



## Promoting Competitive, Integrated Employment among Individuals with IDD

There are numerous benefits to employers, the economic mainstream, and American society when individuals with disabilities are included in the workforce. In a [2019 study](#)<sup>1</sup> completed by Accenture, in partnership with Disability:IN and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), data revealed that companies that embrace best practices for employing and supporting more persons with disabilities in their workforce have outperformed their peers. <sup>2</sup>

**Despite the numerous benefits of meaningfully engaging individuals with disabilities into the nation’s workforce, workforce participation rate is lower for people with disabilities and barriers to the economic mainstream are typically more significant.**

- **The low employment rate for people with disabilities has been increasingly recognized as a serious societal issue, with over 13 million adults of working age in the United States receiving disability benefits from Social Security.** Per the US Department of Labor, the workforce participation rate for people with disabilities is about 1/3 that of people without disabilities. Yet it has been continuously shown that with assistance, accommodations, and encouragement, many more people with disabilities can work successfully in the community.
- **Poverty rates are higher, and pay is lower for people with disabilities.** If you have a disability, you are much more likely to be poor. Working-age adults with disabilities living below the poverty line at twice the rate of the general population (US Census). Almost two-thirds (65%) of the individuals in poverty long-term are people with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> In the U.S., individuals with disabilities who work full-time/full-year are paid less than comparable individuals without disabilities.<sup>4</sup>
- **Individuals with disabilities face workplace discrimination.** Disability discrimination claims represent the largest percentage of discrimination charges (administrative complaints) filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) after retaliation—and some retaliation claims are related to disability claims. In FY2022 alone, the EEOC received 25,004 charges alleging

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<sup>1</sup> Accenture. Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage. (2019): <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/pdf/pdf-89/accenture-disability-inclusion-research-report.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, #40.

<sup>3</sup> Association of Persons Supporting Employment First (APSE), Employment First Fact Sheet. <https://apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/What-is-E1-UPDATED.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics, Annual Report on People with Disabilities in America: 2023](#)).

workplace discrimination in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),<sup>5</sup> which comprises 34% of all charges filed with the EEOC in FY2022. One of the most common types of disability discrimination under the ADA is failure to provide reasonable accommodation—workplace changes that allow an individual to apply for a job, perform a job, have access to the workplace, or otherwise enjoy equal employment opportunities. Charges also allege disparate treatment, harassment based on disability, and violation of the ADA’s rules on confidentiality and disability-related medical inquiries.

- **The federal government offers individuals with disabilities greater opportunities for workforce participation, but individuals with targeted disabilities (including IDD) still experience lower workforce participation rates.** Among the more than 2.7 million federal employees reported in FY 2018 EEOC MD-715 reports, 259,164 (9.42%) were individuals who reported having a disability. Of those with a disability, only 46,383 (1.69% of the total workforce) had a “targeted disability.”<sup>6</sup> Targeted disabilities include developmental and intellectual disabilities.<sup>7</sup>
- **Employment supports are only being provided to a small percentage of individuals receiving IDD services.** While the number of people with IDD working in competitive integrated employment (CIE) grew over the past thirty years from a few thousand to nearly 150,000, and the number of people receiving supports to work in the community quadrupled, those numbers still represent a small fraction of the people with IDD who would like to be working in the community. Although 60 percent of people with IDD would like to be working in a paid job, alongside people without disabilities, only 20 percent of people with IDD are doing so. Similarly, only about 1 in 5 people who receives employment or day services from a state IDD agency received support to work in an integrated job.<sup>8</sup>

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

1. **Private sector employment opportunities are lacking for individuals with IDD in the nation’s economic mainstream.** Employer engagement is an often-overlooked cause of underemployment, which results in major barriers to employment opportunities. Employers who have significantly and intentionally invested in building a diverse and inclusive workforce often recognize that hiring persons with disabilities is a cost-effective way to build an inclusive workforce that is representative of the business’s customer base, and that individuals with significant disabilities are an asset to the company – not a risk. *People with disabilities offer diverse skill sets and unique insights*

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<sup>5</sup> See: [EEOC, Charge Statistics \(Charges filed with EEOC\) FY 1997 Through FY 2022](#).

