

Triangle Inc. helps students with disabilities prepare for their dream jobs

By Michael McHugh | Staff Writer
Feb 26, 2025



A large computer lab at Triangle Inc. in Salem, which offers innovative and comprehensive programs that provide greater opportunities for employment, empowerment, independence, and community inclusion for people with disabilities, Friday.

DAVID SOKOL/Staff photos



While recent increases in disability awareness and employer engagement have played a significant role in workers with disabilities becoming more widely represented in various fields, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in Massachusetts is still about 2½ times higher than that of people without disabilities, according to the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Triangle Inc., a disability services organization with offices in Salem, Malden, Boston and Randolph, is partnering with local school districts to narrow that employment gap and help people with disabilities as young as 14 to start planning for their future careers.

Triangle's School-to-Career and Empowering People for Inclusive Communities (EPIC) programs provide people ages 14-22, who have disabilities, with vocational coaching, supported employment and volunteer work, self-advocacy training, and a variety of other tools to enable them to start careers and serve their local communities.

“The ultimate goal for people with disabilities is inclusion in work,” Rachel Kaprielian, CEO of Triangle Inc., said. “And at Triangle, we know that everyone can contribute. The question is, where? How much? and what kind of environment will they be working in?”

During the week that would have normally been their February vacation, Beverly High School students in Caitlin Casale’s class visited Triangle’s Salem office for a one-week EPIC program.

“This is the first time we’ve done this with this group, because we figured that if they have to be here over February break, I could at least get them out of school,” Casale said, referring to the makeup days for Beverly due to the recent teachers’ strike. “In public schools, the age to start transition planning for people with disabilities is 18 to 22. But for us, these kids are in a life skills program and are academically focused, so to be doing this at 14 when they haven’t had much exposure to employment, it definitely helps them start to align with what they’re learning in school at a younger age.”

With students in Casale’s class dreaming of becoming anything from a hairdresser to a chef, Triangle helped equip students with the skills, experience, and knowledge necessary to feel ready to enter the workforce in whatever field they wish.

“We’ve been working on our resumes, practicing talking with friends the right and wrong way, and figuring out what our future jobs could be,” Beverly High junior Jayelyn Valerio said.

“I’ve learned that anybody, of any age, of any ability, can have a dream job and achieve it,” said sophomore Alexine Holmes.

Students in Casale’s class also had the opportunity to work with participants in Triangle’s day program, leading to some students discovering their potential for serving as direct care staff for others with disabilities.

“What I’ve found is that working as direct care staff is a good opportunity for kids and adults with disabilities, because they understand it and are really capable,” Casale said, “And they all kind of naturally flowed into those roles, which was really cool to see. The field is very flexible with supporting people of various employment abilities.”

Triangle provides a variety of programs that provide greater opportunities for employment, empowerment, independence, and community inclusion for both youth and adults with disabilities. In order to provide diverse entry-level work opportunities to participants, the organization has partnered with businesses such as TJ Maxx, Buffalo Wild Wings, Marshalls, McDonald’s, Kelly’s Roast Beef, CBS, and Walmart, as well as nonprofits like Cradles 2 Crayons, the Hope Lodge, Stoneham Zoo, and the YMCA Food Pantry.

At Triangle’s Salem office, 60 adult day service participants can be seen doing anything from training on personal finance skills in the computer lab, to practicing hanging clothes in the “TriangleMaxx” mock retail room. However, a large portion of those participants are out in the field working at local businesses.

“Participants will express what they’re interested in and we help to match them with a certain place,” Anne Gachohu, the site manager at Triangle’s Salem office, said. “Other times, they will come in and not know at all what they want to do. In that case, we do assessments, take them to do volunteer work, and that’s when they can gauge what they’re good at for themselves, and go from there.”

For the onsite EPIC trainings, young people with disabilities work with adult mentors to create resumes, figure out their ideal career, and develop important skills for the workplace such as communication, self-advocacy, professionalism and employer expectations.

“We’re fortunate to have these great relationships with the school systems,” Kaprielian said. “Students (will come to our sites), usually for a one-week type of activity, and we’ll start with basic questions like, ‘Where would you like to work?’ or ‘Have you had a job before, and if not, why?’, and we learn who they are and what makes them tick. And often they come to find out, ‘Hey, I’m pretty good at this,’ and will start to gain confidence in their skills. It flows to a place where they’re able to go out on the last day and do a few things that expose them to employment, where it’s their choice.”

For more information about Triangle Inc. and its services, visit triangle-inc.org.

Michael McHugh can be contacted at mmchugh@northofboston.com or at 781-799-5202