



**IVY LEAGUE LEARNING** -- Brian Meersma is finishing up his freshman year at Cornell University. A native of Princeton Junction, Brian has dyslexia and has struggled with reading since he was in elementary school. Assistive technology helped Brian succeed in school and he has teamed up with Advancing Opportunities' Assistive Technology Services Department to help spread the word.

## Tapping Social Media to Highlight Possibilities Assistive Technology Provides Solutions

Advancing Opportunities' Assistive Technology Services Department is a collection of AT professionals who are passionate about the positive impact assistive technology can have for people with disabilities, and they are dedicated to spreading the word. In 2014, the team revamped its website, [www.assistivetechcenter.org](http://www.assistivetechcenter.org), and launched a new YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/user/assistivetechcenter](http://www.youtube.com/user/assistivetechcenter) in an effort to educate people about what is possible with assistive technology. Both online outlets feature real examples of people with disabilities using assistive technology to improve their quality of life -- by living more independently and reaching their fullest potential. A blog on the website, written by members of the AT team, features case studies and observations on the latest developments in AT. For the YouTube channel, the department hired Rider University student **Anita Chomenko** to help them produce **AT Stories**, a series of six videos featuring people using different types of

assistive technology. One features a woman who is deaf and uses her iPad and several different apps to communicate with others who don't know American Sign Language and one shows a man with visual impairments from North Brunswick, NJ who runs his antique shop with a screen-reader.

In his video, Brian Meersma talks about how reading tools and sites like Bookshare have helped him overcome his dyslexia. A student finishing up his freshman year at Cornell University, Brian uses Learning Ally and Bookshare, online libraries with accessible, downloadable books for people with various print disabilities. These programs allow him to download reading materials from their websites

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# Celebrating 65 Years of Service

Dear Friend,

Advancing Opportunities celebrates a milestone this year: 65 years of service to people with disabilities and their families. The agency traces its roots back to a group of parents with children who had cerebral palsy; they banded together to advocate for their children.



The initial mission of the group was to help each other meet the challenges their families faced in raising their children. Those families faced barriers, a lack of services, and attitudes that were, at times, less than congenial. The parents persevered. The vision they had for their sons and daughters was that they would be welcomed in their communities; that their abilities and strengths would be recognized; and that they would be nurtured to grow and reach their fullest potential.

Sixty-five years later, this agency continues their vital work. As we go about celebrating our 65 years of service, we note that this year also marks an anniversary for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). On July, 26, 2015, it will be 25 years since the landmark legislation was signed by President George H. W. Bush. And while attitudes and laws about people with disabilities have changed -- children with disabilities are educated in their local school districts and people with developmental disabilities are living in the community instead of in institutions -- there is still work to do. Sometimes parents have to fight pretty hard to ensure their children are included, really included, in the classroom. Accessible housing is in limited supply, especially low income accessible housing and that is unfortunate because the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is much higher than it is for people without.

We still have work to do. Businesses and

institutions may be ADA compliant to the letter of the law, but it is not until the spirit of the law resonates with all Americans, and people with disabilities are truly included and their needs fully considered, that our work will be done.

To give you an idea of the scope of our efforts, we provided services and supports to more than 3,000 individuals with disabilities and their families last year.

Our Family Support Specialists provided over 30,000 hours of recreational and respite services to families that have a member with a disability. Our Employment Specialists helped 68 people with disabilities find or keep a job. Our Prevention Education programs provided family skills training to over 30 families in Mercer County. Our residential programs provided supports to over 72 men and women with developmental disabilities in community-based housing around the state. Our Assistive Technology Services Department performed hundreds of evaluations and trainings to advance the independence of people using technology.

We have expanded our communication efforts to include Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, where we share information and keep the dialogue about disabilities moving forward. I would encourage you to check us out the next time you are online and join the discussion.

So, we may be 65 years old, but we are in no way sitting still. Advancing Opportunities will continue to look for new ways to serve people with disabilities and improve its services.

