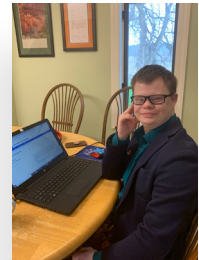


# Partnering for Career Success

An employment guide for employers and employees  
with Down syndrome and other disabilities





## Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 made society more accessible for all. The ADA does not allow unfair treatment and protects the rights of people with disabilities. Progress has been made to open the job market to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including Down syndrome. The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) is working to build on the ADA for employment for all people with disabilities. Our goal is to work towards a more inclusive labor force for people with Down syndrome.

People with Down syndrome face different barriers as they work towards competitive, integrated employment. These barriers include; a lack of accessible transportation and limited access to reasonable accommodations. Despite these barriers, people with Down syndrome achieve success in many industries and workplace settings. As no two people are alike, there are many paths to a successful career.

This guide serves as a resource for employers and people with Down syndrome and their families looking to attain competitive integrated employment in their community.<sup>1&2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> NDSS and the #DSWORKS® program would like to thank David Egan, currently a community relations coordinator at SourceAmerica and a previous Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Public Policy fellow, for his contributions both now and over the years to this resource guide.

<sup>2</sup> There are other models of employment including self-employment and entrepreneurship.



# Exploring Career Choices

Employment is a defining aspect of life in our society. It offers more than just a means to earn a wage. Employment benefits the community and offers people a chance to develop new friendships and interact with others. Exploring career choices and determining a good fit between the employer and employee are important to a rewarding job. It is important to remember that a person's first job does not determine their entire career path. The following actions are suggested when determining a good fit:

## 1. Determining Interest in the Company:

People take pride in where they work. Most people are happiest at work when they enjoy the work they do as well as the company they work for. Prospective employees should inform themselves through online research and in-person discovery to make sure the company is a place they want to work.

## 2. Choosing a Work Environment and Culture:

No two workplaces are alike. Even in the same company, two different locations can have different work environments or cultures. This could be due to geography, the unique people within each office, the industry and more. Employers should be aware of their culture and how a candidate with Down syndrome will be fully integrated. People with Down syndrome should be exposed to the environment and culture of a company before making an employment decision.

**3. Job Tasks and Responsibilities:** A job description is often not enough to determine if a job is a good fit. Having the chance to shadow during the interview process benefits both the employer and prospective employee. For employers, they get a better sense of whether that candidate is a good fit for the role. For employees, it helps them better understand what to expect before starting



a job. It is important to define and explain the specific tasks and responsibilities of a role. Employers and their employees with Down syndrome should have a common understanding of the tasks and how they match the strengths a candidate brings to the position.

Each of these steps has a different value in determining a good job placement for an employee with Down syndrome. However, it is important during the job search process to consider all three to maximize the likelihood of success.

# Getting Started

## Transitions from School to Work:

Volunteering, shadowing and internships can be great ways to gain experience or determine interest in a job. Many education systems give high school students the chance to gain hands-on experience at worksites. Accessing these programs at an early age allows for greater exposure and experience. These transition experiences are important as a student is approaching the end of their high school education. Furthermore, employers who offer internships benefit by identifying talent and diversifying their workforce. Whether paid or unpaid, employers get to know the strengths and unique skills of each person with Down syndrome.

## Individualized Training:

As employers work to support their employees, it is important to identify their strengths. This requires an understanding of each employee by spending time to identify their needs. Training is critical to establishing a strong foundation for any employee. The #DSWORKS® program has published a training guide, Guide Me & Watch Me Succeed, which highlights effective techniques. In using these techniques, it is important to use a person-centered approach to maximize success.



## Networking and Mentoring:

Help from other people can be important to candidates and their success in accessing employment. Having a professional network is helpful to learn about career paths and opportunities at specific companies. Mentoring new hires should be a part of any workplace culture. Having someone to rely on who cares and has a deep understanding of that person's specific skills is a big part of success for all employees. Finding that mentor is a responsibility for both the employee and the employer.



# Workplace Best-Practices

**Set Specific and Tangible Goals:** People enjoy the satisfaction and pride of completing a task or project. This feeling can fuel success. Setting concrete goals in a work setting can be a great tool to motivate and improve performance for employees with Down syndrome. There are several components to these goals that are critical.<sup>3</sup> First, they should be measurable to ensure that employees know when they have completed them. Second, the goal should be within that person's job duties and appropriate for their strengths and skills. Third, whenever possible it is beneficial to add a timeframe to the goal.

