ERA Grads Find Employment Success
Most Participants Land Community Jobs After Program

The Employment Readiness Academy (ERA) is far from being Easterseals Arc's largest program; just three or four individuals are enrolled in each academy location each session. The impact, however, is huge.

The Employment Readiness Academy is an intensive 18-week hands-on training experience that began in partnership with Lutheran Hospital in November 2015. In addition to Lutheran Hospital, it is now also offered at St. Joseph and Parkview hospitals, with modified versions of the program at Macy's, Lutheran Life Villages, and the YMCA.

Since that launch at Lutheran, 22 individuals have graduated from the Employment Readiness Academy. More than two-thirds of the graduates have found jobs in the community at businesses such as AMC Theater, Kroger, Richard's Restaurant, Scotty's Brewhouse, and more. For one graduate, Cassandra, finding a job was a smooth transition.

“Cassandra graduated on a Friday, and she was sitting in my office Monday morning saying she wanted to work here,” said Peter Jovevski, director of food and nutrition for Metz Culinary Management at St. Joseph Hospital. “We figured out the right fit, and she jumped in. She pretty much hired herself. It was a no-brainer.”

Although Jovevski was well aware of Cassandra's capabilities and work ethic at that point, he did have some concerns months earlier when he was first approached about hosting Employment Readiness Academy participants.

“Working with knives, heat, wet floors ... there were so many things I thought could go wrong,” Jovevski said. But he was pleasantly surprised with the ERA participants. “They were always super happy to do anything. We could just say ‘This is what we need.’”

Cassandra now works three days a week on the dinner tray line. Not

➡️Continued on Page 2
Let’s Build on 2017 to Thrive in 2018

Happy 2018 to everyone! As we usher in the New Year I want to reflect on some of the great things that happened in 2017. We were excited to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services at Wayne High School and Homestead High School. We are looking forward to starting services at Carroll High School and Columbia City High School this year. All of our school collaborators, students, parents, and business community partners have deemed these efforts a success!

Our employment services have really grown! We have worked to provide a variety of choices for the people we support to expand community employment offerings. Collaborating with the business community to find unique and innovative ways to help them with their workforce needs has been inspiring! We are truly blessed to have business leaders know and champion that hiring people with disabilities is good business. The people we support have been able to reach their personal goals as they experience mentorships and internships; Employment Readiness Academies hosted at local businesses; volunteer work; and getting hired!

In 2017, we also worked to improve our Direct Support Professional wages. We know our DSPs are critical to our purpose and have rewarding yet challenging work. Over the past 18 months, we were able to increase average DSP pay by 13 percent. We are grateful to state legislators that helped by increasing some Medicaid waiver rates, but we know we still need to advocate for funding and rates that allow us to recruit and retain great staff. With the help of wage increases and other improvements, our staff turnover was reduced 9.1 percent in 2017 and we will continue to do more.

Looking ahead, I am really excited for our new supported living and residential services team! Danielle Tips, vice president of health and residential supports, will work with Carrie Savarese, director of group homes and supported living, Cindy Sands, assistant director of group homes, and Derek Bernard, assistant director of supported living, to enhance overall quality of services. This new team brings a lot of experience, energy, and determination for continuous quality improvement.

I am very grateful for your part in helping us fulfill our purpose! It takes over 500 employees, a dedicated board of directors, donors, collaborators, volunteers, business community partners, our state partners, the leadership teams at the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) and the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) … and of course the people we support every day and their families! We are stronger together!

Donna Elbrecht
President & CEO

Employment Readiness Academy (continued from Page 1)

long ago, however, a job was just a dream. Then she started participating in Easterseals Arc programs and heard about the Employment Readiness Academy.

“I had been wanting a job part time, but I didn’t know where to look or how to go about getting one,” she said.

After being accepted into the academy, she “went really gung-ho” to learn skills while working in the St. Joseph Hospital kitchen, environmental services, and stocking patient areas. When she graduated, she knew she wanted to work in the kitchen.

“I love my job and love doing it. I didn’t think twice about it,” Cassandra said. “The people are very loving and helpful, and they know who I am.”

Jovevski described Cassandra as very shy when she first started the Employment Readiness Academy, and Cassandra said being successful at work has helped in other areas of her life.

