



Texas Beacons
of Excellence

July, Aug, & Sept
2025

Upcoming Conferences

**28th Annual Texas
Workforce Conference**
December 3-5, 2025
Corpus Christi, TX
[Register Here](#)

**2025 TAVAC Annual
Conference**
December 3-5, 2025
College Station, Texas
[Register Here](#)

**Texas Transition
Conference 2026**
February 18-20, 2026
San Marcos, TX
[Register Here](#)

**27th International
Conference on Autism,
Intellectual Disability &
Developmental
Disabilities**
January 14-17, 2026
Long Beach, CA
[Register Here](#)

Resources

Job Accommodation Network
askjan.org

 disabilityinnovation.unt.edu

Partnership Led by:



Texas Beacons of Excellence In The Community

Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter!

Here's a glimpse at what we've been working on—and
an exciting look at what's next!

Job Skills Training Workshop

July 29, 2025 | San Antonio State Supported Living Center

The Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) Project hosted a Job Skills Training Workshop in collaboration with the San Antonio SSLC. The event brought together members of the vocational team and newly appointed job coaches, all dedicated to advancing residents toward Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE).

The course, led by Peggy Schmidt and Dr. Paula Dean-Fuller from UNT WISE, provided an in-depth overview of Supported Employment. Key topics included career discovery, job analysis, and best practices for job skills training.



Participants engaged in hands-on exercises such as writing case notes, exploring accommodation options, and role-playing employer interactions. Staff reported that the role-play activities were particularly valuable—enhancing their confidence and preparing them to apply these strategies in real community settings.

Training Spotlight: “On the Demand Side” *September 11-12, 2025*

TBE Employment Specialists and SSLC Vocational Team staff attended the training “On the Demand Side: Tried and True Employer Engagement Approaches.”

This session highlighted effective employer engagement strategies that connect the skills of individuals with disabilities to high-demand workforce needs. The training emphasized the important role of employment specialists and disability advocates as part of the human resource pipeline, bridging the gap between employers and a talented, often underutilized, labor force.

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Texas Beacons of Excellence

VCU Consultation & Worksite Assessment

August 20, 2025 | Lubbock SSLC & Glassy Alley Art Studio

The Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), EmpowerAble Skills, coordinated a worksite assessment with Glassy Alley Art Studio, supported by Lubbock SSLC Vocational Staff, who arranged transportation for residents. Consultants Austin Miller and Vicki Brooke from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) visited to provide technical assistance with the TBE caseload. Employment Specialists Hailey Venner and Prudence Venner designed the assessment to explore a variety of transferable employment skills—benefiting not only residents interested in art but also those developing broader workplace competencies. At Glassy Alley, residents participated in a variety of tasks, including:

- Organizing and preparing art supplies
- Sorting glass for mosaic kits
- Assisting with studio setup and cleanup
- Following safety protocols
- Supporting art classes and retail operations



These experiences allowed the Lubbock SSLC Vocational Staff to also observe critical employment-related abilities such as attention to detail, adaptability, time management, fine motor coordination, and social communication—skills that are highly applicable across many work settings.

September 15, 2025 | San Antonio SSLC

In San Antonio, Dr. Carol Schall and Dr. Lauren Avellone from VCU provided additional technical assistance to support career discovery and exploration with our TBE participants.

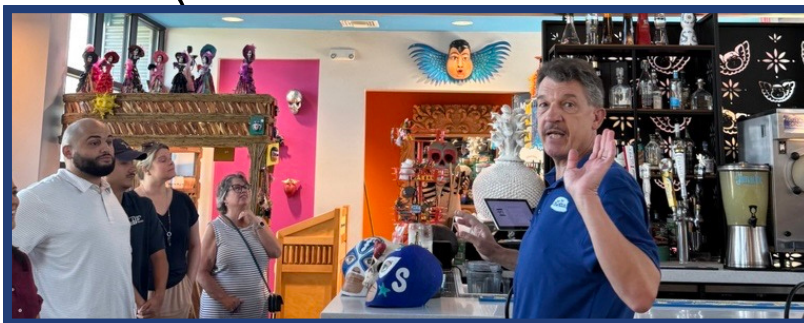
Partnering with Let's Go Texas, a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), the SSLC Vocational Team coordinated two engaging community worksite tours—at Bubble Bath Car Wash and La Gloria's Mexican Restaurant. The tours offered residents valuable exposure to real-world employment opportunities.

At La Gloria's, the restaurant manager shared the establishment's history and cultural background, inspiring several residents to express interest in applying for jobs on the spot.



At Bubble Bath Car Wash, participants learned about cleaning processes and assisted in restocking supplies.

The enthusiasm and curiosity displayed throughout the day marked a successful milestone in each participant's career discovery journey.



Community Connections

August 7, 2025 | Klein ISD

Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) had the opportunity to participate in Family Orientation Night hosted by Klein ISD at the Bridge Center. This event is designed to welcome new and returning adult learners, giving them a chance to tour the campus, meet staff, and learn about available educational and support resources.

TBE, along with Garza and Carrillo Consultants, hosted an information table to share details about UNT WISE and supported employment services. This event was highly successful, generating interest among attendees in pursuing competitive integrated employment opportunities. Several participants took steps towards signing up to participate in TBE, marking a meaningful outcome from the evening.



In Other News:

Supporting Community Milestones

September 18, 2025 | Texas A&M

In September, Texas Beacons of Excellence was proud to support Texas A&M University in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Center on Disability and Development. This milestone event recognized the Center's significant contributions to improving lifelong opportunities and services for individuals with disabilities, their families, and the broader community. Through education, research, and service, the Center has played a critical role in advancing inclusive practices and fostering a more accessible and equitable society. TBE was honored to be part of this celebration and to continue supporting initiatives that strength the disability services ecosystem.