**Establish a Routine:** People learn new skills through repetition or practice. Employees with Down syndrome can therefore benefit from a consistent and meaningful routine. Routine provides a space for an employee to master a set of skills. This in turn allows them to perform tasks at a higher level of quality, which contributes to the needs of the company.

**Ensure Consistent Communication:** The workplace today offers many avenues for communication. Whether it be face-to-face, over the phone, or through other virtual means, it is important to have consistent engagement with an employee with Down syndrome. These lines of communication provide a way for employers to stay engaged with the work their staff are doing. It also supports employees so they can consistently access support and feedback. Given that communication can take many forms, it is important to determine which one is the most effective for each employee.

**Prioritize Inclusion:** The workplace is more than just a way for employees to gain a paycheck. It is a source of pride, personal growth and belonging to a community. However, most of these things can only happen in an inclusive setting.

Therefore, employers must prioritize inclusion for their employees with Down syndrome. This is achieved by incorporating them into the workplace as they would any other employee. Workplace inclusion for employees with Down syndrome takes many forms including; participation in regular staff meetings and professional training, listening to their opinions and inviting them to company events.

**Accommodations:** Employees with Down syndrome and other disabilities often rely on workplace accommodations for support. These accommodations vary in form from a modified schedule to assistive technology. Many people assume these accommodations are costly, but this is not the case. According to the Job Accommodation Network, 58% of workplace accommodations do not cost anything to the employer, and the remaining share cost an average of \$500.<sup>4</sup> Employers should promote a culture where requesting these reasonable accommodations is not out of the ordinary. This reduces the stigma of employees making such requests.

**Educate other Team Members:** An inclusive culture starts with all members of a team. It is clearly important for managers and human resource professionals to understand disability inclusion practices, including the use of appropriate workplace language. However, it is also key to invest in company-wide training. Employees with Down syndrome will engage with all sorts of people while at work, not just their supervisors. All staff members should be trained to understand basic disability inclusion practices. This knowledge makes the workplace more welcoming for people with Down syndrome and other disabilities, and it also positively impacts the overall culture of the company.

<sup>3</sup> Rep. SMART Goals: A How to Guide, n.d. [https://www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/\\_files/performance-appraisal/How%20to%20write%20SMART%20Goals%20v2.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/_files/performance-appraisal/How%20to%20write%20SMART%20Goals%20v2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Employers and the ADA: Myths and Facts." U.S. Department of Labor. Office of Disability Employment Policy, n.d. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/fact-sheets/americans-with-disabilities-act>.



# Expectations

**Employers:** Every member of a team brings a variety of strengths to the table. While employees with Down syndrome may need additional support, they should not be held to a lower standard because of their disability. Employers should raise their expectations of people with Down syndrome. When performance issues do arise, it is important to consider the role that accommodations can play in closing any gaps.<sup>5</sup> Once expectations are established, they should be communicated by the employer to other members of the team. This helps to ensure that employees with Down syndrome and their colleagues are on the same page.

**Employees:** Clear expectations at work ensure that employees with Down syndrome will be successful. When appropriate, sharing these expectations with an employee's support system can be beneficial. These supports include; job coaches, case managers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, or a responsible family member. Their involvement can make it easier to provide support in a way that aligns with those expectations. However, it is critical that an employee with Down syndrome be at the center of discussions about employment expectations. Documenting expectations and their progress helps ensure clear understanding. It should also highlight the contributions and accomplishments of employees with Down syndrome.



<sup>5</sup> DeFreitas, Tracie. "Performance Management and Employees with Disabilities." Job Accommodation Network, n.d. <https://askjan.org/articles/Performance-Management-and-Employees-with-Disabilities.cfm>.