The agency could not do all it does to improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities without generous donations from friends, like you. Thank you for your continued support. Together we are making a difference in the lives of people with all kinds of disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack M. Mudge".

Jack M. Mudge

Chief Executive Officer  
Advancing Opportunities, Inc.

# FREE Trainings Underscore Link Between Disability and Substance Abuse

Did you know the instance of substance abuse is considerably higher among individuals with disabilities than it is among the general population?

Advancing Opportunities offers free training to providers of disability services and to providers of substance abuse treatment programs to increase awareness and help remove barriers to treatment for people with disabilities.

The key to helping individuals with co-existing disabilities and substance abuse issues is to get the disability service providers to recognize the signs and symptoms of substance abuse and then refer them to accredited treatment providers.

It is also necessary for substance abuse treatment and prevention service providers to understand their

programs need to be accessible for people with all types of disabilities, including physical, cognitive impairments, and mental illness as well.

The free trainings feature information on removing physical, programmatic and attitudinal barriers to treatment; understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act; and identifying risk factors for substance abuse.

Presentations are given by Advancing Opportunities' Director of Prevention Services Beverly Burns. To schedule a free seminar or for more information, contact Ms. Burns at 609-882-4182 ext. 513 or via email at [bburns@advopps.org](mailto:bburns@advopps.org). These trainings are funded by the New Jersey Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services.

## Join Us for a Party 65 Years in the Making

Advancing Opportunities is gearing up for an epic evening on Saturday, May 9, 2015. The agency will be celebrating its 65th Anniversary during the Annual Spring Gala and the evening promises to be spectacular. This year's gala will be held at Forsgate Country Club in Monroe Township, NJ and will feature cocktails, a silent auction, dinner and dancing.

During the evening, the agency will honor individuals and organizations that share its vision and support its mission.

The Corporate Citizenship Award will be presented to EisnerAmper LLP. Paula S. Lieb, CEO Emeritus of the New

Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education, will receive the Elizabeth M. Boggs Award for Advocacy and Erin Saunders of Burlington Township, NJ, will be presented with the Andrew J. Murphy Award.

To become a sponsor or help plan this exciting event, contact Liz Graham at 609-882-4182 ext. 520 or email her at [lgraham@advopps.org](mailto:lgraham@advopps.org). Registration is available online at [www.advopps.org](http://www.advopps.org)

*Anniversary Gala*



**Advancing Opportunities**  
*All Disabilities. Many Services. One Agency.*

**Address:** 1005 Whitehead Road Extension, Ewing, New Jersey 08638

**Voice:** 609-882-4182 **Toll Free:** 1-888-322-1918

**Fax:** 609-882-4054

**Online:** [www.advopps.org](http://www.advopps.org) **Email:** [info@advopps.org](mailto:info@advopps.org)

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, school, work and play.

**65** Years of Service



# Family Support Snapshot

***BUILDING BRIDGES** – Direct Support Professional Erica Colucci (left) accompanied Holly Petrelli to Camp Liberty Lakes in Columbus, NJ this summer. With a little bit of guidance from Erica, Holly was able to participate in many different activities with her peers.*

## Respite Options Provide Families A Much Needed Break

For families caring for a member who has a disability, sometimes getting to the simple chores can be challenging. Or parents have trouble carving out quality time to spend with one another or their children who don't have disabilities.

Advancing Opportunities offers several different services that fall under the family support umbrella – the variety helps ensure the services offered fit a family's needs. During fiscal year 2014, Advancing Opportunities provided over 30,000 hours of respite services to families across New Jersey. Here are just a few snapshots of what Family Support Services can look like during the course of a year.

The agency can provide a one-to-one aide for children with disabilities so they can participate in community-based activities alongside their non-disabled peers. Twins

**Sydney and Holly Petrelli** attended camp at Liberty Lakes in Columbus, NJ, with this type of support. Each girl was accompanied by an aide who helped her navigate the spacious grounds and her personalized schedule. The two were among over 50 children who attended camp this summer with these kinds of supports.