<sup>6</sup> See: [EEOC, The EEO Status of Workers with Disabilities in the Federal Sector](#)

<sup>7</sup> [U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Form SF-256](#)

<sup>8</sup> [30 Years of Community Living for Individuals with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities \(1987-2017\)](#), Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://acl.gov/30years>

*that can help shape design and development for industry, resulting in products and services that appeal to a broader market share.*

Employers need help funding unique supports that workers with IDD need to be successful in their employment (for example, embedding of job accommodations, customized employment practices/strategies). There is a lack of funding to scale and sustain inclusive apprenticeship, internship and integrated work-based learning opportunities for individuals with IDD. Lack of sustained funding streams to cover additional specialized training and continual on-the-job supports (like job coaching).

Another barrier that exists is the fear many employees with IDD and their families have about employment is whether a person's income will jeopardize their eligibility to health care and other essential benefits. Employers, families and self-advocates require long-term benefits planning support to help navigate various rules and regulations to assure that workers with IDD can earn and save optimally without being penalized or losing critical LTSS.

2. **Some state and federal agencies have not consistently prioritized employment in funding or practice.**
  - a. **More Medicaid HCBS funding is spent on day habilitation and sheltered work than supporting individuals with IDD in CIE.** Through Medicaid HCBS waivers, state and federal governments spend approximately \$500 million per year for segregated day programs, while spending slightly above \$100 million per year to support people with disabilities to participate in CIE.
  - b. **Despite 20 years of documented evidence-base around customized employment, many state HCBS waiver programs still do not provide adequate supports.** As a result, adoption of best practices and prioritization of CIE among HCBS providers remains limited, and best practices in job supports are not implemented consistently.
  - c. **Many families of individuals with IDD have reservations about employment or lack access to information/education on services/resources that could support their loved ones with IDD find and maintain a job in the community.** A lack of resources, education, access to benefits planning, and wrap around supports leads to family discouragement around employment.
3. **More emphasis is needed in promoting entrepreneurship and small business development among individuals with IDD.** According to a report by National Disability Institute, approximately [1.8 million individuals](#) with disabilities are business owners<sup>9</sup>. Entrepreneurship offers an alternative path to traditional employment for individuals with disabilities. To achieve economic prosperity and independence, Americans living with a disability turn to self-employment and small business development at a rate that is [nearly twice that of people without disabilities](#). Several [barriers](#) persist for this community in

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<sup>9</sup> Add Citation to NDI Report

starting and growing their own businesses, including a lack of targeted technical and programmatic assistance as well as outdated attitudinal norms. Additionally, there is a major lack of federal investment in training, funding and programming as well as a lack of data focused on entrepreneurs with disabilities.

## **Review of Federal Resources & Technical Support Available to States to Promote Competitive Integrated Employment**

1. **ODEP's systems change initiatives:** The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has invested in several systems-change efforts over the years intended to promote State efforts to prioritize CIE opportunities for individuals with I/DD and other disabilities. These include:
  - [National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network \(NEON\)](#): This initiative provides technical assistance and training to National Provider Organizations (NPOs) and their affiliated Local Provider Organizations (LPOs), State Intermediary Organizations (SIOs) and State Government Agencies (SGAs) in advancing CIE for the people they serve through provider transformation. The provider transformation process realigns a disability service provider agency's business model from providing work opportunities in segregated settings or at subminimum wages to providing CIE for people with disabilities. NEON also provides one-on-one technical support to LPOs that are members of each NPO. In addition, NEON offers its participating organizations an opportunity to network with one another and to learn about effective strategies through peer-to-peer mentoring.
  - [Working for Freedom, Opportunity and Real Choice through Community Employment \(WorkFORCE\) Action](#): ODEP funded \$2.5 million for up to six (6) competitive grants to support the use of customized employment grants which focused on systems change within workforce system.
  - [Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment \(ASPIRE\)](#): To support and expand [competitive integrated employment \(CIE\)](#) for people with mental health conditions, ODEP launched the Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment (ASPIRE) initiative. ASPIRE provides selected states tailored and targeted technical assistance to integrate state policy, program, and funding infrastructures to expand evidence-based employment services for people with a disability resulting from mental health conditions. Particular emphasis is placed on expanding best practices such as the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of Supported Employment.
  - **US DOL Transformation Hub:** This hub provides a culmination of multiple agencies working together to put in one place key information about moving to CIE. Whether a person with a disability, family member, provider, employer or other stakeholder, there's information for multiple audiences relating to transitioning to CIE. You can access it here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/hub>.