“It’s made me more independent and able to live more on my own,” she explained. “I’m less afraid of leaving home and branching out into the world. It’s still scary, but less scary.”
New Services Aid Workplace Success

The new year brought new services to help individuals succeed in the workforce as Easterseals Arc began offering extended services and workplace assistance in January.

“We’ve made a lot of progress in helping individuals with disabilities prepare for and find jobs in the community, but some situations require more follow-up support than others,” said Thomas Summerville, vice president of employment and community supports. “These new services will allow us to provide additional support to individuals we have placed in area jobs as well as those who have found jobs on their own.”

As a Vocational Rehabilitation Services provider, Easterseals Arc assists people with disabilities as they prepare for, obtain, and retain employment in the community. However, individuals may need follow-up support that is not covered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Also, Vocational Rehabilitation’s Order of Selection policy prioritizes serving people with the most significant disabilities. Individuals with less severe disabilities who find jobs on their own or with other assistance may require additional support to succeed in those jobs. Easterseals Arc’s extended services will fulfill those needs.

“Area employers have found that people with disabilities are an overlooked talent pool, but sometimes the employer just doesn’t have the expertise or resources to give someone the little bit of extra training or support they need to really thrive,” Summerville explained. “We can step in with extended services to help the individual succeed and save the employer the time and cost of hiring someone new.”

“Successful community employment is a win for everyone,” Summerville said. “Individuals gain the independence, confidence and self-esteem that come along with a paycheck, while employers gain dedicated employees.”

To qualify for extended services, an individual must be employed in a community-based, competitive job that pays at least minimum wage and have Medicaid waiver funding. The services include activities such as:

- Training for the individual and/or the employer or co-workers to increase workplace inclusion
- Job-related safety training
- Job-related self-advocacy training
- Reinforcement of work-related personal care and social skills
- Training on use of public transportation or acquisition of appropriate transportation
- Coaching on job-related tasks

Workplace assistance provides a range of personal care services and supports during community employment hours. Examples include help with meals, hygiene, and medication administration. The services are designed to ensure the health and safety of the individual, therefore helping them retain employment.

To learn more …

For information on extended services or workplace assistance, contact:
Aimee Green, Intake & Transition Specialist
agreen@esarc.org or 260.456.4534 ext. 276
Meet the Dancers

Ashley and Mark
Doug and Delonda
Eric and DeDe
Cheryl and Jason
Susie and Jason
Damian and Jenny
Aaron and Lesley
Danny and Linda
Rae and Peter
Scott and Janis

Fun Night Has Big Impact

This March, Easterseals Arc of Northeast Indiana will celebrate its 10th annual Dancing with the Arc Stars. This event is a fan favorite as you get to truly see our mission in action.

Each year, Dancing with the Arc Stars delivers the financial support that our organization needs as we strive to change the way the world defines and views disability, by making a positive difference in the lives of those using our services and their families.

We are delighted to have 10 community volunteers paired with 10 dancers from Easterseals Arc already committing their time and efforts as they work diligently to perform March 1.

Dancing with the Arc Stars is more than a fundraiser—it’s an emotion-filled adventure for the dancers. They practice for 10 weeks and are trained by professional dance instructors, who all donate their time. The night of the event, each dance is critiqued by a panel of three judges who bring loads of laughter with their commentary. The audience votes with donations via their phones to determine winners.

The money raised at this annual event helps change lives through Easterseals Arc. YOU can help an individual thrive at home, at work, and in the community by donating at the event or now at www.bidpal.net/dancing.