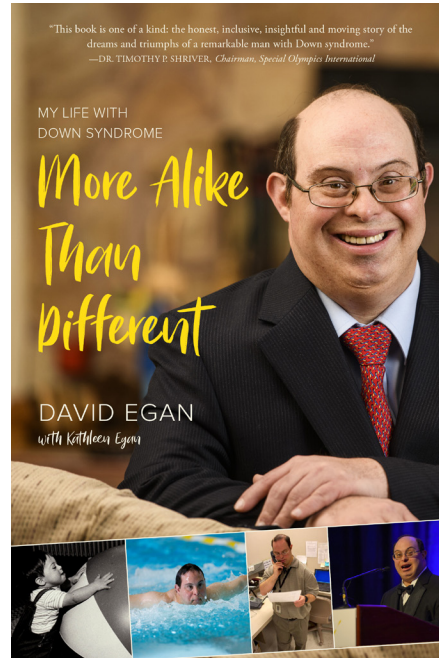
# Self-Advocate Stories

## David Egan

As a child, I dreamt of winning the race at the Special Olympics swimming competitions, and as young adult, I told my dad that I wanted to have a job and be a champion of the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities. My preparation for inclusive employment started in 1996 through the Fairfax County Public Schools with vocational training and internships that then launched my career with a competitive job. I went from being a clerk in a distribution center to being selected as the first person with an intellectual disability to serve as a Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Public Policy Fellow. In that role, I worked with the House Ways and Means Committee and the National Down Syndrome Society. In 2017 I landed a community relations position at SourceAmerica, the largest non-profit organization that focuses on the employment of people with disabilities.

All my employers, Booz Allen Hamilton, CBRE and SourceAmerica, treat me like all other employees, paying me fair, equal wages with full benefits. Advocacy has always been part of my journey with multiple leadership opportunities in the Special Olympics movement and with other non-profit organizations changing hearts and minds at the local, state, national and international levels. I am proud to have testified at the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, stating that “hiring people with disabilities is a good business decision as well as a social responsibility.”

Having Down syndrome is not an obstacle to being successful. Having a disability does not mean no ability. I have a good life and experience challenges and opportunities like everyone else. In fact, we all share in the same humanity and are more alike than different as I wrote in my book: “More Alike Than Different: My Life With Down Syndrome.” Join in on the conversation: [www.davideganadvocacy.com](http://www.davideganadvocacy.com)





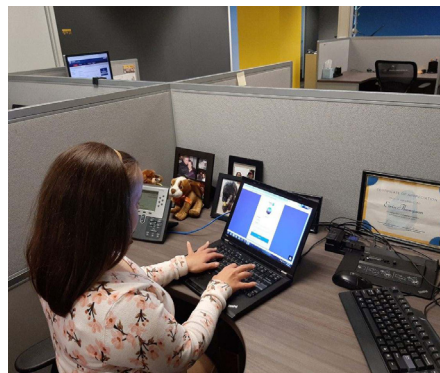
# Self-Advocate Stories

## Erin Thompson

I graduated from Paul Catholic High School in 2006 and then went to the Mason LIFE Program at George Mason University. I really enjoyed my classes, which helped me discover what kind of job I wanted. They also equipped me with essential skills for the workplace. When I was in my freshman and sophomore years, I got the opportunity for a paid internship at the Arc of Northern Virginia where I got more professional skills. After graduation, I networked with many professionals and was thrilled when I got an interview with Rosetta Stone in 2011. I was very happy to be offered a job with Rosetta Stone as an Office Assistant.

I have been working for nine years which is a big achievement for me! I built a lot of connections with my coworkers who were very nice and fun to work with. If I need assistance, my supervisor or coworkers are there to help. I have taken advantage of working with Rosetta Stone to appreciate new cultures and am currently learning Spanish. Ever since I started working at the office, I have had the opportunity to work on some very exciting projects and tasks. One of my favorite things is tracking and managing office equipment, as well as arranging travel plans for my colleagues. I am a great employee at Rosetta Stone because I take my work very seriously and make sure to always get the job done. I am a valued staff member because I am good at my job and work very well with members of my team. Access to a job coach is very important for people with disabilities. My job coach supports me at the office and likes to see what I am doing and offer help as needed.

Employment is important to adults with Down syndrome as it helps us contribute in the community. Hiring people with Down syndrome presents an opportunity to include valuable employees in the workplace.



