

## October: Disability Employment Awareness Month in Pennsylvania

October 29, 2015

As part of a national initiative, Governor Tom Wolf declared October as Disability Employment Awareness Month in Pennsylvania. “It is a chance to raise awareness about disability employment issues and to celebrate the contributions of Pennsylvania’s workers with disabilities,” he said.

Governor Wolf’s proposed FY 2015-2016 budget includes \$500,000 for a collaborative effort between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Department of Labor and Industry’s (L&I) Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to promote competitive employment for individuals with an intellectual disability. The initiative will allow for the possibility of expanded job-training programs, paid work experience for high school students, employment demonstration projects, and family outreach.

There is also a \$5 million increase in the Governor’s proposed budget for additional services to people with disabilities and receiving that funding will allow Pennsylvania to draw down federal funding for a total of \$18.5 million for OVR services. Increased state funding can also help adults with disabilities find employment and independence and offset employers’ initial expenses of orientation or training.

To continue advancing this initiative, the administration is scheduled to host events across the commonwealth in the coming weeks. Sponsored by the Governor’s Cabinet for People with Disabilities, DHS, and L&I, the fourth annual Pennsylvania Disability Employment and Empowerment Summit (PADES) will allow employers, government agencies, service providers, and individuals with disabilities to discuss the challenges, advancements, and supports to increasing employment opportunities.

### Impact: Michael Laputka, a dream come true

Michael Laputka dreamed of working at the White Haven Center. Laputka, 23, wanted to help other people with disabilities and serve as a role model. Transition to Community Employment (TRACE) program at The Arc of Luzerne County helped him fulfill his dream.



TRACE’s 30 graduates have done extensive career assessment and have begun working at: offices, nursing homes, Weis Markets and other stores, Geisinger Medical Center and other medical facilities, distribution centers and non-profits such as the Commission on Economic Opportunity and the Salvation Army. TRACE, which was created in conjunction with DHS, helps individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism to set goals, create resumes, and understand employer expectations.

“When I was told I got the job, I was so emotional, not for the job itself, but for helping other people out,” said Laputka, who is a food service worker. Making desserts, especially banana pudding, is the best part of the job, he said. He also enjoys interacting with people at White Haven. “I ask them what they want in the future. What’s their goal?” Laputka tells them, “Do not let anyone put you down. If you want a job, go after it. It might take months or weeks. It might take a day or two. If you want it, go get it.”



**DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH**  
OCTOBER IN PENNSYLVANIA

*“Smart employers are hiring individuals with disabilities because they recognize the value of this inspired, hardworking workforce.”* – **DHS SEC. TED DALLAS**