

Mission & History

The mission of AHEDD is to serve the community as a catalyst in the employment and development of people with disabilities. Our passion for community employment includes support for youth and adults with all types of disabilities, physical and cognitive, and those that come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and varying levels of academic achievement and work experience.

Prior to incorporation in 1977, our organization was a demonstration project under the auspices of what was then known as the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (today known as the Arc of PA), a statewide advocacy organization. PARC was instrumental in spearheading landmark Right to Education legislation (PL 94-142) that ensured access to a free and appropriate education for every individual with a disability.

We were initially an alternative to the segregated training programs available for people with developmental disabilities. Our employment approach of the 1970s was described as a “work station in industry”. This approach bore resemblance to today’s enclave model, where groups of individuals carry out work within a business but are not employed by the business. By the early 1980s, our model evolved to a one-on-one place and train job coaching model and we began expanding to a larger target group of people with disabilities.

Responding to a severe economic recession, AHEDD established an independent for-profit company called Red Rose Services in 1980. This custodial contracting firm based in Lancaster, PA later expanded to York, PA and Wilmington, DE. Red Rose Services not only provided jobs to people with severe disabilities, but these workers all owned this company.

It was not until 1985-86, with the advent of Supported Employment, that our agency’s community employment model was officially accepted throughout the vocational rehabilitation system. Around the same time (1985), the Social Security Administration (SSA) engaged AHEDD in a Transitional Employment Training Demonstration (TETD) project that eventually led to the development of specific work incentives for persons receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

In 1994, our agency developed a school-to-work program focused on the transition of students with disabilities. Initially sponsored by a federal grant, the effort has continued to expand through the direct financial support of school districts.

To expose human resource personnel to our program participants and assist these job seekers in preparing for job interviews, we developed the Volunteer Interview Network of Employers (VINE) in the 1980s and were later (2000) selected to coordinate the PA Business Leadership Network (PA-BLN). The PA BLN is a business-to-business initiative that allows companies to learn about and promote the employment of persons with disabilities.

In 2001, AHEDD began to contract with SSA under the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA) and Ticket to Work Program (TTW). Our participation in these programs has been an effort to address the common employment fears of SSA beneficiaries and to offer these individuals greater choice on where to get employment support.

For further information about AHEDD’s Mission and History, contact AHEDD at 1-866-902-4333 or inforequest@ahedd.org.