

Mission & History

The mission of AHEDD is to serve the community as a catalyst in the employment and development of persons with disabilities. The agency was established in 1977 to serve as an alternative to segregated training programs for persons with developmental disabilities. Prior to incorporation as an independent, non-profit organization, AHEDD was a demonstration project of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC), a statewide advocacy organization. PARC was instrumental in spearheading the Right to Education that ensured access to education for every individual with a disability.

AHEDD's initial employment approach in the 1970s was a "work station in industry," resembling today's enclaves. By the early 1980s, AHEDD's model evolved to the one on one job coaching approach. During this time, AHEDD routinely placed individuals who had been deemed "not job ready." It was not until 1985-86 with the advent of Supported Employment that this employment model was officially accepted throughout the vocational rehabilitation system. Since then, AHEDD has provided Job Coaching & Supported Employment through a field office network throughout PA and DE, including urban and rural areas, to adults with all types of physical and mental disabilities. In 1994, AHEDD developed a School to Work program in collaboration with local schools in the transition of students with disabilities. Initially sponsored by a federal grant, this effort has continued through support by schools and the state vocational rehabilitation.

In 1980, AHEDD established an independent for-profit company, Red Rose Services. This custodial contracting firm based in Lancaster, PA later expanded to York, PA and Wilmington, DE. The compelling aspect of the Red Rose story was that not only did it provide employment for persons with severe disabilities, but these employees were owners and acquired equity as the business evolved and expanded.

During 1985-1987 AHEDD was selected by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to serve in the Transitional Employment Training Demonstration (TETD) administered by Mathematica Policy Research. This project provided the impetus leading to specific work incentives for persons receiving Supplemental Security Income. In 2001, AHEDD was selected by SSA to serve in the Benefits Planning Assistance & Outreach Program, providing benefits counseling and education on work incentives to beneficiaries. In addition, AHEDD has begun to serve as an Employment Network in the Ticket to Work. AHEDD's work with SSA reflects the agency's values that employment is a means to increase financial independence and decreasing dependency on government subsidies.

At its core, AHEDD has maintained a positive relationship with the business community at its core. Programs such as the Volunteer Interview Network of Employers (VINE) were developed to give Human Resource Personnel regular opportunity to interact with individuals with a disability. In 2000, AHEDD was selected to coordinate the PA Business Leadership Network, a business to business program creating forums for business leaders to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.