

# Real Jobs for Real Pay

## *Success Stories*

Every day in Connecticut people served by the Department of Developmental Services work for companies across the state doing the ordinary and extraordinary as productive employees. They are building their own futures and contributing to the Connecticut economy. Here are some of their stories.



## Jaime Ardolino

## Stop & Shop

After working as a dishwasher for a number of years, Jaime was ready for a change. When an opening came up at a local Stop & Shop, her job coach thought it would be a great fit. Jaime found the interview process to be a bit nerve-wracking, but she persisted and was offered the job. Today she works fifteen hours a week as a bagger and receives benefits.



Jaime learned her job quickly. She has made new friends and taken on more responsibility. While Jaime's main job duties are bagging groceries and returning stock to the shelves, she is also involved in the store's charity work. Every year, during the store's Jimmy Fund campaign, she campaigns with the cashiers to sell tickets.

Jaime says that she really loves her job. She explains, "Just getting up every day... knowing that when I go into work there are tons of people [who] know... that I can bring their stuff up to their car, and [to know] they are grateful for that... It makes me happy that I am helping them."

Jaime likes interacting with many different people every day. She enjoys seeing her regular customers get into her line because they know that she will do a great job. She also feels that the store takes great care of their employees.

Jaime has become a valuable worker for Stop & Shop. She earned her five-year pin in October 2011 and she hopes to stay with the company. Jaime's advice to other job seekers? "Just keep looking, because you never know where you will find a really good job."

## Jane Boyce

## Danbury Hospital

Jane has built her career around helping others. For the past 38 years she has worked full time at Danbury Hospital. She started out making beds and cleaning hospital rooms. When she changed jobs at the hospital, moving from housekeeping to the laundromat, she was able to use some of the skills that she learned at her previous position.

On her current job, Jane is in charge of taking in the clean laundry and putting it away. Jane likes this job "because people are nice to me," and she gets along well with her co-workers. She finds it rewarding "to make patients feel better because they have clean sheets on their beds." If Jane runs into any problems on the job, her supervisor Ruth is very helpful.

In a society where workers change jobs frequently, Jane's long-term employment at Danbury Hospital is that much more remarkable. As the person on staff with the most experience, she's now the one who trains new employees. One day Jane hopes to retire, but right now she is happy working, because she's able to support herself working full time and earning benefits. In her own words, her career "makes me feel good. I want to make everyone happy and proud of me."



## Jennifer Aponte Willow House Preschool and Early Learning Center

Each morning, Jennifer gets into her car and heads to Willow House Preschool and Early Learning Center, where she has worked for the past four years. As a teacher's aide, Jennifer prepares and serves snacks. She helps to develop the break schedule and substitutes in the classrooms. She says her favorite part of the job is making sure the children are okay. Jennifer's supervisor, Susan, describes Jennifer as going above and beyond her job description. Jennifer has attended every outside function and helps out with whatever is needed, whether it is filling the playground with more bark or serving spaghetti to the guests.



As a Deaf woman, American Sign Language (ASL) is Jennifer's primary language. She also speaks English at work and Spanish at home. "ASL has always been a part of the environment here at the day care center," says Susan. "Now with Jennifer here, we have access to this wonderful resource. She helps us learn how to sign, which is very useful with the children." The children also know that if they need to get Jennifer's attention, they can tap her gently to get her attention. When Jennifer's supervisor needs her she sends her a text.

Jennifer takes classes at Manchester Community College, where she is earning her Childhood Development Associate credential. One of her long-term goals is to earn an advanced degree. Her classes have helped Jennifer become more comfortable with her role at work and to learn about child development and early language learning.

Jennifer has a great team to work with, both on and off the job. It took a bit of trial and error, but over time Jennifer and her team, including her tutor at school, ASL interpreters, DDS case worker, her job coach and her mom, were able to identify the right supports to help her be successful.