During the school year, this program also provides aides who accompany children as they participate in a wide variety of activities like scouting, municipal sports programs, swimming class, karate lessons, community theater productions or after school programs .

In-home respite provides individualized care for children and adults with disabilities in the home or at a community-based setting of their choosing. Services provided by respite care



# Respite and Recreation Options

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workers may include activities of daily living, in-home recreational activities, preparation of light meals for the child or help with homework. Ilesha Falen provided in-home respite care for **Sarah Weber**, who is eight. For five hours each week, Ilesha and Sarah play and interact in the family's home while Sarah's parents **Maria and Karl Weber** are able to accomplish household projects without interruption or simply spend time with one another.

The agency's Parents' Night Out, Adults' Night Out and Weekend Rec programs are all drop-off respite programs that give caregivers a break while providing supervised, group activities for individuals with disabilities. It's a win-win situation.

One of the favorite activities for the Weekend Rec program offered in Passaic County is a visit to Van Houten Lanes for an afternoon of pizza, bowling and fun.

Some of the other community-based activities include trips to the movies, local theater events, cooking classes, and seasonal trips to farms and festivals. Some programs also feature site-based activities like theme parties, craft and game events and karaoke parties. The weekly events are listed on the agency's website and families who have registered in advance can sign up online.

## Visit Us At The Abilities Expo May 1 through 3 in Edison

Mark your calendars for this year's Abilities Expo! It will be held Friday, May 1 through Sunday, May 3, 2015 at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center in Edison.

Advancing Opportunities is pleased to be a sponsor. When you're there, be sure and stop by the Assistive Technology Pavilion and say hello to members of Advancing Opportunities' Assistive Technology Services Department who will be conducting hands-on demonstrations of a variety of the latest devices.

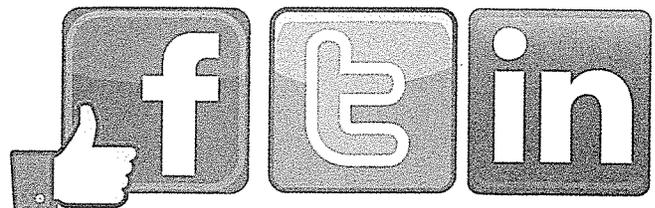
Admission is free. You can expedite the registration process by registering online at [www.abilitiesexpo.com/newyork/index.html](http://www.abilitiesexpo.com/newyork/index.html). We look forward to seeing you there!

Advancing Opportunities provides Family Support Services for families who are registered with the NJ Division of Children and Families, the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities and for families who are on self-pay or fee-for-service plans.

For more information about Advancing Opportunities' Family Support Services, please visit [www.advopps.org/famsupp](http://www.advopps.org/famsupp) or send an email to [info@advopps.org](mailto:info@advopps.org).



**BOWLING PARTY** – Participants of Passaic County's Weekend Rec program recently enjoyed a visit to Van Houten Lanes in Clifton, NJ.



## Join us on Social Media

Like us on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/AdvancingOpportunities](http://www.facebook.com/AdvancingOpportunities)

Follow us on Twitter: [@AdvOpps](https://twitter.com/AdvOpps)

Connect with us on LinkedIn:

[www.linkedin.com/company/advancing-opportunities](http://www.linkedin.com/company/advancing-opportunities)

# 65

Years of Service

## Person-Centered Planning for Job Seekers Kessler Funds Employment Initiative

The Kessler Foundation awarded Advancing Opportunities \$50,000 to fund a new initiative: "Advancing Employment Through Person-Centered Planning," in Mercer and Middlesex counties. The program augments the community employment services typically provided by the agency with a creative, highly individualized planning process that will be facilitated by staff from Neighbours, Inc.