5:30pm Thursday
MARCH 1, 2018
Grand Wayne Center
WWW.BIDPAL.NET/DANCING
Gratitude for Grants
Easterseals Arc is thankful to the following organizations for their generous grant awards:
- Eric A. and Mary C. Baade Foundation, $4,000 for upgrades at the Projects Drive Group building
- English Bonter Mitchell Foundation, $45,000 for upgrades in the Adult Day Center
- Foellinger Foundation, $20,000 for staff development
- Fort Wayne Health and Education Foundation, $2,000 for assistive technology
- Magee-O’Connor Foundation, $7,500 for employment services
- PNC Foundation, $5,000 for literacy classes
- Raker Foundation, $15,000 for the Employment Readiness Academy
- Schwab Foundation, $20,000 for employment services
- Dr. Louis and Anne B. Schneider Trust, $10,000 for community-based enrichment opportunities
- Mary Cross Tippmann Foundation, $6,250 for operating expenses
- Wilson Foundation, $5,000 for assistive technology

To learn more ...
PDG is now accepting new participants over age 30. For more information, contact:
Aimee Green, Intake & Transition Specialist
agreen@esarc.org or 260.456.4534 ext. 276

PDG Adds Option for Job Exploration
Projects Drive Group is making some changes to help meet the range of interests of its participants. As part of the reorganization, PDG is launching a new option called Community Connections for individuals who are working age but have not yet expressed a preference for a job specific goal. Participants will learn about various jobs and explore what they would like to do for their long term employment.
Work Services will now be for individuals who only want to participate in paid work and employment-related activities. The Career Center will include the ability to work half-days and participate in community volunteer options, classes, and other events for the remainder of the day.
PDG also will continue to expand Creative Expressions to help individuals develop their own self-employment ventures through sewing and other creative arts. Staff will help them learn their skill and market their items.

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Your Support Made Vino, Java & Jazz a Huge Success
Thank you to everyone who supported Vino, Java & Jazz in November 2017!
The event was our most successful ever, and raised more than $135,000 for the individuals and families served by Easterseals Arc.
Watch for more information coming this summer about an exciting new event for November 2018.
Helpful Nature Leads to Volunteering

Some people are just naturally helpful, and Greg is one of those people. He’s always lending a hand, usually offering it before it’s asked for with so many things like opening doors for people, helping others in and out of vehicles, carrying things, or organizing areas for his baseball and basketball teams. One year, he even stepped in to fill a vacancy when one of the Dancing with the Arc Stars participants had to bow out just weeks before the event.

His newest venture involves volunteering at the Georgetown Branch of the Allen County Public Library. He goes there once a week for a few hours to help with tasks such as alphabetizing books and movies.

There was a lot of information for Greg to absorb in the beginning, but after he got comfortable with the situation he only needed minimal assistance, wanting to do things on his own.

Greg was trained on certain tasks, but his helpful nature takes over and he always manages to do a little extra—straightening books on shelves or returning books left behind to the circulation desk—before ending his shift.

Briefs

Hepler Elected Chair

With Dan Metzger completing his term, the Easterseals Arc board of directors elected Christine Hepler, of Parkview Home Health and Hospice, as the new chair at its November meeting. Hepler has been on the board since 2011.

In addition to Hepler, additional board officers are:
- Joe Cohen, of Barrett McNagny LLP, 1st vice chair
- Scott Weiskittel, of Lutheran Health Network, 2nd vice chair
- Karen Bachman, of Hamil, Lehman & England, treasurer
- Amy Eavey, of Carson Boxberger, secretary

Verduce Joins Board

Cindy Verduce joined the Easterseals Arc board of directors in January for a three-year term and will be part of the board’s external relations committee. Verduce is director of the Career Center and regional career services at Indiana Tech.

Elbrecht Builds Connections

Donna Elbrecht, Easterseals Arc CEO/president, has been elected to the National Easterseals Affiliate Leadership Council representing the Great Lakes Region. The council will work with national Easterseals CEO Angela F. Williams on strategies for the affiliate network and overall affiliate engagement.

Elbrecht also has accepted a role on an ANCOR business acumen work group to develop tools and resources for community-based organizations to use in navigating the changing landscape of providing support for people with disabilities.

