Grantee Innovation Spotlight
Career Path Program

About This Series

The Administration on Disabilities (AoD) Disability Employment Technical Assistance Center (DETAC) *Grantee Innovation Spotlights* showcase innovative practices implemented by AoD grantees to advance competitive, integrated employment and economic outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The *Spotlights* highlight replicable, scalable programs, outcomes, and lessons learned to inform AoD grantees and partners. Visit the DETAC website to access the full collection of *Spotlights*.

Program Overview

About Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

CILs are local, community-based nonprofits providing in-person support to help people with disabilities thrive and live independently. Visit the Administration for Community Living (ACL) CIL webpage to learn more.

For more than 15 years, the **Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living (LVCIL)** has helped youth and adults with disabilities pursue competitive integrated employment through its Career Path program. Grounded in independent living philosophy, Career Path helps participants identify their strengths, explore career interests, build workplace skills, and pursue employment aligned with their interests and long-term goals. Career Path was developed to address gaps in employment and transition services for young adults with disabilities and was informed by lessons learned through LVCIL's previous School to Life program. Today, the program serves individuals across Lehigh and Northampton counties in Pennsylvania through a combination of group training, individualized supports, and community-based experiences.

Career Path includes an eight-week Work Essential Skills Training program focused on obtaining and maintaining employment, person-centered planning to identify employment goals and support needs, community-based work assessments that allow participants to explore multiple jobs in real-world settings, individualized job development and placement services, and on-the-job coaching and ongoing employment supports as needed. A key feature of the program is its person-centered and strengths-based approach. Through community-based work assessments, participants explore several jobs of interest in real workplace settings before deciding which career path to pursue. These experiences help participants identify career goals and preferences while allowing staff to better understand participants' strengths, support needs, and workplace accommodations that can inform individualized employment planning.

Rather than focusing solely on job placement, Career Path emphasizes long-term career development. Staff work with participants to identify pathways for continued employment, education, advancement, and greater independence, recognizing that an initial job can serve as a stepping stone toward broader career growth.

Outcomes and Impact

Career Path has maintained strong employment outcomes over time, including an employment placement rate exceeding 80 percent and a six-month employment retention rate of 90 percent. During the program's first six months, LVCIL helped more than a dozen young adults secure employment,

including several who had previously been told by other organizations that they would be unable to obtain or maintain a job.

Demand for Career Path services continues to be strong. Prior to 2020, approximately 12 transition and employment staff supported roughly 400 participants at a given time. At this time, Career Path was one of Pennsylvania's leading supported employment providers for VR despite operating in only a small number of counties. COVID-19 caused a decline in those numbers, but the program has rebounded. As of 2026, the program serves approximately 230 individuals and continues to receive referrals from schools, families, vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors, and other organizations.

Career Path in Action

One participant entered Career Path with a long-term goal of becoming a classroom paraprofessional but had no relevant education or work experience. Through person-centered planning, LVCIL helped her develop a step-by-step pathway toward that goal. She obtained employment in food service at a nursing home, gained valuable workplace experience, and was eventually promoted into a leadership role while pursuing coursework related to education. Two years later, she achieved her goal of working as a paraprofessional in a classroom.

Recommendations on How to Replicate and Scale in Your State:

Organizations or states seeking to replicate and scale this approach can consider the following strategies:

- Start small and grow strategically by using early youth and transition programs to build partnerships, staff expertise, and infrastructure that can support future employment services in your state.
- Use person-centered, strengths-based approaches that focus on interests, goals, and support needs.
- Provide hands-on career exploration opportunities so participants can make informed employment decisions.
- Build strong partnerships with VR agencies, schools, employers, and community organizations.
- Develop a well-trained coaching and supervision model to ensure consistent, high-quality supports.
- Strengthen long-term sustainability through braided funding and multiple funding partnerships.

Resources

- **LVCIL Resources**
  - LVCIL Website
  - LVCIL Transition & Employment Services Webpage
- **ACL Resources**
  - ACL CIL Webpage
  - ACL Disability Information & Access Locator (DIAL) Website
- **DETAC Resource**
  - Engaging Youth With Disabilities In the Delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services

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