

**ON THE JOB** - Jackie Jackson works at Wendy's in Burlington, NJ. She tracks her progress in a storewide customer service campaign that rewards employees for positive interactions with customers.

## Dedicated to Building a More Diverse Workforce Overcoming Challenges to Employment

In 2008, the U.S. Labor Department began tracking employment statistics for people with disabilities. Reports indicate the jobless rate for people with disabilities this August was 14.1 percent – nearly twice that of the rate for people without disabilities. Advancing Opportunities is dedicated to building a more diverse workforce and has provided employment services since 1985.

In July, **Margaret Gilbride** joined the agency as the Director of Employment Services as the department's previous director **Jaime Brown** transitioned into her new role as Residential Coordinator. "Employment is one of the most important dimensions through which to positively impact the quality of life for people with disabilities," said Ms. Gilbride.

"It addresses issues of financial and relational poverty; works to eradicate misperceptions held by the general population; gives individuals the opportunities to

meaningfully contribute to their communities and additionally enhances their levels of self-confidence and self-esteem," she said.

### Removing Barriers

"One barrier to employment is the misperception some employers have that people with disabilities will not be able to do the work efficiently, effectively or safely, which is just not true" she said. "On the flip side, employer-to-employer references are really powerful. When one employer speaks to another about the quality of hard and soft skills an employee with a disability has brought to his or her business, doors are opened.

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# Turning Houses into Homes

Dear Friends,

In August, our very first group home celebrated its one-year anniversary; this is a truly special milestone that resonates with me for two reasons.



First of all, it highlights the commitment our agency has made to develop housing opportunities for the men and women who are being transitioned out of the state's developmental centers. Right now in New Jersey there is a huge need for housing options and our agency has answered the call.

In addition to that first home, we have opened six other group homes around the state since last August and are on track to have seven more completed by year's end. Believe me, it is no small feat to get a residence purchased, renovated, licensed, staffed and inhabited. Seems like everything,

from funding sources to the stars, needs to fall into perfect alignment...

What you really need is a tremendously dedicated staff working diligently with focus and verve. Our Residential Services team, led by **Jackie Roberts-Diggs**, has been functioning in overdrive for the past two years to prepare these homes and we have even more on the horizon. Administratively, we've added **Chief Operating Officer, William Curnan**; and **Business Manager, Janet Zoda** and expanded our Human Resources team to keep it all moving smoothly forward. Everyone at the agency is dedicated to creating homes where people with disabilities can live with dignity and respect.

This brings me to the second reason I revere this milestone so much. I am overwhelmed by the encouragement and compassion our staff has for the three women who moved into this house. They have gone above and beyond to ensure Ruth, Mary Anne and

Debbie feel safe and comfortable in their new home. Getting these women out and about to enjoy all that living in the community has to offer has become a priority.

Each member of the staff in this home has fully committed to helping these women attain a higher quality of life and their performance is representative of all of the agency's direct support professionals. Integrity, reliability and kindness are hallmarks of the services our staff provided to the men and women in their care. I cannot tell you how gratifying it is to see the positive impact our services have on the people we serve.

We would not have celebrated this milestone without the support and generosity of friends like you. Thank you for your continued support. Together we are making a difference.

