



Texas Beacons
of Excellence

January, February &
March 2025

Upcoming Conferences

APSE Employment First Employment for All

June 11-14, 2025
Location: Washington D.C.

Registration Link:
[2025 National APSE
Conference](#)

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

June 23-25, 2025
Location: Washington D.C.

Registration Link:
[https://www.aaid.org/
education/annual-
conference/registration](https://www.aaid.org/education/annual-conference/registration)

Resources

Job Accommodation
Network
askjan.org

 disabilityinnovation.unt.edu

Partnership Led by:



TEXAS
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES



Texas Beacons of Excellence in the Community

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter!

We're excited to share some of the incredible things happening at both the Lubbock and San Antonio State Supported Living Centers. From expert-led trainings to meaningful networking events, 2025 is off to a strong start. These moments highlight our ongoing commitment to empowering residents through employment opportunities and collaborative support.

Let's take a look at what we've been up to—and what's still ahead!

Klein ISD

February 11, 2025 – Employment Training Event

This comprehensive session focused on preparing individuals for future employment opportunities. Participants received hands-on Job Skills Training, where they learned practical strategies for workplace success. Experts from UNT-WISE and Texas A&M University provided an insightful benefits overview, covering available support and services for individuals entering the workforce. Texas A&M University also led a powerful discussion on vocational pathways after graduation, helping participants and their families explore future possibilities beyond high school.

March 1, 2025 – Empowerability Fair

The Empowerability Fair offered a wide range of engaging topics designed to promote independence and self-confidence. Imagine Enterprise led informative sessions on navigating benefits, helping attendees better understand available support. In partnership with Texas A&M University, the fair also featured inspiring sessions on Independence and Self-Advocacy, specially tailored for elementary and middle school students, encouraging them to begin building important life skills early on.


Post-Secondary Resources

UNT-WISE continues to be a valuable partner, providing resources and guidance for students exploring post-secondary education and career options. Their programs support a smooth transition from school to adulthood, helping individuals discover meaningful and fulfilling pathways forward.

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Texas Beacons of Excellence



Texas Beacons of Excellence Spotlight



Gilbert Gonzalez
Current Employer:
Nikki's Popcorn

Big congratulations to Gilbert Gonzalez, who was named March Employee of the Month at Nikki's Popcorn! Your hard work and dedication truly popped—way to go!



Mike Sandiford
Current Employer:
Smoothie King

Mike Sandiford started a job with Smoothie King as a Team Member.
Start Date: 3/17/2025
Previously with U&I Spread the Light

Lubbock State Supported Living Center

January 15, 2025 – Supported Employment Training

We kicked off the year with a dynamic training session led by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), designed exclusively for the SSLC Vocational Staff. The session focused on advancing the team's knowledge of Supported Employment strategies. Through tools like assessments, the Discovery process, and Customized Employment strategies, staff learn to create tailored job opportunities and promote greater independence on the job. Attendees explored the best practices and tools to better assist residents in pursuing meaningful community-based work opportunities. It was an inspiring start to 2025!

February 13 & 14, 2025 – Benefits Training

Imagine Enterprises joined us for two days of interactive training to demystify how employment impacts public benefits. Participants gained practical tools to explain benefits in simple, relatable terms, empowering them to support residents as they make informed decisions about their employment journey. A huge thank you to all who attended!




April 10, 2025 - Meet & Greet

In April, we hosted a fun and informative Meet & Greet with the VR and EmpowerAbleSkills teams, which included a tour of the SSLC facility and an opportunity to connect with residents from our TBE referral list. During the tour, we explored the wide range of day programming available to residents, including the music classroom, nutrition lab, clothing store, Hearts and Hands craft shop, and the Canteen-Diner.

Vocational Director Jasmine Peeples shared how these programs help residents build both soft and practical skills—essential for a smooth transition into the community. The Meet & Greet also strengthened our existing partnerships and deepened alignment around our shared goals within the Texas Beacons of Excellence project. We're energized by the collaborative spirit and look forward to what's ahead!





Texas Beacons of Excellence Spotlight



Debbie Aplin
Current Employer:
Luby's Cafeteria

Debbie Aplin kicked off an exciting new chapter on March 10th as she joined the team at Luby's Cafeteria! Wishing you all the best, Debbie—you're going to shine in your new role!

Testimonial:
Follow the QR Code for
amazing testimonials from
two of our TBE participants,
Darius and Gilbert!



San Antonio State Supported Living Center

March 19, 2025 – Supported Employment Training

We were thrilled to welcome VCU for an exclusive training focused on Supported Employment practices. Designed to equip staff with practical tools, the training covered how to match residents' strengths with meaningful work opportunities, identify potential employers, and provide the right supports for long-term success.

Staff left the session with a deeper understanding of how to help residents pursue community employment—feeling more confident, motivated, and aligned with our mission. This training reinforces our ongoing commitment to disability employment and inclusive community integration.

April 1, 2025 – Benefits Training


Imagine Enterprises returned to lead another impactful training focused on understanding the relationship between employment and Social Security benefits. SSLC staff learned how to communicate complex benefits information in simple, clear language, making it easier for residents and their families to understand how employment may affect their benefits. Staff left the session feeling more confident and equipped to support residents through these important conversations.



April 17, 2025 - Meet & Greet

Our April Meet & Greet brought together VR, Let'sGoTexas, and San Antonio SSLC staff for a meaningful exchange of ideas and introductions. It was a wonderful opportunity to better understand each other's roles in the Texas Beacons of Excellence initiative. Collaboration has never looked so good!





Texas Beacons of Excellence Spotlight

New TBE Participants at Goodwill

We are excited to welcome three new participants at our Goodwill site, David Favors, Dralion Minnifield, and Devonne Booker. We look forward to partnering with each of you as you take the next steps toward meaningful employment in the community.

Thank you to everyone who continues to bring passion, knowledge, and heart to our shared mission. Your efforts make a lasting impact on the individuals we serve and the communities we're building together.

Here's to continued growth, learning, and collaboration in the months ahead. Stay connected and keep up the great work!

Sincerely,

**The Texas Beacons of
Excellence Team**



TTC Presentation

February 19, 2025

TBE's very own Risa Mack and Sonia Martinez delivered an insightful presentation on job skills training and best practices for educators, including both teachers and paraprofessionals.

Their session covered essential strategies for accessing and using baseline data to support students in job development. Topics included assessing and planning, job skills analysis, targeted skills training, best practices for writing case notes, and effective caseload management. It was a valuable opportunity for educators to strengthen their tools and techniques for guiding students toward success in the workplace!

VCU Training

March 3–5, 2025

The TBE team attended an in-depth training at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). The training covered a range of valuable topics, including supported employment, identifying workplace barriers, and teaching social understandings essential for workplace success. This professional development experience provided the team with fresh tools and strategies to better support students on their path to meaningful employment!