## James "Jimmy" Boyce Western Connecticut State University

Jimmy has had many jobs, ranging from working in a toy store to working on a college campus. No matter where he's worked over the past 25 years, he has always been happy to have a job. After all, as he says, "I hate lazy."

Jimmy started his career working in a restaurant, where his responsibilities included making bread, preparing salads, and washing dishes. When the restaurant closed, a local service provider helped him find a new job at Toys "R" Us. After ten years, the store where he worked went out of business.

Once again the service provider was there to help Jimmy get back on his feet. Facing a challenging job market, some people might have been discouraged. But Jimmy stayed focused and used the supports that were available to find and transition to another job.

Today, Jimmy works in the cafeteria at Western Connecticut State University. His favorite part of his job is cleaning tables. He proudly explains that he can clean all of the tables in the cafeteria in only 30 minutes. Jimmy was recognized for his strong work ethic when his supervisor gave him a \$2/hour raise.

Because his current job is seasonal, Jimmy has decided to work with his job coach to find a full-time year-round position. With his strong work ethic, positive work history, and the right supports, that next job should be right around the corner.



## Greg Bussett

## Aqua Turf Club

They say it's who you know, not what you know. But, in Greg's case, it was both. With over 20 years of experience as a dishwasher, Greg was looking for a new job. While his personal contact opened doors, his work experience sealed the deal!



Greg worked for over 20 years at a large, busy hotel. He was known for showing up for work, rain or shine, even during severe weather emergencies. Greg was a hard worker, and the hotel relied on him. With the downturn in the economy, business at the hotel slowed down and Greg was laid off. Even though he was given a generous severance package, Greg started looking for a new job right away. He also started volunteering at a local soup kitchen.

Knowing what a great worker Greg is, his brother put him in touch with a friend who is a chef at a nearby resort. Greg followed up on his own, and later went in to complete a job application and meet with the manager. While the contact from his brother opened the door, it was Greg's solid work experience in a busy hotel environment that got him the job.

Today, Greg has expanded his responsibilities and is responsible for food preparation. He prepares bread crumbs, cuts enormous amounts of carrots, stuffs mushrooms, sweeps and cleans work stations, and works in the dish room. Greg's manager, Mike, says Greg gets along very well with everyone. He's meticulous, and sticks with tasks to make sure they are done right.

Greg continues to work with an employment specialist from a local service provider. The specialist coached him through the job application process, and has supplemented the training the resort typically provides for new employees. With the specialist's support, Greg has learned about safety, such as choosing appropriate shoes, handling kitchen knives, baking bread crumbs in the ovens, and preventing kitchen fires. Greg's family has also been a great support as he transitioned to this new job.

## Hope Ciota

## Primrose Elementary School Mavis Discount Tire Business Center



Hope works in the cafeteria at Primrose Elementary School in Somers, New York five days per week. She also works two days per week at the Mavis Discount Tire business center.

At the cafeteria, where she's worked since 2001, Hope is responsible for food preparation, serving, and cleanup. She loves helping out in the kitchen, and gets along well with her co-workers and boss. Her supervisor describes her as "...the most dedicated, meticulous, and punctual person I know—all employees should be like her." Hope likes to see her friends at work and also likes getting paid. She is a member of the union, and this along with her seniority has helped her weather budget cuts and layoffs.

Hope also volunteered at the Primrose school office for a number of years. When this position was eliminated, she used the skills she'd gained to get a paid position at the corporate headquarters for Mavis Discount Tire. The head of Mavis was a family friend. She hired Hope to work one day a week, and decided against a job coach, as she had confidence in Hope's ability to do the job on her own.

Hope enjoys her office responsibilities, including sorting mail. She also enjoys her job at Primrose, and plans to continue her two part-time jobs. Hope's sister sums it up well: "She is a role model for other employees, because when she is at work she works diligently the entire time."