Sincerely,

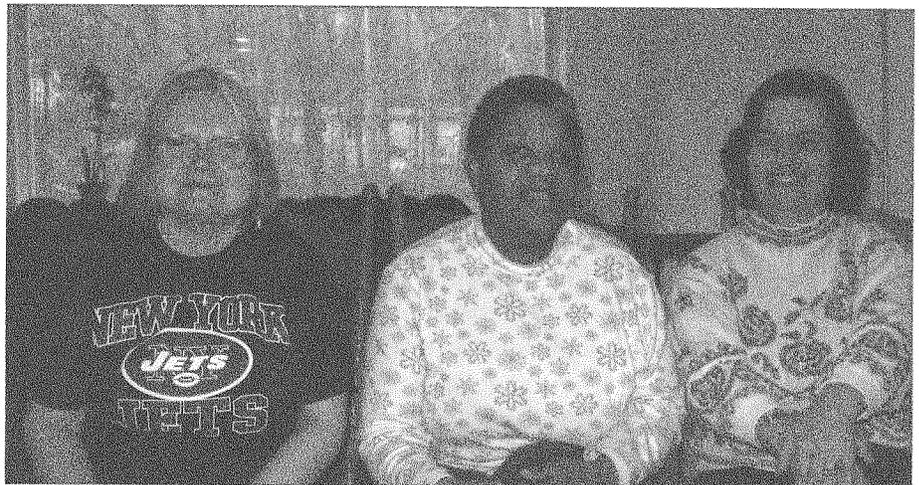


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**Chief Executive Officer**



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Advancing Opportunities/Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey helps children and adults with all types of disabilities gain independence. We believe people with disabilities have the right to participate fully in society. Since 1950, we have provided services, support, education and advocacy to individuals with disabilities and their families to help them lead fuller lives at home, at school, at work and at play.



**HOME AT LAST** – In their new home, (from left) Debbie, Ruth and Mary Anne have fun cooking together and looking for deer in the backyard through the big picture window in the living room.

# Dedicated to Building a More Diverse Workforce

## Overcoming Challenges to Employment

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Employers speak best of the richness that comes to the workplace by including disability as one of the elements of diversity reflected in their employee pool.”

The electronic age has created barriers too, said Gilbride and **Employment Specialist Carol Fairlie** agrees. “With employment websites and automated and online applications, job seekers with disabilities can get lost in the process. They don’t get a chance to highlight their special skills,” Fairlie said. “The key to securing employment for my consumers is in finding the right person to talk to, whether it’s the HR manager or business owner, and really persuading them to give this person a chance.”

A large part of her role as an Employment Specialist is finding jobs or volunteer positions for her consumers. It isn’t always easy. “I face a lot of rejection,” she said. “When I hear, ‘No,’ ‘No,’ ‘No,’ it weighs heavy on my heart. But it is all very worth it when you hear the one, ‘Yes.’ Finding the right job for the person is key--part of the challenge for the Employment Specialist is matching the person with a position that truly suits his or her abilities and interests.

Sometimes the road to competitive employment starts with exploring work strengths and interests in a volunteer position; Fairlie found one young woman a volunteer position in her local library. “This young woman is not really comfortable in social situations, but she has a real knack for remembering the Dewey Decimal system. She looks forward to spending time in the library and even though she’s volunteering, she treats it like her job.” The skill she is mastering, combined with the opportunity to become comfortable with work rules and expectations, will combine to help her define an employment opportunity in the future.

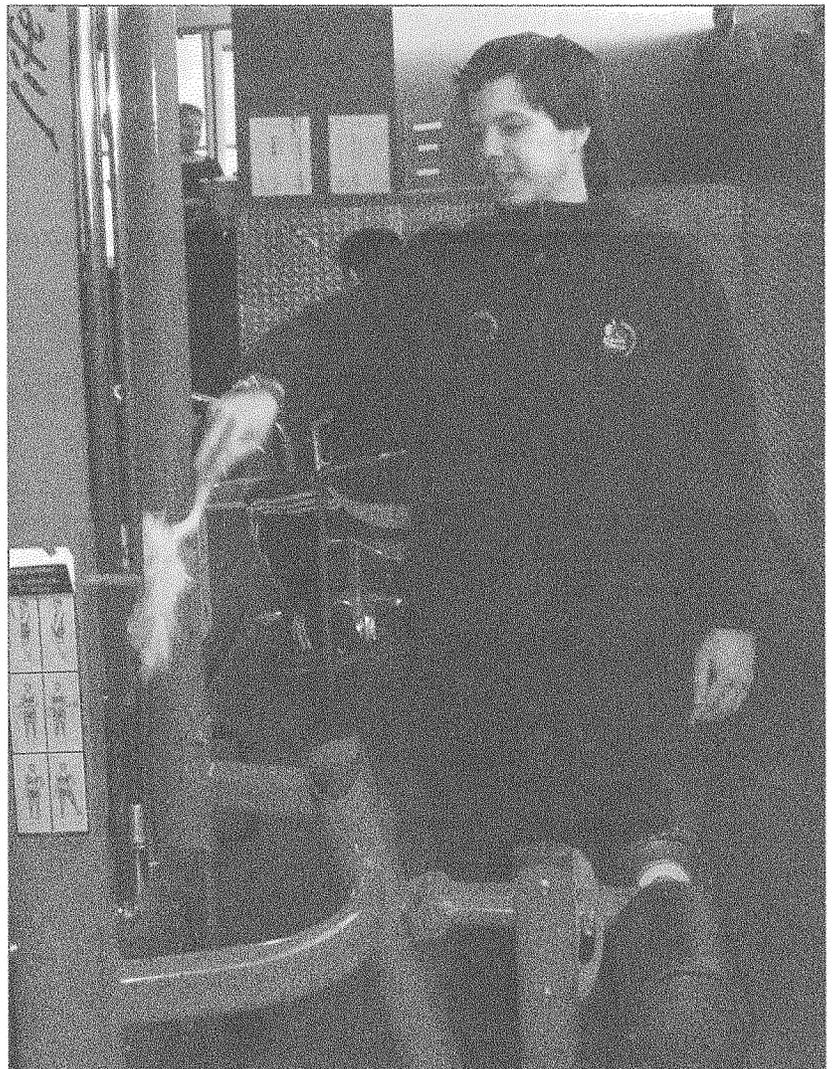
**Jackie Jackson** works at the Wendy’s in Burlington, NJ. She enjoys her shifts at the drive-thru window. “My customers are really wonderful,” she said. “I know when they come through, they are glad to see me.” Ms.

