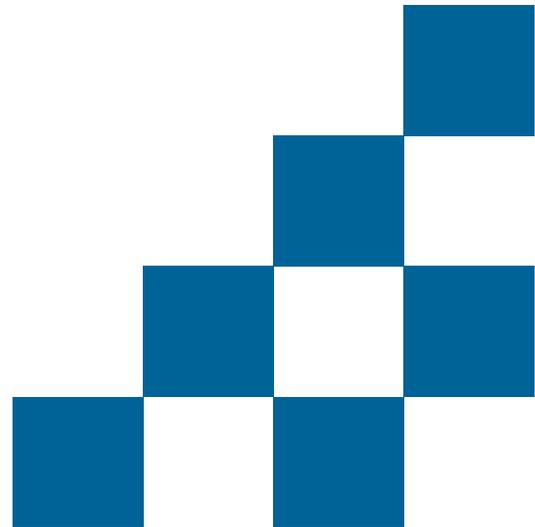


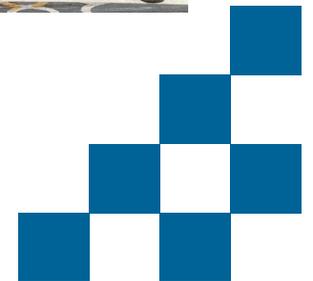
# MA-APSE Panel: Practical Advice for Career Development

Paula Collins, *Work, Inc.*  
Elyse Forbush, *Run the Gamut*  
Jeff Gentry, *JVS Boston*



# Why We APSE!

- APSE is the Association for People Supporting Employment First
- APSE is the only national membership nonprofit that is completely focused on pursuing competitive employment outcomes for people with diverse disabilities
- MA-APSE promotes competitive integrated employment through education, advocacy, and leadership development



## The Plan for Today: 3 Unique Perspectives

- **Jeff** is sharing his experience as a provider of Transition and Adult Services
- **Elyse** is sharing her experience as an Employer
- **Paula** is sharing her experience as a parent advocate



## Jeff Gentry

### Advice from a Provider's Perspective



- Provided Career Coaching for transition age high school students and young adults since 2007
- Played an active role in the transition of a large sheltered workshop to a Community Based Day and Independent Supported Employment Program
- Passionate about innovative services:
  - IMPACT: Ability
  - Accessible Icon Project
  - Work Early, Expect Success
- Leads one of the largest disability focused workforce development teams in Massachusetts
- President of MA-APSE Board of Directors since 2024



## Jeff's Advice for Parents

- Temple Grandin was right. It doesn't matter so much how people start so much as it matters that they start!
- Expectations are the deepest, darkest magic that we have
- If your child is transition age, make sure that the school starts transition planning at age 14 and continues to offer excellent supports throughout high school
- Most people find jobs through family and friend networks. That includes career seekers with disabilities!



## Jeff's Advice for Career Seekers

- Start as early as you can. You need to build your resume
- Pursue industries that provide a growth trajectory (i.e., provider agency versus schools)
- If you are spending more than 25% of your time on Indeed you (or your career coach) is doing it wrong
- Trust Coaches and Teachers who care enough to push (in the right amount and the right way)



## Jeff's Advice for Career Seekers



**“You can carve out a very good career simply by being the most reliable person on the team. You would not think that always showing up on time, hitting every deadline, and responding quickly and professionally to all communications would be such a differentiator, but these traits are always in short supply.” –James Clear**



## Jeff's Awesome Client: Liam



- Turned 22 in 2021
- Working as a Lunch and Recess Monitor at BPS's Henderson School
- Wanted a new job, so he applied for and secured a second position as a Busser at Legal Sea Foods while his Career Coach was on vacation
- Constantly pursuing personal goals like securing his driver's license and developing a country music career



## Jeff's Discussion Question



Which family member or friend do you need to connect with about opportunities for your (or your child's) career?

How can a career coach or an educator partner strengthen your networking skills?



