated in developing a registered apprenticeship training program to expand their talent pipeline and provide career development opportunities to enable their employees to gain marketable skills, earn living wages, and participate as full citizens of the community.

For Our Food Suppliers

“For our customers who sell our produce, we grow our plants grow in a safe, clean, controlled atmosphere, in water, without soil, using just the right mix of nutrients and light. This allows us to increase crop yield and nutritional value with less waste, using fewer natural resources. The result is outstanding, all-natural disease-free produce without the use of pesticides. Those who purchase our produce make the jump to a healthier post-organic lifestyle, and experience produce with exceptional taste that you can truly feel good about eating. Truly, the taste of better. (YLG.com).

Your Local Greene’s motto, “Live Better Than Organic” extends beyond the grow-room to include the use of non-petroleum, biodegradable, recycled plant-based packages for all its lettuces and micro-greens.

Development of the YLG Apprenticeship Program

YLG connected with Disability:IN North Carolina in May 2018 shortly after the InRoads to Employment Initiative began. At the time, founders of YLG were building their first growing facility in an industrial section of Burlington, North Carolina. YLG was also developing its employee policies, recruitment and training strategies and the idea of developing an apprenticeship training program for youth with disabilities fit as part of their disability inclusion strategies in their business plan. The renovations to the building began in the summer of 2018 and were largely completed by January 2019. Once the building was completed in early 2019, YLG started out by hiring a small group of staff and began to test the growing systems for the lettuce and micro-greens. The business plan was to scale the business to meet customer demand among several retail food outlets by mid-summer 2019. By the end of the summer, YLG was ready to begin meeting with the partner agencies to build out the apprenticeship program.

There are several steps to completing the design of a new apprenticeship including:

1. contacting ApprenticeshipNC and engaging a consultant to plan the program
2. working with the consultant to build out the classroom- based curriculum and on-the-job training
3. checking the program to be sure it aligns with national and state standards
4. registering the program with state and federal agencies
5. launching the program

It can take several months to year or more to build all the components of the classroom training as well as design the detailed on-the-job training skills training before the

“Programs designed to include people with disabilities often require additional partner agencies with specific expertise in disability inclusion strategies.” (Discover Apprenticeship: Advancing Apprenticeship Opportunities for People with Disabilities, 2021)

apprenticeship application can be reviewed for approval of a typical apprenticeship program. In October 2019, DI-NC started a partnership with YLG to develop their apprenticeship training program in collaboration with ApprenticeshipNC, Alamance Community College, the local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and TEACCH: The Autism Program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill NC. DI-NC also assisted YLG to develop their employee handbook to include policies that support disability inclusion and equality. While the various program elements of the apprenticeship application were being developed, the partner agencies worked closely with YLG to field test the training components along the way. YLG decided to go forward and hire a few individuals with autism or other developmental disabilities during this development phase, while they continued to work with ApprenticeshipNC to develop the on-the-job training, classroom instruction and application for the apprenticeship program. The

chart below details the contributions of each of the partner agencies to building out YLG’s disability inclusion practices.

YLG Partner Agencies on the Apprenticeship Program

Agency	Type of Organization	Responsibilities
Disability:IN North Carolina	Business Network Non-Profit	<p>Provide project management and coordinate the efforts of all partner agencies</p> <p>Assist YLG to develop disability inclusion strategies in their HR recruitment, training, and retention plan</p>
ApprenticeshipNC	NC Community College System	Lead the development the apprenticeship training components and application for the state and federal apprenticeship program
Alamance Community College	NC Community College based in Burlington NC	<p>Modify the horticulture curriculum to include hydroponic farming techniques</p> <p>Develop curriculum for YLG apprenticeship classroom training</p>
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation/Alamance Office	NC Division of DHHS	<p>Assist with candidate recruitment, as well as conduct vocational evaluations to determine the skill sets of candidates who apply to the program</p> <p>Assist with the development of accommodations and modifications to assure access</p> <p>Authorize TEACCH to provide job coach services as needed by specific candidates with disabilities</p>
TEACCH The Autism Program at UNC-Chapel Hill	University Affiliated Non-Profit Agency	<p>Provide job coaches for one-on-one support to YLG mentors and the apprentices as they learn the on-the-job skill sets</p> <p>Assist Alamance Community College horticulture instructors to modify lesson plans to accommodate apprentices with autism</p>

Strategies YLG Used to Enhance Disability Inclusion

As previously stated, engaging individuals with disabilities in apprenticeship programs often takes conscious effort and specific disability inclusion strategies as well as collaboration with additional agencies besides ApprenticeshipNC consultants. DI-NC assumed the role of project manager to assist YLG to incorporate the disability engagement strategies and coordinate the efforts of the partner agencies as described above.