## Roger Clapp

## Newtown Youth Academy

A career is sometimes defined as a person's progress through life. For Roger, work has been an essential part of his progress. Over the years, Roger has worked in a series of jobs, including being a janitor in group supported employment. Recently, Roger decided that he wanted to get an individual job where he could be more independent.

In order to assist Roger with accomplishing this goal, he was assigned a job developer through a local service provider. The job developer built a relationship with the Newtown Youth Academy, and by working with the employer was able to carve out a job at the gym there for Roger.

Initially, Roger was employed as the gym's new janitor for eight hours a week. With on-the-job coaching and supports, he quickly excelled, and his hours were increased to 20 a week.

Today, Roger works on his own and uses natural supports in the workplace. Roger says the gym hired him because the employer "likes the way I work." At the gym, Roger has a lot more to do than at his old job. He gradually got used to the increased workload and has earned a high employee-assessment rating by "just sticking with it."

"Now, on my new job, I am totally working on my own," Roger says. He hopes to be at this job for the foreseeable future. Down the road, Roger sees the next step in his career as working in a warehouse six hours a day, Monday through Friday.



## Ryan Breedlove

## Big Y

Today's challenging economy requires job seekers to be flexible. While Ryan loves being outdoors and doing landscape and construction work, the economic downturn led to his recent layoff.

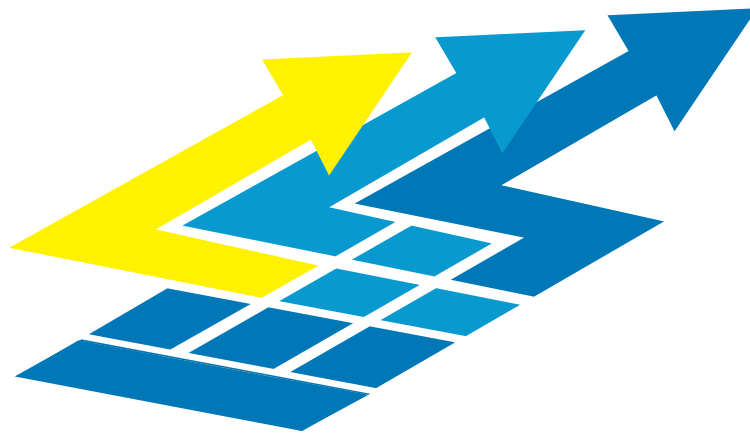
After he was laid off Ryan worked for his landlord performing odd jobs and for a family member shoveling sidewalks and salting roads. Then he found a position as a porter at Big Y.

At the store, Ryan is responsible for cleaning the dining area, sweeping floors, taking out trash, cleaning the restrooms, and making sure the store looks neat and inviting. He says everyone at the store is nice to work with, and he enjoys talking with the customers. Ryan explains that he's good at his job because he's nice to the customers, he's a fast worker, and he's dependable.

Ryan's employment support person checks in with him every week to make sure things are going smoothly. His family is also supportive of his job, and sometimes they drive him to work to save him a ride on the bus.

Ryan is hoping to work with his uncle again this winter in addition to his job at Big Y. His long-term goal is to find his dream job, where he can work outside all year round. In the meantime, he's happy to be employed at the store and to be a part of his community.





This publication was written by John Kramer and Cindy Thomas of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston for the CT Department of Developmental Services. This project was funded through Connect-Ability's Medicaid Infrastructure Change Grant provided by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services. Connect-Ability is managed by the CT Department of Rehabilitative Services

In addition to the individuals who shared their stories and their employers, ICI would like to thank Ability Beyond Disability, ASD Adult Vocational Services, CT Department of Developmental Services, Kuhn Employment Services, Vista Vocational, Quinn Barbour, Rebecca Ciota, James Clarke, Donna D'Arco, Charlotte Dodd, Polly Donnellan, Erin Fallon, Amy Gelb, Jim Hughes, Rebecca Mercado, Anya Weber, and Adele Wise for their contributions to this publication.