

jobpath JOURNEYS

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Job Path supports people with developmental disabilities in their efforts to make choices about their lives.

“A matter of choice”

By Fredda Rosen

Job Path supports people with developmental disabilities in their efforts to make choices about their lives.

Each word in this, our mission statement, was carefully considered. The idea was to pin down in one sentence *all* that we try to accomplish. We know what we strive for: Through our work we enable people with developmental disabilities to establish themselves in paid and volunteer jobs, to develop friendships with people in their communities, and to make a valued contribution to those communities. The bedrock philosophy that this all rests on is choice. *Theirs*. We can't help people achieve their goals if we don't fully understand what they want out of life. What we do each day is enable people to make choices, and then to make those choices real.

This is truly easier said than done. If there is one group of people unable to take choice for granted, it's people with disabilities. Often it's assumed that people with developmental disabilities can't make choices, don't have the ability to make them, or shouldn't make them. It certainly shouldn't matter whether the person can use spoken language or not. Everyone can communicate their preferences in one fashion or another. True choice for people with disabilities means the same as it does for you and me. We make choices in the context of what limits us—whether it's finances (we don't always have the money to buy what we would like), safety or our own abilities. This should hold true for all of us. What most of us take for granted should be available to *everyone*.

Fredda Rosen is Executive Director of Job Path. You can contact her at: frosen@jobpathnyc.org

Speaking for Job Path, Helen Gomez-Dao, Director of Employment & Community Support Services testified at the *Commissioner's Hearing*, July 11, 2003:

What does choice mean to you? Did someone tell you this morning to wear the blue shirt instead of the green one because they knew what looked better? If you did not have the opportunity to voice what you would like, how would that make you feel? There are people who think that because a person has developmental disabilities, they do not know what is best for them.

As an agency, we allow people to have choices, and at the same time we are responsible to ensure their health and safety. When individuals make choices, not every one will be the 'right' choice, which is fine. People with developmental disabilities can learn from their own mistakes as you and I do. We may think that because we are the 'professional' we know what is best for the person. We are wrong. The people we serve have earned the same right as you and I to make choices.

A big thank you to Gensler

At our recent benefit/auction one of our supporters, Allen Lee, was so impressed with our program that he suggested his company, Gensler, a global architectural firm, adopt Job Path as the beneficiary of their annual photography auction. The photos sold for \$2,158 and Job Path was presented with the check by Michael Mararian, an associate with Gensler.



Job Path Open House November 20.

To commemorate Job Path's forthcoming 25th anniversary, we created a Job Path quilt that tells our story. Each square of the quilt depicts a person's life and the values we share. Please join us in our newly expanded offices on Thursday, November 20th from 4 PM to 7 PM when we officially unfurl the quilt. Look for our invitation soon.

◀ Fredda Rosen, Executive Director, and Emily Ellis, Deputy Director, accepting check from Michael Mararian for Gensler.

Job Path Employer: The Manhattan Theatre Club

We recently met with Jamie Beth Cohen, Assistant Education Director at MTC and co-supervisor with Denise Thomas of Job Path participant Nicky Gottlieb. Nicky found his way to MTC through his mother, actor Maria Tucci, who is also a Job Path board member. Maria had performed at MTC and knew her son is comfortable around actors. Maria called Lynne Meadow, artistic director, who turned Nicky over to Jamie who coordinates the extensive intern program at MTC.

After meeting the Job Path team that supported Nicky, Jamie thought Nicky could relieve the interns by assuming some of their tasks. “We outlined the tasks we thought Nicky would enjoy,” recalls Jamie, “and came up with a schedule that matched everyone’s needs.” For one hour he sits at the receptionist desk, answers the phone and greets everyone; he spends one hour copying scripts; and he spends one hour on the mail: “Copy duty is not his favorite, but he does it willingly and well because he understands it’s important.”



▲ Nicky Gottlieb with Jamie Beth Cohen

Getting where I am in the work world has simply been a miracle for me. At this time last year I could never have dreamed I'd get to where I am today. In the spring of 1999, Job Path entered my life, and they helped me find a paying job. I was taken on as a trainee and I had supervision from Job Path as I worked. The supervision slowly petered out and then on April 1, I had my first day as a regular employee of the Manhattan Theatre Club. Before, I felt sad, pessimistic, and hopeless that I'd never have a normal job. I now feel confident that I'll have one either at this job or another one elsewhere.