"Employment provides so many things beyond a paycheck," said Advancing Opportunities' CEO Jack Mudge. "In addition to earning a living, having a job helps people connect socially with co-workers and others in the community. Employment adds to a person's sense of self and can be a springboard to personal growth and learning new things. The Kessler Foundation and Neighbours Inc., share our firm belief that people of all abilities have a place in New Jersey's workforce. Together, we look forward to helping residents in Mercer and Middlesex counties develop personalized, comprehensive plans for overcoming barriers to employment," he said

This new partnership targets two types of job seekers: people with physical disabilities who

have open cases with the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and job seekers whose physical disabilities appear so severe, they have been deemed ineligible for services from DVR.

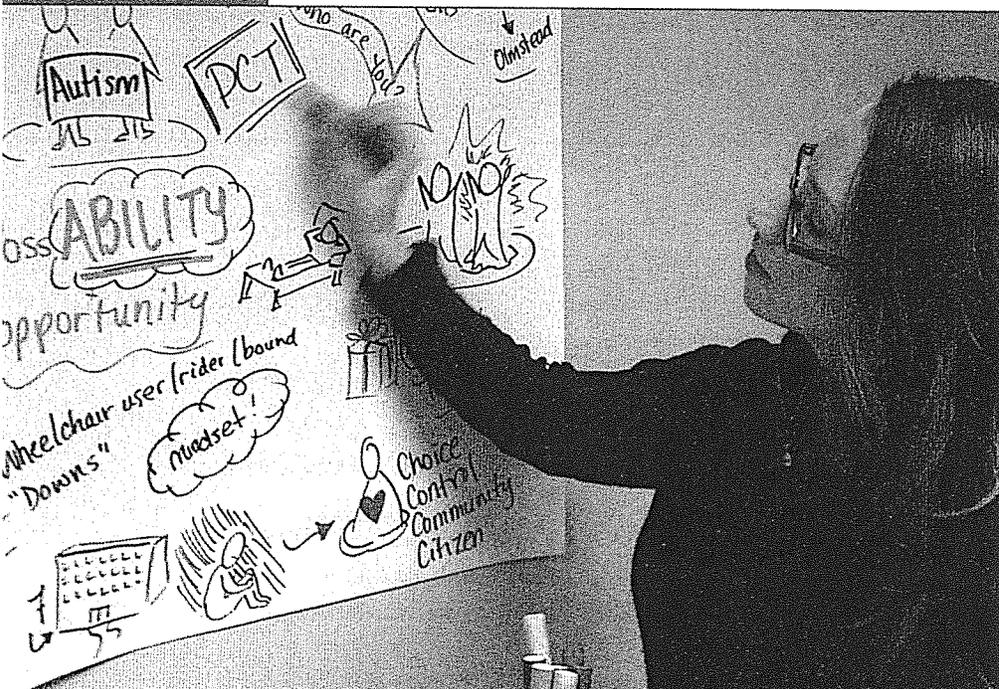
Each program participant will work with a Facilitator from Neighbours, Inc. who will guide the job seeker through Person-Centered Planning (PCP) meetings that utilize MAP and PATH tools. The MAP session will help create a personal profile for participants by detailing his or her history, identifying dreams and fears, highlighting strengths, likes, and abilities, and noting necessary supports and needs. The PATH process begins with person's vision for the future and, working backwards from that goal, develops a plan on how to achieve it. Using the PATH tool, Facilitators and participants will create a comprehensive, individualized job development plan that identifies employment goals, establishes timelines, and assigns actions.

When the planning process is complete, the job seekers will work with Advancing Opportunities' Employment Specialists on finding a job. The Employment Specialists will also serve as liaisons to the agency's Assistive

Technology Department to ensure that assistive technology accommodations are considered during the process.

For more information about person-centered planning for employment contact **Assistant Director of Employment Services Karl Craft** at 609-882-4182 ext. 502 or via email at [kcraft@advopps.org](mailto:kcraft@advopps.org).

MAP & PATH FACILITATOR Cailin Kehoe of Neighbour's Inc. demonstrates the highly individualized process of planning that will be used to help job seekers with disabilities secure and maintain employment.



