



*Seeking Employment, Equality and Community for  
People with Developmental Disabilities*

**SEEC Insider**

December 2021 | Issue Thirty-Eight

## What's Up with Services?!

### A monthly update on re-envisioning SEEC services post pandemic

By Sherry Beamer, Director of Services



#### **Staffing: “The best recruitment strategy is a retention strategy”**

As stories continue in news sources around the country of how disability services are affected by labor shortages, SEEC continues to find creative ways to meet our staffing needs. Several months ago the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) started a bi-weekly provider survey to track Direct Support Professional (DSP) openings and the impact on services. DDA last reported three weeks ago that the DSP opening percentage amongst Maryland disability providers was 32%. SEEC’s data for the past two weeks is 15%. On 12/8 we held another Recruitment Open House with a focus on Supported Living and Community Engagement and are following up with 10 potential employees. A key reason why SEEC’s openings are lower than many organizations is our commitment to retention of staff over the past decade. This includes providing regular training and mentorship based on the national standards for DSPs with career pathways as skills are developed.

#### **Employment Data**

The MD DDA collects data from providers bi-annually to track the State’s progress in supporting people to work. SEEC recently submitted data and got an immediate report of our results. Here are a few key statistics:

- Average weekly hours of work: 21.65
- Average hourly wage: \$17.50
- Percent earning paid time off: 78.4%

And here is a list of the of the new kinds of jobs developed last year during the pandemic:

- Office Automation Clerks – at the National Institutes of Health
- Data entry/analysis in Banking
- Technical Associates in the biotechnology industry
- Distribution (package handling, fulfillment) e.g. UPS, Amazon
- IT Help Desk
- Environmental Services/COVID Sanitation - through our new partnership with
- Microsoft/CBRE
- Restaurants – skilled food preparation

- What's Up with Services?
- In Memory of Mike Cunningham
- Bonny Roy's Retirement
- SEEC Addresses the Workforce Shortage through Innovation
- Save the Date for Our Online Wine Tasting Event
- Save the Date - Gala 2022
- End of Year Appeal
- Greetings from the Employment Outreach Team
- Volunteer Corner
- HR Corner
- Wellness Corner
- DSPs Making a Difference

### In Memory of Mike Cunningham



It is with great sadness that we share the news Michael Cunningham, a longtime employee, friend and advocate, passed away on Tuesday, November 30, 2021. Mike had been ill for some time and had been receiving care at the hospital, rehab center then at home. Mike was beloved by everyone that he worked with. SEEC was blessed to have him in our family for more than 22 years. Mike will be sorely missed by Jeff, his co-workers and team members. Mike always reminded us that life is to be cherished as are those who join us in our journey.

### Bonny Roy's Retirement

Priti, best known as Bonny, Roy has been the unquestioned financial leader of SEEC for over 2 decades. She joined SEEC back in June 2001, when SEEC was a growing non-profit with revenues in the single digit millions. She took over a department with gusto and brought the team into 21st Century with improved tools, systems and policies that enabled the agency to maintain stronger control of fiscal stewardship, while developing a more program-focused financial operation supporting the creative and innovative work being done on the front lines. Bonny's commitment to the people SEEC supports is second to none, and her collaborative ways of working with programs is always focused on what is best for people supported and their staff.



Bonny is not a numbers-only accountant. Her first thought always is the people to whom SEEC provides services, and ensuring they are able to live, work and thrive. Bonny has set aside time from managing the books to do lunch with many of the people SEEC supports, even spending significant one on one time with one such person who was struggling financially. This mission-based leadership has endured throughout her dedicated tenure with SEEC and is a model of leadership much admired across our agency, and by her CFO peers across the region. Bonny's accolades and accomplishments are too many to list out in this article. However, she always shares that her proudest moments are when she sits

across from someone SEEC supports, or a staff member and helps them solve a problem using her creative financial abilities. As a member of the agency's Executive Leadership Team, Bonny not only demonstrated a commitment to fiscal sustainability, but a compassionate resolve to ensure the agency stayed true to our mission in support of people with IDD being able to direct their lives with dignity, choice, authority, and responsibility.