—Nicky speaking at the NYC Regional Conference, Self-Advocacy Association of NYS, “Self-determination: Our Lives, Our Choice, Our Future”

Jamie notes there have been very few problems since Nicky was hired. “What’s good for me in working with him is that I can say anything to him. And he will say just about anything back.” Jamie recalls, “One day Denise and I saw Nicky near the mail station where the coffee pot is. We thought he was waiting for the mail to arrive. He looked at us and blurted out: **‘The mail’s not here, but Richard Dreyfus is.’**” And sure enough the actor was pouring himself some coffee.

Nicky craves consistency and has a gift for establishing connections with people. One thing he has had to adjust to at MTC is the constant change in personnel, which is built into most internship programs. “He gets comfortable and really attached to some of the interns and

has developed some lasting friendships,” explains Jamie who adds, “But he is learning to adjust.”

Nicky will be celebrating his one-year anniversary, from the time he began training, on September 9. In that time he has grown to be a more independent employee and a welcome addition to the MTC family. The bottom line according to Jamie is: “This has been very challenging and rewarding. **I’m so glad we decided to do this.**”

ATTENTION SHOPPERS

Head on down to The Gap, Old Navy, K-Mart and Banana Republic. All of these retailers have recently hired our participants.

Spotlight on: Board Member Diana McCourt

With a BA from Smith College and certificates in cabinetry from Manhattan Trade School, and Purchase University, Diana McCourt is really a Jill of all trades. She is a founding member of Women in the Trades, a New York City organization furthering women’s employment in the building trades, and cofounder and coordinator of WOMANSHARE, a unique service exchange system that is a model for community building. A designer and craftsman, she founded Dovetail Cabinet Making and Contracting, Inc. Diana recently completed her masters in Community Economic Development.

For the last 30 years Diana has been an active parent advocate and organizer of families with people with developmental disabilities.

Diana is the mother of Nina, 42, who once lived in Willowbrook (the State-run institution for people with mental retardation) and now lives in her own apartment in Manhattan with support from Job Path. Diana was also a member of the “warrior” group of parents and advocates, who finally brought the deplorable conditions of the Willowbrook State School into public awareness. As a result, Nina became a named plaintiff in the Willowbrook Consent Judgment, which was signed in 1975 and is considered to be the event that created one of the most successful social policy changes of its type. Diana is currently a member of the Commissioner’s Task Force on Willowbrook. She is also on the Board of Adaptive Design.

Still, Diana manages to find the time to be a personal angel to Job Path. She is always available when needed, working tirelessly to make our benefit/auction a success. She met Executive Director, Fredda Rosen several years ago at a meeting, and they stayed in touch. About four years ago, Fredda called and asked if Diana would be interested in services for Nina at Job Path. Then Diana joined Job Path’s board. As Diana explains her relationship with Job Path, “My experience at Willowbrook was always ‘us versus them.’ Here at Job Path it has truly been a partnership.”

“I feel heard here. I have the freedom to be creative.”

THE PATHFINDERS PROJECT: Life After High School

Spotlight on: Carolann Granata

Carolann Granata is coordinator of the Pathfinders Project, which enables special education students like Christina Rodriguez to leave school with jobs and other activities in place. She fondly recalls the intensive two-day workshop attended by Christina and her parents. One of the first exercises was to help the students “dream.” Christina was clear about what she wanted: A job at the Gap, an apartment and a boyfriend. The second day, dad didn’t return. As Carolann recalls, “Mr. Rodriguez couldn’t believe we were asking Christina about her dreams. At that time, she was 19 and she was still holding a parent’s hand when they went out.” Christina’s parents have since learned how to support her in her efforts to be more independent.

Carolann also coordinates the Pathfinders Coalition, which meets about eight times a year, and brings together parents, teachers and agency staff throughout the New York City area. Every coalition member is directly involved with at least one person in transition from school to the workplace. They share ideas, developments, resources and expertise related to inclusion oriented transition work.

Carolann also runs Futures Labs, which helps students think about life after high school. The lab is a two-period workshop customizing a flexible format for each participating high school. The lab takes the students through various exercises: They create maps to discover what works best for each student, including what the student likes and does not like. Then they create a map that includes the student’s dreams of the future and practical steps in developing a life after high school. Carolann works with the school on how to incorporate person-centered planning techniques into the school transition process. Thanks to the generous support of the Pinkerton Foundation, Carolann has reached more than 230 students in 10 schools.

Carolann finds these sessions stimulating: “The students always surprise me. They really share their dreams.” One young lady said her dream was to ride a horse. It turned out she also wanted to see them run. “Being a horse lover,” admits Carolann, “I helped her figure out how to get to the track.” As she supports the students, they in turn support her. Carolann admitted she has always wanted to learn how to ride a motorcycle. She’s now planning to take motorcycle lessons.

After the initial Futures Lab presentation, Carolann fills out a certificate for each student based on their plans and later returns to “award” them. These plans could be presented at an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting and to Vocational & Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID).