Jackson enjoys working so much, and the opportunities working affords, that she would like to increase her hours. She and Carol have been looking for an opportunity to either add to her hours at Wendy’s or supplement that position with a second job. “Jackie has been doing very well at Wendy’s and she’s very motivated to be working more,” said Fairlie.

### Job Coaching and Follow-Along

In addition to helping people find jobs, the Employment Specialists take steps to assist people in learning their jobs and then maintaining their employment over time. They often act as a liaison between the worker and the employer. If

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**ON THE JOB** - With the help of Employment Specialist Doris Heffernan, Eric Kotchkowski landed a job at Planet Fitness in the Roxbury Mall in Succasunna, NJ.

Spring Gala 2013

# Thank You for an Amazing Evening!

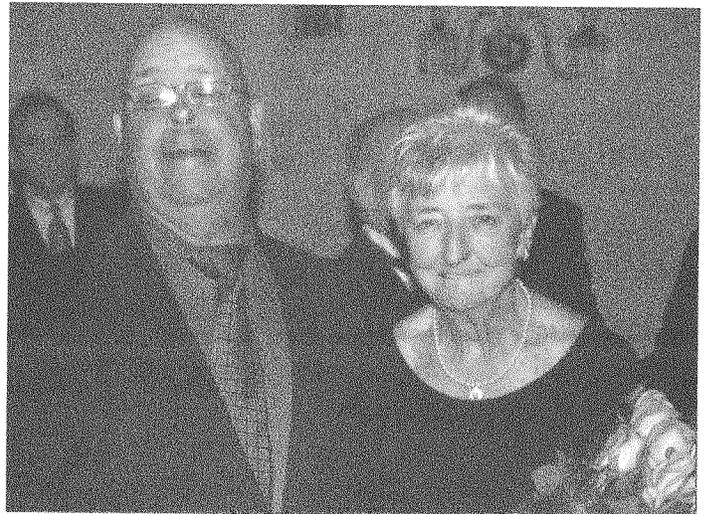
Advancing Opportunities held its 24th Annual Spring Gala celebrating those who share and support its mission on Saturday, May 11, 2013.

This year, Lawrenceville resident and George Washington University student **Jagggar DeMarco** was recognized with the Andrew J. Murphy Award in honor of a young man who was born with severe disabilities but who never let his physical limitations prevent him from following his dreams.