# Thank You to Our Funders!

## Grants Help Ensure Mobile Services Continue

Advancing Opportunities recently received awards of \$10,000 from both the **Hyde and Watson Foundation** and from **OritaniBank Charitable Foundation** to help defray the cost of a new van to be used as a mobile assistive technology workshop.

The agency currently has two of these workshops and the rehabilitation technologists who drive the specially equipped trucks create custom accommodations that allow people with all kinds of disabilities live more independently. With drill presses, hand tools, saws, heat benders, and even an electric frying pan for molding plastics, the trucks are well equipped and let the technicians create solutions. In most cases, a technician can visit an individual, assess the situation, draft a solution, take measurements and build whatever is needed in one trip. In the same visit, he can install, test and make any necessary modifications to the accommodation.

Recently, one of our rehabilitation technicians built a t-shaped bench that attaches onto the wheelchair used by a young woman with cerebral palsy. Using this bench, the girl can transfer, by herself, from her wheelchair onto a toilet.

The bench was designed based on the measurements of the girl, her wheelchair and the bathroom where it will be used. It's pretty safe to say, there's not another one like it anywhere. The bench, which gives the young woman independence and privacy in the bathroom, was built for her on-site by an ATS technician in one of the agency's mobile workshops.

It will cost approximately \$30,000 to purchase and outfit the van. Anyone interested in covering the remainder needed to purchase the van, please contact **Development Officer Liz Graham** at [lgraham@advopps.org](mailto:lgraham@advopps.org) or at 609-882-4182 ext. 511.

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## Using Social Media to Spread the Word About Assistive Technology

### FROM PAGE 1

and then, using their software, the text is read back to him. He has also found success using Kurzweil 3000 and various apps on his iPhone.

Brian shares the agency's commitment to promoting the possibilities AT creates. On his Assistive Technology Blog, [bdmtech.blogspot.com](http://bdmtech.blogspot.com), he posts app reviews and information on assistive technology devices and services for people with reading disabilities, dyslexia, low vision, blindness and

other types of learning disabilities.

This multi-media initiative, lead by Assistive Technology Services Department Director Fred Tchang, was funded by a grant from the Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center at Disability Rights New Jersey.

With this network in place, Advancing Opportunities' Assistive Technology Services Department will continue to share individuals' success stories, AT breakthroughs and insights. The goal is to educate everyone about assistive technology.

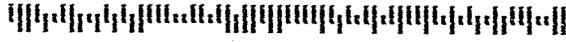
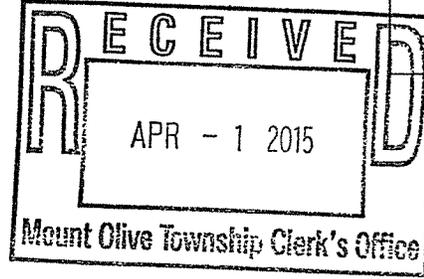




**Advancing Opportunities**

1005 Whitehead Road Extension  
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## **DDD Pre-Service Training Series Offered in Camden, Mercer and Morris Counties**

Advancing Opportunities is an approved training agency for the New Jersey Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and offers the five pre-service trainings that are required for Direct Support Professionals: Overview of Developmental Disabilities, Preventing Abuse and Neglect, Medications, American Red Cross First Aid and American Red Cross Adult CPR.

The trainings are offered in Camden County at the agency's office at 208 Whitehorse Pike in Barrington, in Mercer County at the office at 1005 Whitehead Road Extension in Ewing and in Morris County at the agency's locations at 98 US Highway 46 in Budd Lake and 322 US Highway 46 West in Parsippany.

Updated training schedules are listed on the agency's website at [www.advopps.org/training](http://www.advopps.org/training). To register or with questions, contact trainer Jaimie Szparagowski at [jszparagowski@advopps.org](mailto:jszparagowski@advopps.org).



**65** Years of Service