**2. RSA's Disability Innovation Fund:** The purpose of the [Disability Innovation Fund \(DIF\) Program](#), as provided by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Pub. L. 117-103), is to support innovative activities aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment (CIE) as defined in section 7 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) (29 U.S.C. 705(5)), for youth and other individuals with disabilities. Through the DIF program, RSA funds multiple innovative model demonstration projects focused on the creation of systemic approaches to transition services for children and youth with disabilities. Ensuring that key agents of change and required partners (State vocational rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs), State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and federally funded Centers for Independent Living (CILs)) are actively collaborating to support coordinated transition processes is critical to the success of children and youth with disabilities. To achieve this purpose, projects must:

- Develop an innovative model of collaboration and partnerships, with coordination of funding from, and a seamless system of services provided by the required partners, including State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs), State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and Centers for Independent Living (CILs).
- Stimulate innovative approaches to the provision of seamless transition services focused on career exploration, CIE aspiration, and achievement of CIE for children and youth with disabilities, leveraging the expertise of the required partners to increase the success of the transition process.
- Promote opportunities for career exposure for youth such as internships and apprenticeships. To promote transparency and provide tools for sharing best practices, the project also must establish a project-specific website geared toward actionable items, such as information that is for the youth service professional or project participant resources for children and youth with disabilities.
- Include resources, as they are being developed that would allow for the replication of certain aspects of the project throughout the life of the project.
- Develop collaborations into partnerships that leverage resources to implement a cohesive service delivery model that supports successful postsecondary experiences for children and youth with disabilities and their support systems.

**3. ACL's Systems-Change Initiatives focused on Employment:** ACL offers several technical assistance initiatives aimed at building the capacity of ACL's developmental disabilities network and the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) to support individuals with I/DD pursue and sustain CIE. The [Disability Employment TA Center](#) provides evidence-based technical assistance (TA) to the Administration on Disabilities (AoD) grantees aimed at improving competitive, integrated employment (CIE) and economic outcomes for individuals with disabilities across America. AoD grantees eligible to receive TA through the Center include Centers for Independent Living (CIL), State Councils on Developmental Disabilities (Councils), University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), State Protection and Advocacy Systems (P&A),

Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Programs (TBI), and Projects of National Significance (PNS) Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE).

4. **EEOC's ADA Enforcement, Outreach, and Technical Assistance:** The EEOC recognizes that individuals with I/DD can have improved CIE outcomes when they do not face workplace discrimination. Therefore, the EEOC engages in numerous activities to prevent workplace discrimination, thereby improving CIE outcomes by ensuring that individuals with I/DD have equal employment opportunities.
- [Enforcement of the ADA and other federal laws](#) prohibiting employment discrimination through administrative investigations and litigation.
  - Low- and no-cost [outreach, training, and technical assistance](#) for employers, employees, care providers, advocates, veterans, youth, small businesses, and other stakeholders, including promising practices for providing reasonable accommodation and ensuring workplace accessibility.
  - [Disability-related resources](#), including guidance, technical assistance, press releases for recent litigation and settlements, and other publications and resources. These resources include: [Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in the Workplace and the ADA](#) (2013), [Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship under the ADA](#) (2002), [Newsroom \(Disability News\)](#), [Youth@Work](#), and the [Small Business Resource Center](#).