“I love this job because I make a difference in students’ lives.”



▲ Christina at Daffy's

Where are they now?

Christina Rodriguez, a graduate of Job Path’s Pathfinders program, has been working at Daffy’s, the off-price retail store, at their 34th Street location, since March 23, 2001. In the beginning, she needed someone to review tasks with her. She started out sizing clothing, but then she moved up to the stock room. A big challenge was for her to travel on her own from her home in the Bronx to midtown Manhattan. Although she’s a real pro now at riding the subway, she has been taking the express bus for safety reasons since 9/11.

Christina enjoys pointing out that she can take advantage of Daffy’s employee discount. In general, she is careful about spending her hard-earned money. She’s also good at saving up for special occasions. Last summer she went to visit family in the Dominican Republic.

While her work schedule was reduced because of overall budget cuts, her supervisors report that they are very happy with Christina’s job performance. She was recently included in a film about the lives of young people with developmental disabilities. She was able to explain her job using department store lingo — bet you don’t know what a “donut” is — and how the sensors work.

Pathfinders students were recently asked to imagine what life would be like for them on May 29, 2005

Dear Pathfinders,

I would like to tell you what a day is like for me.

I currently work at Target. I work stocking paper towels, sodas, potato chips, cookies, cake, clothing and toys. I work with a helper now, but I hope to work alone in the future.

I have had to learn to relax my schedule. I cannot do the same thing everyday at the same time. I must be more flexible, because things come up.

A little known fact about me is that I can pick a hit television show long before it becomes a hit. I would love to work for a network and choose hit shows.

I live in a small apartment in my sister’s home. She is upstairs and I live downstairs. I help with yard work and on other things around the house.

I will send a note to you with more info soon.

—Johnny

Dear Pathfinders,

I work in the mailroom part time on Monday and Wednesday. I belong to a neighborhood theatre company. I have an agent to help me find a job doing commercials. I was called for an audition for a commercial, but I forgot my script. I will try again.

I go to Tiger Karate on Thursday evening and bowling on Saturday.

—Ted

Good News

Despite a shrinking economy and increasing taxes, our Job Developers, Henry Goodison and JoAnna Laskas, continue to find job leads, land interviews and get people hired week after week.

- ▶ The Modell's on 86th Street in Manhattan hired Larry Kinley as a maintenance worker. His supervisors note that he even comes to work early, and he is an important asset to their store.
- ▶ It's thumbs up to Old Navy. The human resources manager hired two people from Job Path to work at the Kings Plaza shopping center in Brooklyn and the SoHo store. She is also interviewing candidates for a maintenance position.
- ▶ Illiana Morales started working at the Guild for Exceptional Children's early childhood intervention program. Illiana is an aide right there in the classroom with children 18 months through three.
- ▶ Debra Johnson now works at the Office Depot at the Kipp's Bay office. And Steven Holloway is another new Office Depot employee at the Times Square location.

Patronize Job Path's patrons!

We were fortunate to have some of the finest (and tastiest) restaurants represented at our annual May benefit/auction. We encourage everyone to wine/dine and spend time with Job Path's supporters.

Blue Smoke
116 East 27th Street
212 447-7479

Chameleon
125 East 39th Street
212 983-4949

Chanterelle
2 Harrison Street
212 966-6960

Kennedy's Restaurant
327 West 57th Street
212 759-4242

The Leopard
253 East 50th Street
212 759-3735

Lobster Box
34 City Island Avenue
718 885-1952

Nobu
105 Hudson Street
212 941-1976

Rosie O'Grady's
800 Seventh Avenue
212 582-2975

A canine testimonial: I love animals of all species, sizes and personalities. That's why I donated pet sitting services at the recent Job Path benefit/auction. The winning bidder was board member, Diana McCourt, who has no pets. But Diana's in-laws often leave town, and drop off their dog, Rory, with Diana and her husband Malachy. While Diana loves spending time with the lovable beagle-mix pooch, she thought winning my services would be a great way to support Job Path. Recently, I received a

call from Diana's sister-in-law Ellen who had to go away on short notice. So we arranged for Ellen to drop Rory off with me on Wednesday, and he stayed until Sunday evening. We spent a wonderful weekend chasing squirrels, barking at strangers and howling just for the heck of it. (Rory did the chasing, barking and howling. I enjoyed his company.) I hope Diana will bid on my services again at next year's auction.

JoAnna Laskas is a Job Developer

Note: All participants whose stories or identifying information are included have agreed in writing to participate.

Save Thursday, November 20 for our open house

jobpath

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Fredda Rosen, *Executive Director*

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