



THE PFAL (PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE) INTEL

All the news that's fit to email!

October, 2025

In this issue:

- National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month recap
- Great information about voting
- Blog: Don't Move the Goalpost, Annihilate It
- Introducing our new Youth Advisory Board - an invitation to join!
- Upcoming webinars for parents and professionals
- And two exciting announcements! (Scroll down to see...)



From the desk of Jennifer Harrison - Director, Planning for Adult Life

Did you know October is National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)?

Since 1945 (yes, 1945!), America has designated time to observe the contributions of people with disabilities, and this commemoration expanded to include people with mental health and other nonobvious disabilities in the workforce. So, who better to include than our PFAL community transitioning to adulthood?

This year's theme: "Celebrating Value and Talent!"

There are a million inspiring tales of people going into the work world (and other places, too!) after leaving high school. Some feature people who haven't even made the transition yet! One such story revolves around a mother-and-son business that has not only gained entrepreneurial success but has transformed their lives. As reported in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the journey of Melissa "Missy" Terrell, mother of son Anthony ("Tug") and owner of Tug Butter LLC, began with a diagnosis of nonverbal autism when her son was 5. Because of his frequent meltdowns, Missy would grocery shop at 2 in the morning, alone. The outings led to inspiration: she

ventured into a culinary career and taught Tug how to help her. While learning to make applesauce and apple butter, he also learned to read, write, perform basic math skills, and hone his social skills like making eye contact and speaking. Employment can affect not just our financial well-being but open up our world! The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) ensures that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the same opportunities as people without disabilities for gaining employment and being treated fairly at work.

That means our loved ones with IDD can seek employment with:

- Private employers
- State and local governments
- Employment agencies
- Labor organizations
- And labor-management committees

without the fear of facing discrimination, as long as they have 15 or more employees.

To be protected from job discrimination, one must only be “qualified to perform the essential functions or duties of a job, with or without reasonable accommodation.”

And what are these accommodations, you might wonder?

They include:

- Provision or modification of equipment or devices
- Job restructuring
- Part-time or modified work schedules
- Reassignment to a vacant position
- Adjustment or modification of examinations, training materials, or policies
- Provision of readers and interpreters
- And a workplace that is readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities

This is not a privilege; it is a right!

And even though October is over, employers can nurture respect and advocacy for people with disabilities throughout the year! Sponsoring “Lunch and Learn” and Disability 101 informational events for employees and displaying posters about disability employment will keep the conversation going throughout the year.

The Arc of New Jersey’s Project HIRE Director, Colleen Collick, had a few things to say about disability employment, too:

Q: What can we as employers do to keep NDEAM going all year?

Colleen: I think spotlighting success stories on a bulletin board, in a newsletter or at monthly meetings are great ways to keep NDEAM going all year.

Q: What happens if there are co-occurring mental health issues that make it seem like gaining employment can't happen?

Colleen: I believe having the right support is everything. Having a job coach available while you are working, as well as scheduled off-site appointments to discuss workplace issues, can make a big difference. Flexibility is also crucial starting part-time and gradually increasing hours and responsibilities helps build confidence and skills. Pairing the vocational journey with mental health services ensures that both employment and personal well-being needs are addressed.

Q: What about volunteering opportunities?

Colleen: I have a job sampling letter that has proven to be helpful — having something tangible that a business can see and keep often helps build strong relationships. Networking with places you frequent and provide support can also pay off down the road. For example, local libraries, pet shops, and Weiss in Warren County have recently agreed to allow job sampling. I've attached the letter for your reference. ([Click here for the letter](#)).

Q: Do you find that neurotypical employees receive proper information about how best to interact with people with disabilities when companies hire?

Colleen: I find that peer modeling is such an essential factor throughout life, kindness truly goes a long way. Most people want to be there to support and help others succeed. When employees model inclusivity and respect, it sets a positive tone and a happier work environment. Many companies are also expanding their DEI committees, which creates even more opportunities to promote understanding, collaboration, and inclusion.

Q: How can I prepare my child to work?

