

Kathleen Stauffer, Chief Executive Officer
Bonnie Jones, Director of Employment Services

Employment Opportunities at The Arc New London County

Located in Groton, Connecticut, the Employment Transition Center (ETC) provides employment and vocational preparation for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities age 16 and over. **ETC serves as a catalyst for men and women with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become productive, equal, and valuable members of society by providing opportunities to learn, work and participate in the community as independently as possible, in ways that serve personal goals and demonstrate measurable contributions to society.** This philosophy is driven by the firm conviction that all people can achieve their dreams of working in the field they desire.

Program Snapshot

- 63 Group Supported Employment (GSE) participants are employed at an average of 15 hours per week
- 6 Individual Supported Employment (ISE) participants are employed at an average of 15-20 hours per week
- 9 out of 11 students in the School to Work Transition (SWT) program are employed at an average of 15-20 hours per week
- All employed participants earn **at least** Connecticut minimum wage of \$10.10 per hour

Traditional employment opportunities in both group supported and individual supported employment, combined with cutting edge projects and micro-businesses designed by staff and participants, generate training and employment opportunities in the following fields:

- **Culinary Arts:** ETC offers a state-of-the-art culinary program in which participants create a variety of foods available for purchase in the General Store, Farm Stand and Bakery as well as through the online catering menu. The Bakery's specialty item, the "Classic Crunch" chocolate chip cookie, is now on the shelves of a regional grocery store.
- **Retail:** in addition to community employment at retail outlets including Goodwill, UCFS, Waterford Community Center, Groton Senior Center, participants work in the General Store and Bakery to learn retail skills such as using a cash register, restocking merchandise, making change and interacting with customers.
- **Maintenance:** In venues of all sizes including the Mohegan Sun Casino, U.S. Sub Base, AVCRAD, Johnson Controls located at CSC, and the Arc's mobile cleaning crews. These cleaning crews tackle maintenance responsibilities such as bathrooms, floors, windows and other hard surfaces.

- **Aquaculture:** Participants working with the aquaponics project are responsible for caring for the system including plant and fish care, cleaning the tank, and checking for the correct ph levels in the water.
- **Horticulture:** Participants learn how to cultivate and grow vegetables in both a hydroponic and aquaponic environment. They identify when vegetables are ready to be harvested and what new recipes they can try using the veggies. They also sell the produce at The Arc's successful Farm Stand.
- **Landscaping:** The Arc's Lawn crew gains experience using a wide variety of mowers, saws and hand tools and conducts mowing, pruning, yard maintenance, fall cleanup, etc. at the Arc's offices and residential homes as well as properties of business and individual private clients.

The Arc's Business Development Ambassadors

The Arc has teamed up with two local retired businessmen serving as volunteer community liaisons to utilize their business contacts to create new job opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc has put together a portfolio of outreach materials for these Development Ambassadors to present, highlighting cost saving measures, tax incentives, and success stories of participants, to educate local companies about the benefits of partnering with The Arc to hire competent, well trained people. **Through this increased effort to engage new companies, the Employment Transition Center continues to employ 90 - 100% of its participants.**

Two New Projects at The Arc New London County

The Employment Transition Center's **aquaponics facility** is an innovative way to provide people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with employment training opportunities, healthy food options, and pesticide-free, locally grown produce to share with the community. **People participating in the implementation of this microbusiness learn specialized skills that make them stand out from the average worker and thus increase their marketability in the community.** The estimated 10 job training opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities include caring for the system and the greenhouse, food preparation, and retail sales at The Arc General Store and Farm Stand. In addition to education and job training, the Aquaponics provides fresh produce at a drastically reduced cost to The Arc's 64 residential home and supported living residents throughout New London County.

A generous grant from a local bank helped The Arc New London County create the Snack Café cart, in which young people sell the baked goods created in the culinary program at the Employment Transition Center. **The Snack Café cart, which operates at different locations throughout the month, offers participants the opportunity to gain professional experience that ensures success when they transition to employment outside the agency.** Every step in the process of selling snacks to the community is a learning experience for the people involved, and an opportunity to build the employment skills needed to become independent adults. **People learn how to interact with customers, handle money and manage a retail enterprise.** The success of the Snack Café has led to new partnerships with other local agencies to create similar models at their locations. For participants, it provides a venue for training with the satisfaction of a day's hard work.