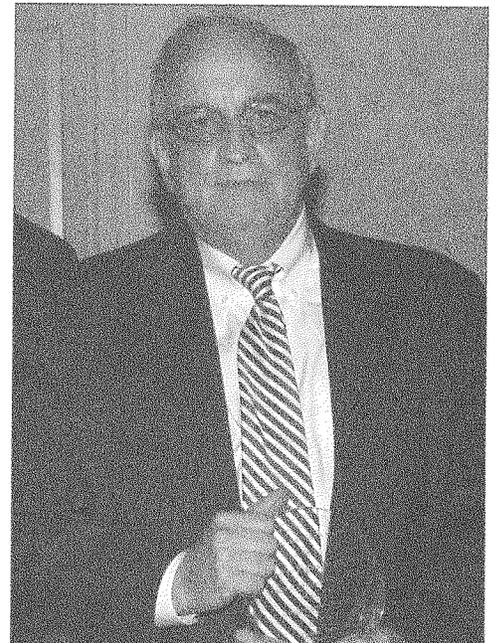
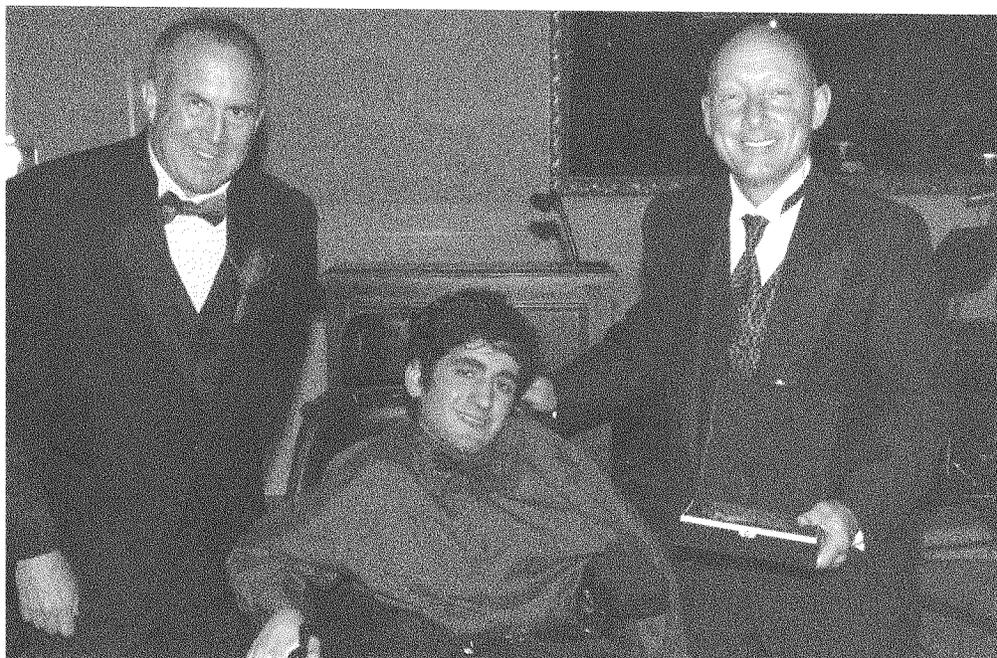
The agency was pleased to honor **Penn Jersey Paper Company** as its Philanthropist of the Year. Penn Jersey Paper Company, which is celebrating its 50th year in business, is a longtime and ardent supporter of Advancing Opportunities and its endeavors.

The agency presented the Elizabeth M. Boggs Award for Advocacy to **Disability Rights New Jersey**, an organization dedicated to advancing the human, civil and legal rights of persons with disabilities. Its Executive Director **Joseph B. Young** accepted the award.

The agency also paid tribute to Development Officer **Liz Graham** for 20 years of fundraising excellence.



**OUR ESTEEMED HONOREES** - (Clockwise from top) Thomas Furia Jr., President and COO of Penn Jersey Paper Company receives the Philanthropy Award from board member Michael Rothwell of Pennington Quality Market. Board member Bill Smith congratulates Liz Graham on the Excellence in Fundraising Award. Joseph B. Young accepted the Elizabeth M. Boggs Award for Advocacy on behalf of Disability Rights New Jersey and CEO Jack Mudge board member Jim Spano presented Jagggar DeMarco with the Andrew J. Murphy Award.



# Three-Year Accreditation Awarded CARF International Reviews Agency

Advancing Opportunities learned in August its Employment Services Department earned a three-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International) in Community Employment Services after undergoing a two-day audit in July.

Surveyors **Cynthia Roling**, Executive Director of Milieu Connexus Svyc in Burnaby, British Columbia, and **George Molano**, District Director of Hope Services in Seaside, California, performed a full review of the agency's employment services and its administrative practices.

"A three-year accreditation, the highest awarded by CARF, is a testament to this agency's commitment

to providing quality services and following best practices," said Chief Executive Officer Jack Mudge. "Not only did they look at our Employment Services but at how the agency operates as a whole, including our policies and procedures, business operations and the way we interact with and respond to all of our stakeholders," he said.