Colleen: It's important to work on soft skills every day, focusing on communication, punctuality, and problem-solving—the top three skills for success in my eyes! Encourage your child to explore different work environments, paying attention to settings that are quiet, loud, busy, or calm, and determine what works best for them. Starting small with part-time or seasonal work allows them to gradually increase hours and responsibilities. Registering with DVRS early, around age 14, ensures that a case is open and that future job opportunities can be paired with job coaching support. Visual tools, such as schedules or smartphone apps, can be simple yet effective tools for organization and independence. Finally, teaching self-

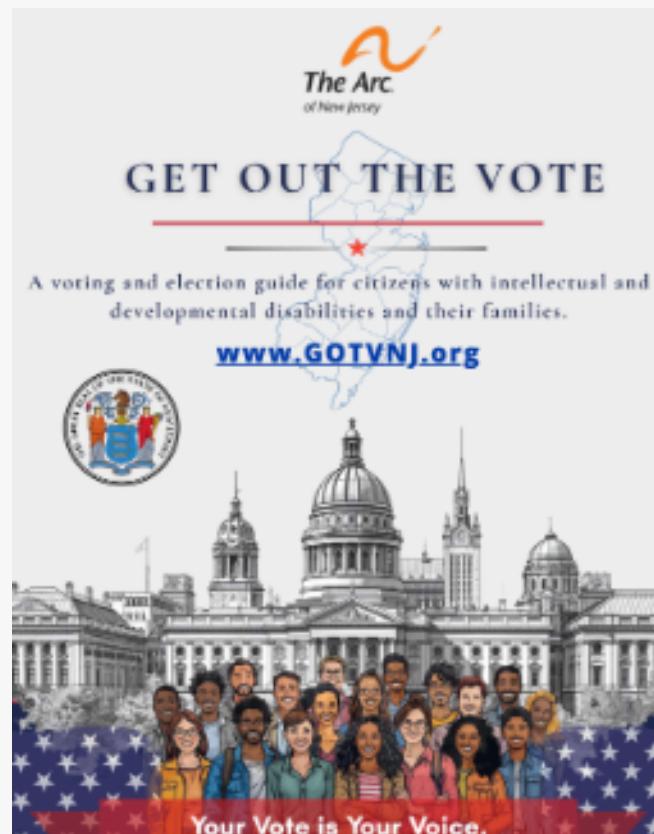
advocacy early helps your child confidently request support, communicate their needs, and highlight their strengths.

You can learn more about Colleen's program, Project HIRE, by clicking [here!](#)

Here's to good work!

Jen

Click on the image below to learn more about voting and elections for people with developmental disabilities and their families!



Want to learn more about early voting? Check out the New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project Director Erin Smithers' video below!



And now a bit about... Reframing Success!!

This month's blog:

Don't Move the Goalpost, Annihilate It

By Jennifer Harrison

We all know the story of The Tortoise and The Hare. The quick bunny who scampered like a maniac toward the finish line while his hard-shelled competitor chose the slower, steadier, and – ultimately – more effective method of easing on down the road to victory. It's a tale about moving at the right pace for oneself, the one that serves the purpose most effectively.

But how many people know that there was a third character in the tale? (Ok, there actually wasn't, but for our purposes, we'll take some creative liberties...)

The third character in this remix was a human. Not a young human, necessarily, but, say, around the transition-to-adulthood age. Just for argument's sake.

The human happened to be taking a stroll on that lovely autumn day, inhaling the scent of wet earth and listening to the crunch of fallen leaves beneath their Uggs. Chuckling at the scampering animals that passed a few minutes apart. First a bunny, then, later, a turtle. Taking in the beautiful day. The human walked only as quickly as their needs dictated and aimed at a destination they had set for themselves.

So, why don't we ever hear about that third character when the story is told? Because the human wasn't part of the race. *That* race was for the animals who wanted to race and had set a goal to cross their specific finish line. The human, however, had a totally different mission. The human's particular finish line was experiencing the path the way that was appropriate for them, beholding the day and the journey in their own particular manner.

And they were doing it brilliantly, by the way.

Racing is great and sharing a finish line can be fine. But not everyone wants to – or needs to – or should – participate in a common mad dash toward a pre-prescribed end. Marching to our own beat at our own pace and toward our own destination is truly the best way to be successful.