## SEEC Addresses the Workforce Shortage Through Innovation

By Jessica Neely, Director of Knowledge Management



This winter, the Maryland Direct Support Training Consortium (MDDSP) will offer its 9<sup>th</sup> cohort of our Direct Support Professional II training. This exciting initiative is supported by a grant from the Maryland Department of Labor, EARN Maryland division. Working alongside four partner agencies, SEEC is developing and delivering advanced-level training for our essential workforce—training, in fact, that the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration has adopted as a framework for the State.

Our winter DSP II training will be offered in four cohorts, one facilitated by SEEC and three delivered in coordination with consortium partners. In total, we will train and credential a combined 75-80 highly-skilled staff. At a time when Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities provider agencies nation-wide are experiencing a systemic workforce shortage, this program is critical.

National research demonstrates that key predictors of staff retention are training, coaching, and opportunities for career advancement. Direct support staff need skills and competencies to feel confident in their work; they need to be coached rather than supervised in a top-down manner, and to be offered opportunities for professional growth. To date we have credentialed over 230 DSP IIs and 51 Mentors.

One way SEEC helps meet this demand is by using a train the trainer model. We work with DSP II graduates interested in becoming professional trainers. Meeting as a monthly community of practice, we study the skills and techniques needed to educate adult learners effectively, as well as course content. Trainees then deliver lessons and are critiqued by their peers. It's a collaborative method that helps all of us learn from one another and provides yet one more opportunity for career advancement—becoming a skilled workforce trainer.

Anna Oldham, SEEC's Workforce Training and Curriculum Coordinator, shares our aspirations for this model. "We've researched and developed great materials to support emerging trainers. We can share the materials and our subject matter expertise with other providers to help scale this work. That is one of the goals of EARN Maryland."

## Save the Date for Our Online Wine Tasting Event

By Katrina Kugel, Events Manager

We are excited to announce our

second online Wine Tasting Event will take place on Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Just in time to get you ready for Valentine's Day, Bill Jensen, the 2021 Washington, DC Sommelier Award winner, will lead an expert tasting on Winter Reds. Bill owns two restaurants in DC, Tail Up Goat, which has a Michelin star, and the cozy Reveler's Hour, which was recently named the #2 best restaurant in DC by the Post food critic Tom Sietsma in October. Bill started an online wine school during the pandemic. We are so grateful he has agreed to donate his time and will help us source the wines for the event. Mark your calendars, you won't want to miss this one!



## End of Year Appeal

As we close out 2021, our lives may not include all our cherished pre-pandemic activities, but hopefully you have added a few new favorites. Thanks to your support throughout the COVID-19 crisis, you have allowed us here at SEEC to continue with some of our favorite things and at the same time, add new opportunities. You trusted us as we adjusted our services to ensure we could keep everyone **engaged and safe**. You encouraged us to see ways **to grow new connections** that propelled us toward more **inclusiveness** for the people we support. This year your **generosity** has impacted people like:



- **Jonathan** -- who now has a great job at Sandy Spring Bank
- **Ava** -- who, with the support of her staff, has made friends with her neighbor and together they enjoy dinner parties and movie nights
- **Josh and others in the Spanish class** -- who participate in virtual activities and are learning a new language

These stories would not have been possible without your support. Your donation allows us to **grow connections** with **employers**, so everyone who wants to work can get a great job. It helps us to hire and retain a skilled direct support professional **workforce** so everyone can be a part of their neighborhood. And it enables us to connect and collaborate with **volunteers** and community members so all lifelong learners can find something they are interested in and thrive.

At SEEC, we are **grateful** for our community of supporters. Your donation to SEEC is a connection that confirms that **diversity and inclusion matter to you**. Ours is a shared belief that a "new normal" is possible, where everyone is part of their community and has the chance to flourish.

**Please click here** to help us reach our end of year goal to raise \$35,000 for people

with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Thank you for being a part of our successes.

## Save the Date: SEEC Gala 2022



## Greetings from the Employer Outreach Team (EOT)

By Pamela Toole, Lead Employer Outreach Consultant

The last few months have been busy, and we have lots to share!



**Networking:** Now that things are opening back up to in-person events, we are expanding our networking channels. The Chambers will always be key groups for us, but the pandemic brought new groups our way, whether it was Business Networking International (BNI), MoCo Connect, MoCo Small Business Association or others. Many of these groups were more accessible in the virtual space and some had reduced membership fees to attract members. This allowed us to evaluate which groups are most fruitful for SEEC. Based on our experience, we will continue to look for new networking groups in DC. We are also collaborating with SEEC's volunteer coordinator, Ethan Livin, to attend events and promote volunteering opportunities to potential future employers.