The survey report noted, "Advancing Opportunities is currently in the process of rapidly expanding its services. The impact, both financially and operationally, is anticipated to be significant. The newly formed leadership team has adopted a strategic plan to guide the service development. There are systems in place to

capture input from the persons served and other stakeholders. The organization's finances appear well managed, budgets are developed, and reports of financial performance are timely."

The report also noted that Advancing Opportunities has recently implemented AWARDS software from Foothold and suggested several ways in which the agency could use the new database to identify and analyze performance indicators. "As an agency, we will take CARF's recommendations to heart to continue improving our services and the way we do business," said Mudge.

"I want to thank our **Quality Assurance Manager Anne Ginterreiter** and members of the Employment Services department for all of their hard working preparing for the audit. Their efforts most certainly contributed to our optimal outcome," he said.



## Overcoming Challenges to Employment

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accommodations are required, they can help the employee communicate just what is needed and they can help the employer with implementation.

Employment Specialists also provide extra training and make certain an employee knows what is expected from the start. **Employment Specialist Doris Heffernan** helped **Eric Kotchkowski** with his job search. "When he applied to Planet Fitness we practiced together before he went in for his interview," she said. Since Eric got the position, Doris checks in periodically while he's at work. She helps reinforce the things the manager has told Eric and helps make sure he is fulfilling all of the requirements of the job.

Many of the men and women to whom Advancing Opportunities provides employment services have been referred to the agency by the NJ Division of

Vocational Rehabilitation or by the Division of Developmental Disabilities. The department also works with school districts around the state, helping students transition from school to adult life.

"My goal is to make Advancing Opportunities' Employment Services the premier supported employment provider in New Jersey through utilizing best practices in person-centered career planning and employer-consultation; keeping up-to-date on the community employment research in the field and establishing a continuous training and development plan to enhance staff skills and knowledge," said Gilbride.

For more information about Advancing Opportunities' Employment Services program or about hiring an individual with a disability, contact Margaret Gilbride at 609-508-6649 or [mgilbride@advopps.org](mailto:mgilbride@advopps.org).

## Charting Your Course

# Families Connect, Learn at Forum

“As the parent, you have the power,” was one of the key points parent-advocate **Nicole Pratt** shared with the families who attended a one-day workshop for participants of Advancing Opportunities’ Strengthening Families Program – Autism training series.

Ms. Pratt, a single parent raising two children, both of whom receive special education services, was the featured speaker for the forum, “Charting Your Course: Resources for Families Living with Autism,” held Saturday, June 8, 2013 at Mercer County Community College.

Nearly 20 families who had participated in the SFP – Autism training series offered by the agency since the program was created in 2010 gathered to share experiences and ideas, and participate in some refresher exercises designed to improve communication skills. Participants rounded out the day hearing a dynamic presentation from Ms. Pratt.

She encouraged families to educate themselves about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and learn what services and supports their children are entitled to. “You have to know and understand the law,” she told parents, “so even if the district says no, you can keep plugging away.”

She suggested families use advocacy services, like those offered by Advancing Opportunities, to ensure positive outcomes. “There is no perfect school district,”

she said. “But with the right tools and information, you can connect with your district and get your children what they need. Don’t be afraid to seek out that help. You need information to do what you need to do. You have to keep pushing; it is important to your child’s success.”

“You have to have the courage to ask for what your child needs even if you think the answer is going to be a no. Your child is counting on you.”  
Nicole Pratt, Parent Advocate

Ms. Pratt also recommended families create a network to help sustain them. “Build supports. Connect with other parents. My son Jordan has Scoliosis and is having back surgery soon. People are calling me, asking what they can do to help me and my family. And I am confident that I have all the support I will need. That’s how much support you have to have. So much support that you don’t even have to ask for it – people just come up and give it to you.”

She said courage is a most important virtue for parents who have a child with a disability. “You have to have the courage to ask for what your child needs, even if you think the answer is going to be a no. Your child is counting on you.”

Miss Pratt serves on the Jersey City Special Ed Advisory Council and is a Surrogate parent for New Jersey’s Early Intervention System. She is also an advisory member to the New Jersey Commission for the Blind.