The American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) is a national organization representing more than 1,400 private community providers of services to people with disabilities.
Upcoming Events: February through May

**FEBRUARY**

- 2/6 Boundaries Crossed: Asperger’s Youth Group, 6:15-7:15 p.m., Ivy Tech Community College, 3800 N. Anthony Blvd.
- 2/7 & 21 Aktion Club Meeting, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Turnstone, 3320 N. Clinton St.
- 2/12 Social Group for Adults Who Have Asperger’s, 6-7:30 p.m., Lutheran Hospital, Room #4 in cafeteria
- 2/15 Self Advocates Meeting, 1-2 p.m., Projects Drive
- 2/17 Sibshops, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. for grade school (ages 7-12); noon-3 p.m. junior high/middle school; 2-4 p.m. high school at Mad Anthony’s Children’s Hope House on Lutheran Hospital Campus

**MARCH**

- 3/1 Dancing with the Arc Stars, 5:30 p.m., Grand Wayne Center, 120 W. Jefferson Blvd.
- 3/6 Boundaries Crossed: Asperger’s Youth Group, 6:15-7:15 p.m., Ivy Tech Community College, 3800 N. Anthony Blvd.
- 3/7 & 21 Aktion Club Meeting, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Turnstone, 3320 N. Clinton St.
- 3/12 Social Group for Adults Who Have Asperger’s, 6-7:30 p.m., Lutheran Hospital, Room #4 in cafeteria
- 3/15 Self Advocates Meeting, 1-2 p.m., Projects Drive
- 3/17 Teens Only Sibshops, noon-4 p.m. at Mad Anthony’s Children’s Hope House on Lutheran Hospital Campus

**APRIL**

- 4/2-6 Spring Break Dream Teens and Mini Dreamers (Dream Teens is full, however Mini Dreamers is taking applications. Contact Aimee Green at agreen@esarc.org or 260.456.4534 ext. 276.)
- 4/3 Boundaries Crossed: Asperger’s Youth Group, 6:15-7:15 p.m., Ivy Tech Community College, 3800 N. Anthony Blvd.
- 4/4 & 18 Aktion Club Meeting, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Turnstone, 3320 N. Clinton St.
- 4/9 Social Group for Adults Who Have Asperger’s, 6-7:30 p.m., Lutheran Hospital, Room #4 in cafeteria
- 4/19 Self Advocates Meeting, 1-2 p.m., Projects Drive
- 4/21 Sibshops, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. for grade school (ages 7-12); noon-3 p.m. junior high/middle school; 2-4 p.m. high school at Mad Anthony’s Children’s Hope House on Lutheran Hospital Campus
- 4/26 Annual Recognition Celebration, 6:30-8 p.m., Ceruti’s, 6601 Innovation Blvd.,
- 4/28 Wings for Autism, watch for more details coming soon

**MAY**

- 5/1 Boundaries Crossed: Asperger’s Youth Group, 6:15-7:15 p.m., Ivy Tech Community College, 3800 N. Anthony Blvd.
- 5/2 & 16 Aktion Club Meeting, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Turnstone, 3320 N. Clinton St.
- 5/14 Social Group for Adults Who Have Asperger’s, 6-7:30 p.m., Lutheran Hospital, Room #4 in cafeteria
- 5/17 Self Advocates Meeting, 1-2 p.m., Projects Drive

**Holiday**

- 5/28 Memorial Day, Easterseals Arc offices and day programs closed
To help family members care for themselves and each other, the Family Support team has several offerings planned for 2018.

One new program is the Family Café, which will be a series of discussions on topics specifically designed for parents of children of any age with special needs. Each session will start with a family style dinner. After dinner, children will go with staff to another area for activities while parents stay for discussion on the featured topic.

“I really wanted to combine a family fun experience with an educational experience and a chance for parents to network with each other,” explained Ashley Gettys, director of community living and family supports.

The Family Café will be free and open to anyone in the community. Dates and times are still to be determined, but the planned topics include: Dealing with Strong Emotions from Your Child; Dealing with Strong Emotions from Yourself; Future Planning; and Taking Care of the Caregiver.

Additional plans for 2018 include:

- Adult Sibling Educational Series: This series offers education and support for adults with siblings who have special needs. Topics will include guardianship, finances, and more.
- Family Connections: These periodic family get-togethers will be full of fun, games, and food.
- Parents Nights Out: Parents Night Out will have a new twist in 2018! Once a month, we will offer a special Parents Night Out open to all children in the family, with and without special needs.
- Parents Taking Action: This one-on-one peer mentorship program for parents addresses specific topics a parent may want to learn more about as well as offering basic peer support.

For more information, contact: Ashley Gettys 260.456.4534 ext. 279 agettys@esarc.org