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Hearing loss didn't hold her back. Now she's making sure others get ahead, too.

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Nichelle Oglesby, a program assistant at Easterseals Northern Career Pathways Connections, shows the type of tech people in the deaf or hard of hearing community use to communicate with others. courtesy of Easterseals

By [Rebecca Panico | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Nichelle Oglesby's job on the sales floor of a clothing store was going well until she was told to work the register.

The music that blasted above her — coupled with her hearing loss — made it more difficult to communicate with customers. She also didn't have a closed caption phone at her register.

"I noticed they stopped calling me to come in and work less hours," Oglesby, 26, told NJ Advance Media with a signer.

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Oglesby, of Orange, has worked all types of jobs in her career, from doing office work to being a home caregiver with her certified nursing assistant training. But just landing a job at times would be difficult: Many employers would say they would be accommodating, but never called her back.

Now, she helps others in the hard of hearing and deaf community as a program assistant at [Easterseals Career Pathway Connections](#). She assists the Northern Career Pathway Connections manager, Lauren Weishaar, who is also hard of hearing.

"I just think that if more deaf people knew that they can do whatever they want, that would change how they think," Oglesby said.

Easterseals, named after postage-sized seals sold for a fundraising program around Easter in 1934, is looking to expand in New Jersey. Weishaar said her program has offices in Maplewood and Woodbury, but with the help of grants they're looking to open another location in Central Jersey to reach more people.

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Career Pathways Connections was created in 2017.

The program has helped dozens of people wanting to work in fields like graphic design or accounting. Clients are commonly connected with jobs in retail, housekeeping, warehouses or food preparation, Weishaar said.

Placing people in jobs has become more difficult since the pandemic. The employers the program worked with had fewer jobs available as the economy slowed from coronavirus restrictions, Weishaar said.

“We go with them on the job, on the interviews,” Weishaar said. “So everything we did was in-person. When COVID happened, we had to step back.”

Instead, Weishaar started working with clients over Zoom on job development. Zoom has closed captions that some clients used on interviews, while others requested a signer who could log on and interpret for them.

Finding resources even pre-pandemic wasn't easy either. Oglesby previously didn't know about programs like Easterseals because she used a hearing aid growing up and didn't know of others in the deaf and hard of hearing community.

“You give your child a hearing aid, you put them in school and that's it,” said Oglesby. “But it doesn't stop there.”

Oglesby taught herself how to sign by watching YouTube videos when she was about 23, when her hearing loss progressed.

Oglesby learned of Easterseals in 2018 when her sister-in-law, who is deaf and was looking for a new job, met up with a counselor from the state's [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#) in the Department of Labor. Oglesby was eventually linked up with a job coach from Easterseals after getting a referral from the state.

She would later learn that she was more suited for office work rather than retail after taking an assessment from Easterseals. It turns out the office job Oglesby landed would be right at Easterseals, where she is able to help people just like herself.

“It’s my dream job,” she said.

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