#### **IDEAS FOR CALIFORNIA TO INCREASE COMMITMENT TO CIE OF INDIVIDUALS WITH I/DD UNDER SELF-DIRECTION**

There are a number of strategies that States can deploy to support the advancement of individuals with IDD in achieving and maintaining CIE:

1. **Reinvigorate the State's commitment to an Employment First framework, which promotes CIE as the preferred outcome of HCBS non-residential, VR, workforce development and education transition funding for people with IDD.** This can be done through gubernatorial proclamation, executive order, and/or state legislation. Such policies should focus on: preparing and incentivizing HCBS providers to expand the delivery of customized and individualized supported employment services, requiring access to [integrated work-based learning experiences](#) for VR Participants as part of Pre-Employment Training Services (Pre-ETS), and adopting hiring/recruitment/development/retention policies to elevate state government as a model employer of people with IDD.
  - a. **Issue a Gubernatorial Executive Order** to include specific recommendations around meeting the needs of tribal governments and the coordination of state agency disability office programs to convene around issues of employment of persons with disabilities. The EO should also emphasize the importance of building the capacity of the state government as a model employer of workers with IDD with additional policy changes following, including:
    - i. Invests in a "state government as a model employer" hiring campaign focused specifically on individuals with targeted disabilities (including IDD).



- ii. Increase investments in specialized training and outreach designed to serve the needs of individuals with IDD, for example, on providing reasonable accommodation in the workplace or offering cognitively accessible training on entrepreneurship.
- b. **Competitive, integrated employment should be prioritized as the preferred outcome of employment services funded through various publicly funded systems** (i.e., state HCBS waiver programs, state Vocational Rehabilitation resources, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B transition funding, and Employment & Training funding distributed through state workforce development agencies and American Job Centers). As such, federal agencies overseeing these programs should invest in sustained capacity building and scalability of Education, VR, HCBS and Workforce System providers to expand availability of evidence-based practices that lead to CIE for workers with IDD (for example, customized employment and individualized supported employment).<sup>10</sup>
- c. **Issue additional guidance on how to best support individuals with IDD who have the most significant disabilities and highest support needs in solidifying CIE and integrated work-based learning opportunities.**

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**INNOVATION HIGHLIGHT #1:**  
**Washington's Employment First Outcomes**

Washington has a long-standing commitment<sup>11</sup> to policies and practices focused on employment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in the community as the priority. The result is that 89% of individuals served by the Washington state system are in integrated employment services, compared to a national average of 20%. Many states are even well below this average with some at less than 10%.

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1. **Build capacity among employers to successfully recruit and retain employees with IDD.** Employer engagement is an often-overlooked cause of underemployment, which results in major barriers to employment opportunities. Employers who have significantly and intentionally invested in building a diverse and inclusive workforce often recognize that hiring persons with disabilities is a cost-effective way to build an inclusive workforce that is representative of the business's customer base, and that individuals with

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<sup>10</sup> [NOTE: Look at recommendations outlined in report released through ODEP/DOL's National Expansion of Employment Opportunities Network (NEON) Initiative entitled, [Plan to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment.](#)]

<sup>11</sup> In 2006, Washington state enacted the Working Age Adult Policy which prioritized employment services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This Employment First Policy was among the first of its kind in the nation and paved the way for multiple other states to follow per the 2019 Case for Inclusion Report<sup>1</sup>. Per the report, Washington state saw an 81 percent increase in the number of individuals with IDD working for pay from 2007 – 2018. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/DDA/dda/documents/policy/policy4.11.pdf>

significant disabilities are an asset to the company – not a risk. *People with disabilities offer diverse skill sets and unique insights that can help shape design and development for industry, resulting in products and services that appeal to a broader market share.*