**Awareness & Education:** We are promoting inclusive hiring at groups such as Chambers, Rotary Clubs, and company teams. In July, we joined Project SEARCH Team Lead, Brandon Williams, in July to present at the National Project SEARCH Conference on "Successful Employer Engagement In The Time Of The Pandemic". In September, we held a webinar, "How Employing People With Disabilities Can Help Your Business Grow", organized in conjunction with Launch Workplaces to introduce business owners to the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. In November, we met with the merchants in two commercial areas managed by Federal Realty – Pike and Rose, and Rockville Towne Centre to talk about SEEC and opportunities to be inclusive while hiring staff.



**Jobs:** Our relationships and our partnerships bring opportunity. Here are recent new positions for job seekers that are the result of our team outreach to the local community. Debrah at The Point DC; Monay, Devonte, Barry, Chris & Alex at Dawson's Dupont; Katherine at Assisting Hands; Elizabeth at Qiagen; Langston and Sam at Ruppert Landscape; Justin at King Street Oyster Bar; John at Benjamin Office Supply; Charles at Sprinkles Ice Cream Store and Michael at Red Coats/Microsoft.

**Externships to Jobs:** Throughout the spring and fall, the EOT has supported Project Search in finding additional externship opportunities through our community contacts. On-going hosts include Cambria Rockville & Cambria DC, Assisting Hands, Sweat DC, Channer Consulting, CMIT Solutions, Tony & Joes, Special Olympics, The National Gallery of Art, Life Energies Foundation, and more recently, Call Your Mother. Assisting Hands hired Katherine in June following her spring internship with them. Remember to frequent these important employment partners.

**Mentorship:** When jobs or internships cannot happen right away, we get creative. We are piloting a mentorship program with National Geographic and SEEC job seekers. The first session will end in December 2021. The pilot has five SEEC job seekers paired with five mentors across NatGeo/Disney. In one case, the pair is exploring video production and another, a love of museums. One of the mentors is interested in customizing a production assistant role that matches their needs. We hope to learn from this experience and develop a consistent mentorship model.



**Job Club:** Skill building is essential for job seekers. Working with Kyra Harvey on virtual Job Clubs has enabled us to not only bring in speakers on topics like industry trends, entrepreneurship, interview skills, LinkedIn, elevator speeches and lots more, we have been able to offer content suggestions based upon our job placement feedback experience. Job Club is a nexus of important activity. It is a place where volunteers and potential employers can meet our skilled job seekers, where we can display our expertise in skill building activities, and where future collaboration can happen.

**Communication:** We continue to promote our employers on [social media](#) and on our [website](#). If you use LinkedIn, [please follow SEEC's LinkedIn page](#), share posts and use SEEC's hashtag #LiveWorkThrive. The more SEEC staff, employers, volunteers, families, sponsors and donors engage with [SEEC's LinkedIn page](#), the greater reach SEEC has!

## Volunteer Corner

By Ethan Litvin, Volunteer Coordinator

### Meet Athena Garcia

**What school do you go to and what year are you in?**

## We Love Our Volunteers!



[volunteer@seeonline.org](mailto:volunteer@seeonline.org)

I am a senior at Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, MD!

### What inspires you to volunteer with SEEC?

I wanted to spread my love for travelling while also learning from those I am teaching. I was intrigued to volunteer with SEEC, an organization that made me feel that I could spread knowledge to the community while also educating myself. After months of volunteering, I am glad I did so because every Thursday feels like a meeting with family members more than students in spite of the virtual setting.

### What do you enjoy the most about volunteering with SEEC?

SEEC has encouraged me to create more elaborate, in-depth presentations, which helps me learn and appreciate each country that I teach. I enjoy hearing comments throughout the conversations such as “so beautiful” and “I want to go”, which helps me feel that I have done justice to the unique beauty and history of each country that I teach about.

### What would you tell a prospective SEEC volunteer as to why they should volunteer with us?

I would only say one word: join! I would recount all my memories unique to each meeting and emphasize that there is room for anyone to volunteer and share what they are passionate about with others!