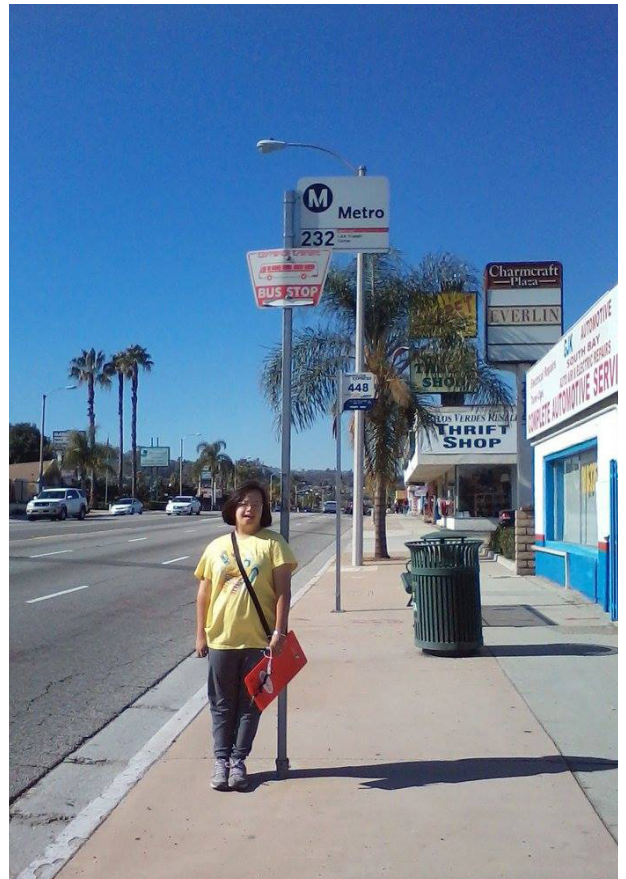


# Self-Advocate Stories

## Eden Rapp

My name is Eden Rapp. I am 24 years old, and I have been working at Mod Pizza since 2019. However, my job journey did not start there. When I was in high school, I volunteered at my local library and was an office assistant at my school. After I graduated in 2018 from Project SEARCH, my Best Buddies job coach asked me what kind of jobs I was interested in, found job openings, helped me fill out applications and prepared me for job interviews. She always went with me to interviews to give me support too. At the end of February of 2019, I had an interview at Mod Pizza and I started training in March 2019. What I do at work is box folding, pressing dough, and if they are busy, I will help with online orders. The reason why I love my job is because it not only gives me the chance to put smiles on people's faces, but it allows me to act professionally and demonstrate ability. I love that it is an inclusive environment and they believe all people should be given an opportunity to work.

Employment is more than a paycheck. Many people with Down syndrome have the goal and dream about wanting to be self-sufficient. Having a job not only makes me more independent, but it also makes me feel like I can see a brighter future for myself.



# Self-Advocate Stories

## Danielle Douglas

My name is Danielle Douglas and I have always wanted to work. I often said since the start of high school that I wanted to work at McLeod Hospital. During my second year at South Florence High School I started training on job sites. Some of my job sites included an Adult Day Healthcare Center where I served food to clients and at McLeod Hospital where I wiped tables in the cafeteria.

During my senior year of high school, I was selected to participate in the Project SEARCH program. This was the first year the program has been implemented in my school district. The program involved a partnership between my school district, McLeod Hospital, Vocational Rehabilitation and the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. It is designed to train young adults with disabilities, with the hope that we complete the program and become employed. This program has been a success and all six in my cohort are employed with McLeod Regional Medical Center. I am now an employee in the laundry department where I spent my senior year training through Project SEARCH. I love performing my job tasks, including folding hospital gowns and interacting with my coworkers.





# Suggested Resources

## Employers:

**Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE):** APSE is committed to competitive employment in inclusive settings. Their business training covers topics to improve inclusion practices.

**CEO Commission for Disability Employment:** A group of private-sectors leaders in disability employment inclusion offering resources and advocacy opportunities for the business community.

**Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR):** Representing 78 Vocational Rehabilitation programs, CSAVR offers the National Employment Team (NET) to support businesses.

**Disability:IN:** A network of over 220 companies that offers a library of resources to support businesses on their disability inclusion journey.

**Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN):** EARN offers business support for recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement. Their Inclusion@Work tool offers valuable strategies for disability employment inclusion.

**Job Accommodation Network (JAN):** JAN offers a library of resources and technical assistance with a focus on workplace accommodations and ADA compliance.

**Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP):** Offers information for employers on topics including; tax credits, accommodations, small business support, and diversity and inclusion.

## Employees:

**Best Buddies Jobs Program:** A program that pairs individuals with companies looking to hire candidates in their communities.

**Project SEARCH:** Offers competitive integrated professional experiences to people with disabilities for employment.

**SourceAmerica:** Offers resources for job seekers, including skills assessments and resume advice.

**Special Olympics Leadership Academy:** Offers people with and without disabilities the chance to improve their leadership and organizational skills.

**State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies:** EARN offers a comprehensive list of State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies. This list features websites and phone numbers for agencies within each state.

**Think College:** An organization that promotes post-secondary education for people with disabilities. Think College has a tool to find specific schools, including vocational programs.

**Your Next Star:** Part of the Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress, this program offers information on the steps towards attaining and maintaining employment.