- a. Establish a clearinghouse of resources so that employers can more easily access information via a coherent and cohesive platform about strategies, available supports, and promising practices for successfully employing people with disabilities.**
- b. Provide funding to offset costs absorbed by private employers in the state to hire internal job coaches and other costs associated with time other employees spend to provide ongoing on-the-job supports to onboard and retain employees with IDD.** For example:
  - i.** States can establish local and estate tax incentives to cover additional costs of training and supporting workers with IDD to successfully engage in competitive, integrated employment (CIE).
  - ii.** Allow for flexible funding partnerships between employers and VR/Medicaid/Workforce System to offset costs of hiring internal staff to support workers with IDD.
- c. Increase access to inclusive apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning opportunities by leveraging resources across federally funded transition, Medicaid HCBS, vocational rehabilitation, and workforce development programs.** An inclusive apprenticeship program is an apprenticeship program designed to be accessible to and inclusive of all candidates, including people with disabilities. Inclusive apprenticeship programs provide opportunities for people with disabilities, including individuals with cognitive, neurological, physical, mental health, and sensory disabilities, to gain credentials and skills to succeed in their desired careers. State and local governments should leverage resources across various systems and initiatives is critical to expanding access to these opportunities for individuals with IDD.
- d. Engage employers about the business benefits of hiring workers with disabilities.**
  - i.** Sponsor a statewide marketing campaign to educate employers and offer technical assistance and training to support successful employment of workers with IDD successful engage in the economic mainstream. Focus the campaign on supporting employers in providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with IDD. Increasing employer awareness about the cost-savings and effectiveness of providing workplace accommodations is critical to advancing disability employee workplace inclusion.
  - ii.** Establish requirements among state contractors to establish required organizational awareness, HR engagement and employee training to



establish best practice cultural norms around disability inclusion in the workplace.

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### **INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT #2:**

#### **Developing Inclusive Culinary Programs – Delaware Food Bank**

In partnership with the Delaware Restaurant Association and Delaware Department of Labor, the Food Bank of Delaware has initiated a new Kitchen School program offering free specialized training designed to provide employment opportunities for adults with disabilities in the food service and hospitality industries. The 12-week curriculum has been developed to include group instruction and individualized training in the Food Bank’s industrial kitchens. Students will spend eight weeks in the Food Bank’s industrial kitchen, an additional four weeks will be spent transitioning to permanent employment through on-site job coaching. The first cohort of students graduated from the program in January 2023. The Food Bank’s professional chef instructors and job coaches train students to enter food-service workplaces, teach students kitchen safety, provide hands-on cooking skills training, teach sanitation procedures, and provide students an opportunity to earn a ServSafe® Food Handler Certification. Staff also provide instruction in soft skills and employer expectations using national industry-based guidelines and curriculum. Students receive support and develop an individualized plan needed to enter a workplace, including transportation options. Kitchen School staff then assist students in finding partner employers whose needs match student strengths and help the transition into a permanent workplace. Additionally, Kitchen School staff provide support to students and employers for at least one year after graduation. “Everyone deserves a chance for success, and this program provides a path forward for a population that wants to work, is excited to work and can be a contributor to the workforce in a big way.” – Cathy Kanefsky, President & Chief Executive Officer, Food Bank of Delaware

### **INNOVATIONS SPOTLIGHT #3:**

#### **Iowa’s state [Disability Employment Business Toolkit](#) and Harkin Institute’s Employer Assessment Process**

The [Harkin Institute for Public Policy & Citizen Engagement](#) was established at Drake University in 2013 on the premise that good public policy requires an informed group of policymakers and an engaged public. Our mission is to inform citizens, inspire creative cooperation, and catalyze change on the issues of social justice, fairness, and opportunity. The Harkin Institute offers programming, research, and education in policy focus areas that defined Senator Tom Harkin’s career: people with disabilities, labor and employment, retirement security, and wellness and nutrition. Recently the Harkin Institute piloted a comprehensive self-assessment process with two national companies, and then created a [Disability Employment Business Toolkit](#) with Iowa’s state Vocational Rehabilitation system to support employers with the resources and strategies needed to successfully recruit, hire, grow and retain individuals with disabilities.

