



Easterseals skills coach, Adrienne Pender, congratulates an employment services program participant on a job well done at the Easterseals training center in Millville, NJ. Photo by Burt Brooks

HELPING Hands



A Century of Caring

Easterseals debuts in Hoboken

BY TARA RYAZANSKY

This March, Easterseals, which has locations all across New Jersey, opened its first Hoboken office in the Harlow building on Clinton Street. Mayor Ravi Bhalla and the city of Hoboken offered the space to Easterseals for a \$1 per year lease.

Just about everybody has heard of Easterseals. It's not a little nonprofit serving a local niche. Indeed, it was founded in 1919 as the National Society for Crippled Children, hardly an apt or acceptable title in the twenty-first century. It later became Easter Seals and now goes by its modern, one-word moniker.

It also expanded its mission, serving veterans, military families, seniors, and caregivers.

The services provided by Easterseals are meant for two groups: senior citizens, 55 and over, who have to return to the workforce due to a financial hardship, and anyone with a documented disability. Seniors seeking Easterseals services have to meet a list of requirements and must have first sought employment through the American Job Center, part of the Department of Labor. When qualifying new clients come to Easterseals they are assessed and empowered by the organization, which prepares them for employment.

GETTING A GIG

Job hunting is always tough, but it can be especially difficult for older people and those with disabilities. It's hard to get a

foot in the door when employers might have misconceptions about someone's abilities in the workforce. Easterseals helps to fight those misconceptions by providing job training and placement.

"This employment base is one of the very best that you can get," Barbara Armstrong, director of senior community service employment programs, says of her clients at Easterseals. She says that her clients' work ethic, paired with the training that they receive at Easterseals, makes them ideal employees. Easterseals aims to help make connections between potential employers and Easterseals clients so that future employment is a great fit for everyone involved.

"The jobs are any competitive job that you or I could have," says Christine Dante, assistant vice president of employment services of Easterseals New Jersey. "We go and build relationships with the employers, basically like a sales team. Our job coaches are out there pounding the pavement and looking for new places for clients to work."

But Easterseals is more than just a job placement agency. It stresses the wellbeing and independence of the two populations it serves.

HOME RUN

Easterseals's mission is especially important because gainful employment is a crucial part of fighting homelessness for those at risk. That's why the organization teamed up with Mayor Bhalla's Hoboken Homelessness Task Force which launched last year.



Hoboken mayor, Ravi Bhalla, poses with Easterseals New Jersey CEO, Brian Fitzgerald, at the new Easterseals employment services office in Hoboken. Photo by Anyssa Holder



After a productive day of work at the Easterseals employment training center in New Brunswick, NJ, an Easterseals employment services program participant expresses how happy he is for the opportunity to earn a paycheck. Photo by Burt Brooks



An Easterseals Employment Services program participant proudly poses for a photo in front of his work station at the Easterseals employment training center in Millville, NJ. Photo credit: Photo by Burt Brooks



Diane Nunez (left), Larry Huntley (center), Myriellen Hopkin (right) are employees of the Easterseals New Jersey Senior Community Employment Service Program (SCSEP) enjoying a holiday party at their main office.

"We have a common understanding," Dante says. "We have missions that are aligned to prevent homelessness. We wouldn't have been able to expand without Mayor Bhalla and his staff."

Though Easterseals is new to the community, Hoboken's seniors and disabled people are already benefiting from the new location.

Easterseals client Kathy Montano is sharpening her clerical skills by working the front desk of the new Hoboken office. She's a senior citizen seeking employment and gaining training experience with the organization. She spends her time doing on-the-job training and going on job interviews. She's waiting to hear back from a few places where she's interviewed and is hoping for good news. "I was lucky to find Easterseals," Montano says. She learned about the

group while volunteering for another nonprofit. Easterseals also recruits from senior centers and leaves informational materials at places that seniors frequent, like pharmacies.

Easterseals told Montano that she had excellent office skills. She's bilingual, which was another great addition to her resume. Montano, who continues to train with the organization, says, "My skills are there, and they're growing."

The office has gotten plenty of clients because of foot traffic in the area. "It's not just me," Montano says. "There's a lot of us within Hudson County that are in my situation. Maybe they're going through unemployment or maybe they're changing their marital status. I do advise people that there are people out there helping us. I feel blessed that Easterseals came into my world."—07030

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