“Studies report that when people with disabilities receive the right kind of support they participate and succeed in apprenticeship programs a higher rate” (Discover Apprenticeship: Advancing Apprenticeship Opportunities for People with Disabilities, 2021).

Candidate Recruitment

Starting with the recruitment process, DI-NC and the partner agencies assisted YLG to create recruitment information flyers and program description messages to provide a welcoming message to youth with disabilities, so that they would be aware that the training program was designed to address their learning needs. In addition to developing and distributing flyers and program descriptions, YLG asked the local office of Vocational Rehabilitation to invite individuals with disabilities from their case load to apply for the jobs YLG was filling ahead of the apprenticeship start date. TEACCH, The Autism Program at UNC-Chapel Hill was also invited to source candidates. Other local community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) were also sent recruitment flyers.

YLG planned to hire and train 2 to 4 individuals with disabilities during the development of the apprenticeship to provide their leadership and staff with opportunities to put accommodations in place before the apprenticeship program started. Another reason for going forward with hiring several individuals with disabilities before the apprenticeship program was fully launched was to provide role models for other candidates with disabilities to encourage other students with disabilities to feel that their career interests are achievable .

Candidate Screening

During the screening stage, candidates are typically asked to demonstrate that they meet the minimum standards (including academic and GPS standards) to be hired by YLG and later, to enter the apprenticeship program. The screening stage usually includes events where the candidate meets with the employer for formal, and sometimes informal screening interviews.

If the screening process is not consciously designed to be accessible, few if any students with disabilities will successfully complete the process.

The local office of Vocational Rehabilitation that serves Alamance County provided the services of their Vocational Evaluator who assisted YLG to analyze the skill sets for each of the job tasks apprentices would need to master. Once the skill sets for the YLG job descriptions were completed, the Vocational Evaluator designed a series of assessments (most of them were skills- based tasks) for the apprenticeship candidates to complete to determine whether each applicant to the program had the vocational potential to succeed in the YLG apprenticeship. The YLG application included questions on disclosure to encourage candidates to ask for any specific accommodations to enhance their participation in the screening process and ultimately in the apprenticeship. The screening questions also covered the environmental work factors (noise levels, presence of chemical odors wet versus dry conditions, etc.) to gauge how each candidate reacts to environ (Home Page NC Community Colleges: ApprenticeshipNC, 2021)mental factors in the various workstations at YLG.

Transportation to and from work can be a huge barrier to students with disabilities. The office of Vocational Rehabilitation, working in partnership with TEACCH helped each of the candidates who were hired by YLG to secure reliable transportation. TEACCH, DI-NC and the Vocational Rehabilitation staff also designed interview questions that were accessible to candidates on the autism spectrum by making the interview questions more concrete and eliminating abstract questions whenever possible. Candidates were also informed about the environmental factors in the various workstations at YLG to access if the work environment was a “good fit” for the candidate.

Interviews were also conducted in private sessions and candidates could have their TEACCH job coach or VR Counselor present during interviews as needed to reduce social anxiety around the interview process.

Candidate Selection

The student selection process is for apprenticeship programs are guided by the job description and skill sets needed to succeed in the job as

Sample of YLG Environmental Conditions

Zone A – Nursery

This space houses young plants that will eventually be transplanted into deep water culture (DWC).

Environment

- 71 degrees F, high humidity
- LED lights, pinkish – protective eyewear required.

Zone B – Germination

This is the central horticultural workspace.

Environment

- 71 degrees F, 75% humidity
- No LEDs in this space but LED in other zones will be visible.
- Vacuum seeder is noisy – like a shop vac
- Tray seeder will also make humming noise.

Zone F – Harvest & Packaging

This zone will require additional handwashing and a glove change when entering to harvest. Sharp implements and potentially dangerous equipment will be employed in harvesting. Team members must be aware of food safety and quality standards and alert for deviations.