September 16, 2025 | Klein ISD

Texas Beacons of Excellence joined Klein ISD's Parent Learning Night, an event focused on equipping families with knowledge about postsecondary options and other resources to support adult learners and equipping parent in provide early intervention. Jana Bishop from Texas A&M shared information about educational opportunities and accommodations, while TBE highlighted programs and services available through our initiative.



Provider News: Expanding Employer Partnerships

Garza and Carrillo Consultants continue to support individuals in pursuing their vocational interests while exploring new partnerships with employers to expand employment opportunities across diverse career pathways. A recent highlight was a tour of Amazon, where participants and their families gained valuable insight into internal operations, production systems, and potential career opportunities in areas such as IT and production. This experience provided participants with a clearer understanding of available career options and the skills needed to succeed in a competitive work environment.

As a result of these ongoing outreach efforts, TBE is proud to recognize Garza and Carrillo Consultants and highlight HTeaO as a new employer partner. HTeaO is a rapidly growing quick-service restaurant chain specializing in tea, with 136 locations nationwide as of 2024. Through this partnership, TBE participants gain access to meaningful employment opportunities that align with their skills and career goals. We are pleased to share that LeDre Williams was recently hired as a crew member. LeDre's prior experience at the Klein Oak Bridge Center Bistro helped prepare him for this role, and he is now thriving in his new position, enjoying part-time work that offers both professional growth and personal fulfillment.



In addition, we are proud to highlight Anna Kosarek, who was recently hired at Campus Kids LLC as a child care attendant. Campus Kids is an extended day program dedicated to enriching the lives of children by providing a safe environment, academic support, and engaging activities. Anna has completed first aid and CPR training provided by her employer, reflecting her professionalism and readiness for the role. With a longstanding passion for working with children, she has quickly adapted to her responsibilities and is excelling in a position that aligns with her skills and career goals. Anna's achievement highlights the impact of TBE's support in preparing individuals for meaningful and fulfilling employment.

Job Coach Spotlight: Building Connections

This quarter, we are proud to spotlight Cindy Lanham of Quest Employment Services for her exceptional dedication to fostering employer relationships. Through persistence, creativity, and a genuine passion for workforce development, Cindy has renewed long-standing partnerships while also cultivating exciting new connections.

By attending industry events, networking sessions, and local business gatherings, Cindy has opened doors to fresh opportunities for participants, helping employers recognize the value of working with TBE and Quest Employment Services. Her efforts not only provide immediate opportunities but also lay the foundation for long-term collaborations that benefit both participants and employers. The energy, professionalism, and enthusiasm she brings to every interaction make a tangible difference in the community and exemplify the heart of our mission.





Participant Spotlight: Kaden Hodges at Scoops



Quest has made remarkable progress this quarter, achieving strong placements for our participants. A shining example of this success is Kaden Hodges, who is nearing the completion of a 16-week internship at Scoops. Kaden has approached this experience with determination, diligence, and an eagerness to learn, mastering new tasks while building meaningful relationships with coworkers.

Kaden's passion for scooping ice cream and providing excellent customer service has been evident throughout this internship. Beyond learning job-specific skills, Kaden has embraced the opportunity to grow professionally and personally, gaining confidence, strengthening teamwork skills, and developing a sense of pride in meaningful work. This journey highlights the power of hands-on experience, dedicated support, and the personal commitment required to achieve success. We are proud of Kaden's accomplishments and look forward to celebrating continued growth and contributions as the internship concludes.

Jobsite Highlights: Quest Employment Services Amarillo, TX

This quarter has been an exciting and productive time for Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) and Quest Employment Services. Our teams have been actively engaging with the community, strengthening relationships, and creating meaningful opportunities for our participants. Every event attended, every connection made, and every successful placement brings us closer to fulfilling our mission.

On September 13th, TBE had the privilege of tabling at the Greater Amarillo Foster Parent Association event. Cindy Lanham spent the day connecting with foster parents, caregivers, and community members, sharing information about our programs, services, and the many ways we support individuals and families. This event was more than just an opportunity to provide information—it was a chance to engage in meaningful conversations, answer questions, and gain insight into the needs of the community. The connections made that day have the potential to create lasting impact and open doors for future collaboration.



Participating in events like this allows TBE to expand its network, strengthen existing partnerships, and build new relationships. Each interaction helps raise awareness about the resources available to foster families and job seekers and reinforces our commitment to creating positive, tangible change. We are grateful to be part of such an engaged and passionate community and look forward to continuing to grow these connections in the months ahead.



Texas Beacons of Excellence is proud to recognize Jenna Armendariz for obtaining an employment opportunity in Amarillo, TX! As of August 28, 2025, she will be working as a Utility Worker at OVR-EZE.



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



2025 TX APSE & TRA Conference September 23, 2025 | Galveston, TX



At the 2025 Texas Association of People Supporting Employment First (TX APSE) and Texas Rehabilitation Association (TRA) Conference, April McDowell, a Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) participant in Dallas, TX, shared her inspiring story during her session "Paving the Way: April's Journey to Meaningful Employment."

Now thriving in her role at DHL–NIKE in Dallas, April's journey highlights the power of determination, inclusion, and the impact of meaningful employment opportunities. Her presentation reflected the spirit of TBE—empowering individuals with disabilities to lead, advocate, and make lasting contributions in their workplaces and communities. We're proud to celebrate April and all our participants who continue to pave the way for a more inclusive future.



Looking Ahead

The TBE Project continues to collaborate with partners across Texas to expand Supported Employment opportunities and empower individuals to achieve meaningful, integrated work in their communities.