It is the same with our students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their goals are as varied as the people who strive for them, a "win" any number of iterations. There is no one right goal, no singular sign of triumph for any two people.

It's time we rewrite the narrative so we can celebrate everyone's individual experience, whether their end game is college, employment, a family, living independently, making a new friend, making a meal, or making a bed. It all marks success, it is all a 10 out of 10. Goal, effort, success.

"Moving the goalpost" means changing the rules mid-task so players find it difficult to win. I think we need to tear down the goalpost altogether, to reframe success so it honors who is doing the work and how amazingly they are doing it.

British disability inclusion and accessibility strategist and consultant Dr. Shani Dhanda suggests several approaches to avoiding the comparison game and focusing on personal goals and growth. These modes include:

1. Watering your own grass. Dhanda states, "when we focus on other people, we lose time that we could otherwise invest in ourselves." So instead of assessing the vegetation on the other side of the fence, we should tend to our own lawns. And even if someone else's is greener, ours is still great to lie back on and daydream!
2. Accepting where you are. Denying or fighting your circumstances is not only useless, it feels pretty awful. Acknowledge where you stand so you can then point yourself in the right direction!
3. Being your own ally. Give yourself pep talks. Recognize all the great things you can and have done - then put a check mark in the "win" column! Nothing makes us compare ourselves to others less than appreciating who and where we are.
4. Comparing yourself with you. You are your own best motivator - look at the great things you've done and then challenge yourself to do even more.

Sometimes, it's not we who are doing the comparing - and coming up disappointed - but others. This becomes even more apparent during rites of passage like high school college decision day

when a certain percentage of the student population is thrilled to announce their future and the rest are left disdaining their own. Situations like these are where parents and professionals can help flip the script: instead of announcing college decisions, how about we all simply announce next years' plans? That way, all students can stand up proudly and let their classmates know that they may be going away to college or they are joining a college transition class, they may be going to work or they plan to work with DVRS to gain employment in the future. Success looks different to everyone - let's not present a small box into which everyone's goals are expected to fit.

Finally, we should remind everyone that future success has little to do with how much ivy is creeping up the walls up one's dorm; according to psychotherapist Dr. Dana Dorfman, "research... indicates that factors such as self-awareness, relationships, and effective communication are greater indicators of future success than the college one attends." We need to recognize that everyone's success is different and everyone's path to that success will reflect their individual journey.

Take that, #DecisionDay. And take that, Hare, too.



Voting isn't the only great way to make your voice heard!

You can join our new Youth Advisory Board to discuss issues that matter to you!
Because inclusion begins with awareness... Click below to sign up!



JOIN OUR NEW YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

There are 3 exciting ways to join!

First Meetings:

1/13/26 @ 6:00 pm for 14-17 year olds

1/13/26 @ 7:00 pm for 18-21 year olds

1/14/26 @ 10:30 am for 18-21 year olds

*Ideal for transition classes!

Link to register: <https://bit.ly/YAB1>

GET READY!

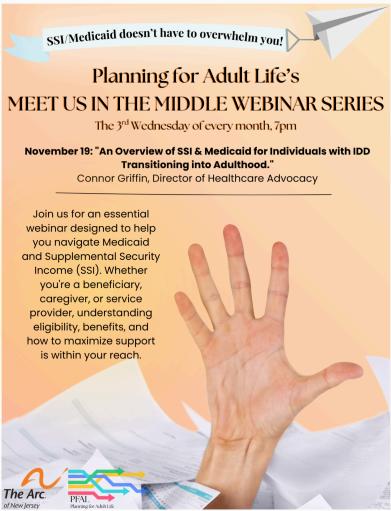


UPCOMING WEBINARS:

PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE: November 19, 7pm

""An Overview of SSI & Medicaid for Individuals with IDD Transitioning into Adulthood," with Connor Griffin, Director of The Arc of NJ's Healthcare Advocacy.

Join us for an essential webinar designed to help you navigate Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Whether you're a beneficiary, caregiver, or service provider, understanding eligibility, benefits, and how to maximize support is within your reach.