Environment

- Room: 50-55 degrees F, 60% humidity
- Cooler: 35.6 degrees F, 90% humidity
- Noisy – The harvester makes a noise similar to a hedge trimmer. There is the potential of periodic alarms and bell sounds.

defined in the Vocational Evaluation described above as well as by how each candidate performed on the vocational evaluation assessments. YLG provided tours of their production areas for all the candidates who applied to the program to enable them to see all aspects of the job responsibilities and to experience the environmental conditions in each of the workstations. YLG was very clear about communicating the work hours and the required work schedules for each shift. However, YLG staff also made it clear that leadership was open to making scheduling changes when these were needed to accommodate disability related issues. A few of the individuals who were hired during the field test period, started at full time schedules but later asked to work part time due to accommodate their disabilities. One of the individuals with disabilities who was hired via TEACCH asked to be moved to the Clean Room because she worked better in colder environments. YLG granted this request because her was made as an accommodation to a health condition.

Apprenticeship Training Program

As previously stated, the full apprenticeship program was not able to be launched during the InRoads to Employment Initiative. However, 4 individuals with disabilities were hired by YLG and many of the training strategies, planned for the apprenticeship program were implemented. For example, for individuals hired through TEACCH and Vocational Rehabilitation, YLG received training assistance from TEACCH job coaches.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a job coach or employment specialist may be considered as a reasonable accommodation for an individual with a disability. Before the TEACCH job coaches began work with the employees hired through them at YLG, TEACCH administrators and YLG leadership signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that detailed the safety and work-related training requirements of the jobs. The MOA also spelled out the confidentiality, clean room standards and all other applicable employee policies before the job coach began to support an employee with disabilities at Your Local Greens. The job coaches partnered with the YLG apprenticeship mentors to assist in training apprentices to

Basic Skills Required to Perform Job Duties at YLG

Candidates Must Have the Ability to:

- Read and write on third grade level
- Walk
- Stand for long periods of time
- Complete food safety training
- Bend over frequently
- Lift weight up to 10 lbs.
- Operate scissor lift
- Understand verbal instructions
- Follow growing procedures
- Use fine motor skills for seeding and harvesting
- Perform repetitive motions
- Tolerate bright pink grow lights and humming sound
- Tolerate working in a dark environment
- Tolerate 55 – 71 degrees F in facility, and 35 F in the harvest cooler
- Move in tight spaces
- Wear rubber soled shoes
- Wear safety glasses (prescription or large ones)
- Tolerate water drips, dirt, and odors

on jobs related training as well as on the “soft skills” (communication and social skills) required to perform effectively as employees of YLG.

Conclusion

Through the InRoads to Employment Initiative, Disability:IN North Carolina partnered with business owners representing two different industries (health care and food production), to develop a pre-apprenticeship program and a full apprenticeship program as model demonstrations of disability inclusive apprenticeship training in North Carolina. Our findings suggest that additional supports from a wider variety of partner agencies need to be offered for people with disabilities are designed to enable the people with disabilities are successful in completing these training programs and securing long term employment. Additional partner agencies should include the local Vocational Rehabilitation Office and partner agencies such as Disability:IN North Carolina and local Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPS) when job coaching is required to augment the mentor training provided via the apprenticeship program. This guidebook may serve to assist other organizations and partner agencies to collaborate on creating new apprenticeship programs as well as expanding existing apprenticeship opportunities to include people with disabilities to benefit from the career enhancing advantages offered by the apprenticeship training model.

Through this guidebook, Disability:IN North Carolina hopes to encourage others to replicate Apprenticeship Programs focused on engaging people with disabilities (such as the Your Local Greens model).

To ask for technical assistance to develop an apprenticeship program that is inclusive of people with disabilities contact Beth Butler at beth@disabilityin.org

Resources

Introduction to the Apprenticeship Toolkit: Youth with Disabilities Entering the Workplace through Apprenticeship: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odepintro.pdf>

Module 1: Understanding Apprenticeship Basics:
<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep1.pdf>

Module 2: Preparing Youth and Young Adults for Apprenticeship: Programs
<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep2.pdf>

Module 3: Increasing the Participation of Young Adults with Disabilities in Apprenticeship Programs:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep3.pdf>

Module 4: Establishing New Apprenticeship Programs:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep4.pdf>

Module 5: What Apprenticeship Employers Need to Know About Working with Young Adults with Disabilities:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep5.pdf>

Module 6: Looking to Future Opportunities in Apprenticeship:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/odep6.pdf>

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