## Elyse Forbush: Advice from an Employer's Perspective

- Communication is key!
- Networking
  - Make connections & Introduce yourself
- Tell me how you will be most successful at work
- Explain to me how your job coach supports you (I want to support you too!)
- Communicate your goals even if they are small and we can achieve them together



## Elyse's Advice to Career Seekers

- Use your network
- Have realistic expectations for what a first job may be
  - Hours may not fit into your ideal schedule
  - There will be elements of work that will not be your favorite
- Take all opportunities to learn something new, especially if the environment feels right
- Advocate for yourself
  - Use your job as a place to practice your independence



## Elyse's Awesome Success Story: Meghan



- Dreams of becoming a chef
- Worked in a hospital kitchen for 4 years
- Passed ServSafe Food Handler's class
- Enrolled in Run the Gamut where she actively practices kitchen skills on a daily basis
- Used her network to make an impact
- Interviewed with a Chef at Committee Restaurant in the Seaport



## Elyse's Discussion Question



How can you support your child's employment behind the scenes?



## Paula Collins: Advice from a Parent's Perspective



- **Assistant Vice President of Employment at WORK Inc – Fitchburg**, leading a North Central MA team supporting individuals with barriers to work across MassAbility, DDS, DTA, and nine area high schools.
- **Developer of employment and workplace-readiness programming**, including ongoing job coaching and skill-building initiatives.
- **Experienced presenter** on disability rights, employment supports, and DEI at both local and national conferences.
- **Highly credentialed**, holding CESP and Marc Gold & Associates Customized Employment certifications, and a graduate of the Fitchburg State Leadership Institute.
- **Co-designer of the Fitchburg Disability Steward Program**, preparing residents for leadership roles in their community.
- **Longtime disability advocate**, serving on multiple boards and councils, and mother to photographer Tucker Collins, who has Down Syndrome.



## Paula's Advice for Parents

- Come out of the IEP Can't to ISP CAN
- Find opportunities for growth—never underestimate the value of volunteering
- Ask for help—we all need our village



## Paula's Advice for Career Seekers

- Ask yourself what job would make you excited to go to work? Dream Big!
- Ask your friends and family what you are good at
- Speak up for yourself—it's your life



## Paula's Amazing Success Story:

- Tucker is starting his 5<sup>th</sup> year at the Worcester Red Sox as a Fan Photographer
- Last week completed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Art in the Park gallery show at Polar Park
- Incorporated Tucker Collins Photography LLC in December 2025



The poster has a dark blue background. At the top, it features the "THE Woo Sox FOUNDATION" logo in red and white. Below this, it says "PRESENTS ART IN THE PARK" in large, bold, white letters. A paragraph of text follows: "An art show featuring the work of WooSox Photographer Tucker Collins and Framingham artist Jordan Caira to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day." In the center, there is a photograph of two women, one in a purple top and one in a white top. To the left and right of the photo are circular logos for "JCPAINTS" and "TUCKERCOLLINS PHOTOGRAPHY" respectively. At the bottom, the event details are listed: "FRIDAY, MARCH 21", "4-7 PM, FREE ADMISSION", and "THE DCU CLUB AT POLAR PARK". A small line of text at the very bottom states: "Net proceeds from art sales will benefit Down Syndrome Awareness."

# Paula's Discussion Question



**WHAT IF A KID'S MOST ANNOYING TRAIT IS THEIR BIGGEST TALENT IN DISGUISE?**

	<b>BOSSY</b> <b>DEFIANT</b> <b>DEMANDING</b> <b>FEARFUL</b> <b>IMPULSIVE</b> <b>LIAR</b> <b>LOUD</b> <b>MANIPULATIVE</b> <b>MEAN</b> <b>QUIET</b> <b>STUBBORN</b> <b>SENSITIVE</b>	<b>LEADER</b> <b>DETERMINED</b> <b>ASSERTIVE</b> <b>THOUGHTFUL</b> <b>BOLD</b> <b>CREATIVE WRITER</b> <b>CONFIDENT</b> <b>NEGOTIATOR</b> <b>POWERFUL</b> <b>KEEN OBSERVER</b> <b>PERSISTENT</b> <b>CARING</b>
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**JOSH SHIPP**



# Q & A + Additional Discussion



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