The Strengthening Families Program – Autism is funded by the NJ Department of Children and Families. For more information about Advancing Opportunities’ Advocacy Services call 888-322-1918 ext. 544.

**EMPOWERING FAMILIES** - Parent-advocate Nicole Pratt shares her experiences as the single parent of two children with special needs.



# Do You Need a Special Education Advocate?

## Ensuring Students Receive All of the Programs and Services They Are Eligible For

Advancing Opportunities' Advocacy Department offers assistance to people with disabilities and their families in removing the barriers that prevent them from gaining access to the programs and services to which they are entitled or eligible.

"Our advocates can help challenge institutional decisions, as well as help strengthen cases by identifying the evaluations necessary to prove a need for a service," said **Tazee Mahjied, Director of Advocacy Services**. "Many of the families we serve need help communicating with their school districts," he continued.

The agency's advocates use state and federal laws including IDEA, section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, to advocate for the rights and needs of individuals with disabilities. "Our knowledge of these regulations, along with nearly 20 years of experience working with school districts, allows us to help ensure students receive a free, appropriate education," he said.

During the past year, advocates from Advancing Opportunities helped several students remain in school through entitlement age. They have also helped parents get their children with disabilities into public or mainstream childcare facilities.

Advocates helped one young lady secure a one-to-one aide for a summer theater program and assisted a family in getting an aide assigned to accompany their son on the school bus.

"We can also help make sure a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) fully addresses the transition period when a student either graduates from high school or ages out of his or her district," he said.

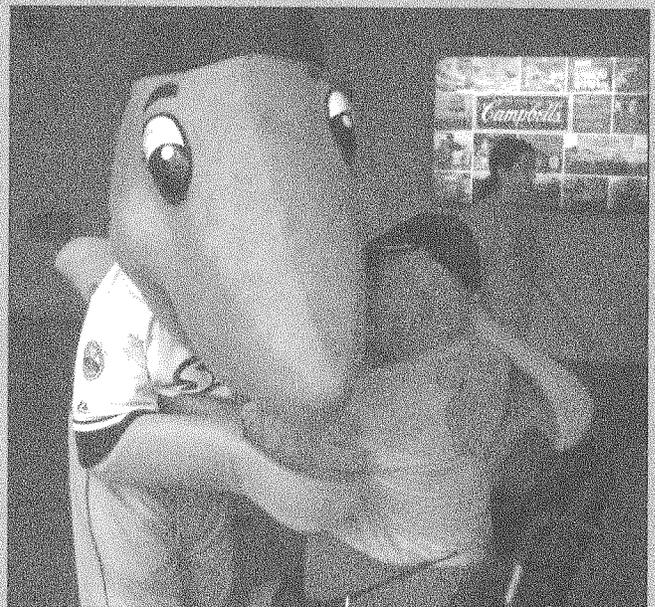
The agency works with individuals or consumers and their families who are registered and receiving services from either the Department of Children and Families or the Division of Developmental Disabilities.

For information on working with an advocate, contact us today by calling toll free 888-322-1918 ext. 546.

### Take Me Out to the Ball Game



**SPORTS FANS** - Tom W. reaches to greet the Camden Rivershark's mascot Finley. His friend Ernie B. got a great big hug when the pair attended a baseball game together this summer. The men, who receive residential supports from the agency, share an apartment in Woodstown, NJ.



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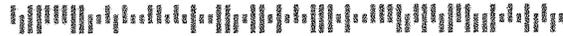
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All Disabilities. Many Services. One Agency.

# Advancing Opportunities Is Hiring!

Advancing Opportunities is looking for compassionate individuals to join its team of caring, well-trained direct support professionals.

Responsibilities include providing direct services to men and women with disabilities in residential support programs. This entails providing supervision and/or assistance with personal care, daily living activities, recreational pursuits, transportation, medical appointments, or any other needs the individuals served by the program may have.

Candidates should have one year of related experience working with people with disabilities. Must have valid driver's license and be at least 18 years of age. As a condition of employment, applicants will be screened for criminal background history and are required to submit to drug testing. Paid training is provided.

For more information visit [www.advopps.org](http://www.advopps.org) and click on the Employment link. Fax resumes to 609-882-4054 or email them to [info@advopps.org](mailto:info@advopps.org).

Advancing Opportunities is an Equal Opportunity Employer