## HR Corner

### Join Us in Welcoming SEEC's New Employees

|           |                |                                   |                      |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Dagemawe  | Belew          | Job Coach I                       | Employment Services  |
| Jonathan  | Higgins        | Community Connector II            | Supported Living     |
| Ginna     | Quintero Neira | HR Rep                            | Corporate            |
| Lilian    | Sanda          | Registered Nurse - E              | Knowledge Management |
| Thomas    | Lorendo        | Training Coordinator              | Knowledge Management |
| Chinedu   | Ijomoh         | Community Connector II            | Supported Living     |
| Jasmine   | Jones          | Community Engagement Coach        | Community Engagement |
| Abanda    | Federick       | Community Connector II            | Supported Living     |
| Abimbola  | Irekoya        | Community Connector II            | Supported Living     |
| Stephanie | Snyder         | Chief Financial Officer - Interim | Corporate            |

### And Saying Goodbye to Others

|             |            |                                      |                      |
|-------------|------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Abdulai     | Jalloh     | Community Support Specialist         | Supported Living     |
| Thomas      | Tabbs      | Community Support Specialist         | Supported Living     |
| Lydia       | Aimone     | LTSS Project Manager                 | Corporate            |
| Pamela      | Odoi-Atsem | Customized Employment Consultant     | Employment Services  |
| Ibrahima    | Ndiaye     | Community Engagement Coach           | Community Engagement |
| Wennsequele | Tengande   | Circle Support Staff                 | Supported Living     |
| Hakeem      | Kaka       | Community Connector II               | Supported Living     |
| Regina      | Green      | Project SEARCH Employment Consultant | Project SEARCH       |
| Ilisha      | Henderson  | Community Connector II               | Supported Living     |

## Wellness Corner



Simple ways to be kind to yourself this holiday season:

Practicing self-care is good for the mind, body, and spirit- especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2021 has been a challenging year, but here are a few tips you can do to boost your mood, beat stress, and find more joy in your everyday life!

1. Take a break! Whether you are working from home or at your workplace, busy with kids or everyday housework, we can all use a break. Take a moment to stretch or focus on your breathing. Even just 10 minutes of mindful movement can make a big difference.
2. Sleep well! Lack of sleep can affect the way you feel mentally and physically. If you're having trouble sleeping due to extra stress during the pandemic, try limiting your screen time before bed. Make changes that might help you let go of any extra stress from the day.

Stay connected! Staying connected with friends and family- either by phone, online, or safely in person- can do wonders for your physical and emotional wellness. Regular video chats are a great way to keep in touch. You can also plan visits with precautions to help protect one another from COVID-19.

## DSPs Making a Difference

Mercedes Mckeel is the winner of SEEC's DSPs Making a Difference for October. Mercedes, a Community Engagement team member, was nominated in the competency area of advocacy.

On a Wednesday in October, Mercedes was at a restaurant with two people she supports. When one of them was paying, she heard the cashier inadvertently make derogatory remarks, oblivious of the hurt he was causing. Mercedes turned the situation into a teachable one and politely made the cashier aware of the impact of his remarks. The cashier promptly apologized to the people she supports. Afterward, Mercedes talked with them about people who may inadvertently or out of ignorance make remarks that are hurtful. She also told them they might encounter people who will say hurtful things intentionally to belittle the dignity of other people who look differently from them. She assured them both that despite what happened, there are many good people in the community. Mercedes shared with her supervisor her plans to teach the people she supports about self-advocacy should they be confronted with a similar



situation in the future.

That same day, Mercedes and one of the people she supports were attempting to cross the street, but police officers had parked their two police cars in a place that blocked the curb cut and crosswalk, which made it unsafe for the person she supports to cross the street. Mercedes saw another teachable moment and bravely educated the police officers about the negative impact of blocking the curb cut and crosswalk. Both police officers graciously apologized and moved their cars. Mercedes further reached out to the police department's District Commander and urged him to reiterate to officers the importance of keeping the crosswalks and curb cuts open and accessible.

In these situations, Mercedes clearly demonstrated her role as an advocate and the responsibility she has to educate and empower the people she supports to advocate for themselves. Her work not only benefits the people she supports but other people with disabilities in our community. Thank you, Mercedes!

301.576.9000 | [www.seeonline.org](http://www.seeonline.org)