[Click here to register](#)

THE FAMILY INSTITUTE: November 11, 12pm

"Understanding Internet Safety for Individuals With IDD"

The Internet has dramatically changed the way we interact with the world, becoming a global means of communication in our daily lives. However, it also poses certain risks, such as exposure to cyberbullying, inappropriate material, online predators, and the potential for individuals to reveal too much personal information.

Hosted by The Arc of New Jersey Family Institute and presented by Erin Smithers, Director of the New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project, attendees will learn about internet safety and how to best support individuals with IDD on the internet.

[Click here to register](#)

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY: November 4, 12pm-1:30pm

"Understanding Transportation Options with the Vorhees Transportation Center"

NJTIP @ Rutgers teaches persons with disabilities and older adults how to safely and independently use public transportation to access where they need and want to go. Join an informative webinar with NJTIP travel instructor Jackie Ng, who will share how individuals with disabilities can confidently and safely navigate public transportation to reach their destinations. Learn about NJTIP's services, discover accessible transportation options available within New Jersey, and explore tools and resources to plan for and facilitate travel. Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your travel skills and independence!

Understanding Transportation Options in New Jersey

JOIN JACKIE NG FROM ALAN M. VORHEES
TRANSPORTATION CENTER AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY TO
LEARN MORE ABOUT THE VARIOUS TRANSPORTATION
SYSTEMS IN OUR STATE AND HOW TO GET CONNECTED

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4TH
12:00 PM

Click [here](#) to register



[Click here to register](#)

HEALTHCARE ADVOCACY: November 6, 9:30am-1:15pm

"Navigating the Medical Insurance Maze for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)"

A half day virtual conference for parents, caregivers, family members, direct support staff, and professionals who support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Navigating the Medical Insurance Maze for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)



November 6th, 2025
9:30am - 1:15pm EST

2025 Beverly Roberts Memorial
Healthcare Symposium

A half day virtual conference for parents, caregivers, family members, direct support staff, and professionals who support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

This event will include:

- A keynote presentation discussing the impact of H.R.1, the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," on Medicaid and health care in New Jersey;
- One workshop session highlighting Medicaid Fair Hearing, including an overview of the appeals process and how best to approach a reduction or termination of Medicaid services or Medicaid enrollment;
- A second workshop session highlighting "Dual Eligibility" - enrollment in both the Medicaid and Medicare programs, how Medicaid helps reduce Medicare cost-sharing, and the requirement of creditable drug coverage.



Conference Schedule

9:30am - 10:00am **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

10:00am - 10:45am **Keynote Speaker Presentation**
The Uncertain Future of Medicaid - How H.R.1 ("One Big Beautiful Bill Act") will Impact Medicaid and Health Care in New Jersey.
Kim Musheno, Senior Director of Medicaid Policy, The Arc of the U.S.

10:45am - 11:00am **Break**

11:00am - 12:00pm **Workshop #1**
Medicaid Appeals - How to Approach the Reduction or Termination of Medicaid Benefits and Eligibility
Stacy Bussel, Managing Attorney, Disability Rights New Jersey
Craig Ismaili, Supervising Attorney, Disability Rights New Jersey

12:00pm - 12:15pm **Break**

12:15pm - 1:15pm **Workshop #2**
"Dual Eligibility" - Understanding Medicare + Medicaid Enrollment and the Coordination of Benefits
Kelly Ott, NJ SHIP Counselor
Michele Lee, NJ SHIP Counselor

Certificates of attendance will be available.

The logo for The Arc of New Jersey, featuring a stylized orange and yellow swoosh above the text "The Arc" and "of New Jersey" below it.

[Click here to register](#)

WE HAVE TWO EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENTS!

1. Planning for Adult Life is thrilled to welcome our two new Transition Specialists, Becca Nash and Cat Lucey-Meagher! We look forward to working with teachers, transition staff, and parents to help usher your favorite students into adulthood!
2. We are proud to announce our Office Hours, **every Wednesday from 6-7pm!** Log on to ask questions, exchange ideas, or just say "hi!" Our doors are always open... You can find us at [this link!](#)

Thanks for reading! We'll see you next month... The Team at PFAL

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