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- 3. Promote small businesses owned by and entrepreneurs with IDD:** States could take the following steps to promote individuals with IDD who wish to start a small business or become an entrepreneur by offering microenterprise grants or long-term loans with favorable terms to individuals with IDD –

- a. Offer microenterprise grants or long-term loans with favorable terms to individuals with IDD.
  - b. Offer specialized training and technical assistance to support potential entrepreneurs with IDD.
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#### **INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT #4:**

##### **Rhode Island's [Self-Employment Incubator](#)**

The Rhode Island Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Rhode Island Division of Vocational Rehabilitation collaborated with entrepreneurs with IDD to build a statewide “**RI Self-Employment Business Incubator**” through entrepreneurship education and ongoing business support to assist people with IDD and others on developing and growing successful new businesses in Rhode Island. Participants in the program complete an 8-course business development series, are assigned a personal staff mentor, receive 1:1 technical support from a Business Adviser (to help with marketing, branding and communications), attend virtual entrepreneur forums and participant in paid speaker bureau engagements. Each participant also receives a mini grant provided by the RI Department of Labor and Training’s “Back to Work RI” Initiative that ranges between \$250-2,000.

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#### **INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT #5:**

##### **[Synergies Work](#) (Georgia/Nationwide)**

Started by one family of a young man with Down Syndrome and huge entrepreneurial spirit, Synergies Work has become in four short years the largest startup hub in the United States for disability-led businesses that has served over 300 founders through its accelerator and incubator programs. By supporting founders at every stage of their journey, we are building an entrepreneurial ecosystem for disabled founders to thrive. We are igniting a movement of entrepreneurship within the disability community, based on our three pillars.

- **Nurturing the Grassroots** by nurturing disability-owned small businesses for sustainable success.
- **Building Collective Action** through the Community Hub and Synergies Market.
- **Creative Pathways to Capital** by creating pathways for direct investment in entrepreneurs.

Synergies Work now supports entrepreneurs with IDD and other significant disabilities nationwide in starting training and innovation cohorts. See their annual 2023 report for more information at: <https://synergieswork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Impact-Report.pdf>.

#### **HUMAN SPOTLIGHT #1:**

**Meet Angad Sahgal, Modern-Day Entrepreneur, Georgia**



## Angad Sahgal

Angad Sahgal is the founder of [Chai Ho Teas](#) and the app [Let Me Do It](#). Angad's love for food, drink and travel led him to founding his first company Chai Ho Teas which provides ethically sourced, organic, gourmet teas from his home country of India.

As Ambassador for the Georgia Supported Decision Making Project, Angad saw the potential for technology to help people with disabilities live independent and full lives. This led to him launching Let Me Do It – an application that supports disabled individuals and their support systems to help make decision making easier and more accessible. Angad has recently been accepted into the [Georgia State University Main Street Entrepreneur Seed Fund](#).

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## HUMAN SPOTLIGHT #2:

### Meet Emily Lantz, Caffeine Aficionado and Community-Oriented Entrepreneur, Iowa

#### Learn a little about Em..

Emilea Hillman is an innovative, young entrepreneur from Independence, Iowa. She is the owner and operator of Em's Coffee Co. Emilea is vibrant, personable, has a strong passion for her work.

Em is well known around Iowa for leaving a segregated workshop and becoming a business owner when she was only 21! She takes pride in owning her own business. With family support, advocacy, networking and the assistance of her local WIPA, Emilea was able to open her coffee shop in a matter of 10 months.

Emilea employs others with and without disabilities and is a valued business owner in her community. Emilea has shown the town of Independence that people with disabilities cannot only work in their community, but own a business too. Emilea is also a past member of Iowa's Developmental Disability Council.

Emilea previously sponsored her Special Olympics team, "Team Em" from 2010-2020.



Emilea Hillman