



Texas Beacons
of Excellence

Oct, Nov, & Dec
2025

Upcoming Conferences

Texas Transition Conference 2026

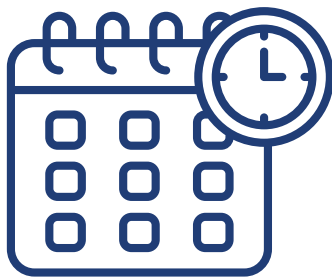
February 18-20, 2026
San Marcos, TX
[Register Here](#)

2026 ARRPE Conference

February 23-24, 2026
San Antonio, TX
[Register Here](#)

2026 National APSE Conference

June 9-11, 2026
Dallas, TX
[Register Here](#)



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!

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

Building Stronger Employer Connections

*October 29, 2025 | San Antonio & Lubbock State Supported
Living Center*

On October 27, VCU Austin and Vicki led a virtual training for SSLC Job Coaches focused on strengthening employer relationships and conducting vocational assessments in community settings.

This session equipped staff with practical strategies to better understand individuals' strengths, interests, and routines—ensuring employment opportunities are both meaningful and well-matched. Trainings like this are critical in expanding inclusive employment pathways and supporting people with disabilities to succeed in competitive, integrated workplaces.

Empowering Self-Advocates Through Real Conversations *November 5, 2025*

On November 5, Imagine Enterprises hosted the first session of Real Talk with Ricky, a virtual training for self-advocates and families.

The session explored the concept of authority and how it impacts individuals with disabilities as they navigate independent living and everyday decision-making. By fostering open dialogue and shared learning, this training empowered participants to better understand their rights, responsibilities, and personal autonomy.

Services Resume Following Government Shutdown *November 12, 2025*

During the shutdown, the Social Security Administration was limited to essential functions and unable to process Benefits Planning Queries (BPQYs), temporarily pausing benefits counseling services. With operations restored, we were excited to resume this vital support and continue helping participants make informed employment decisions.

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Texas Beacons of Excellence

Strengthening Teams Through Targeted Technical Assistance

November 13, 18, 2025

Strengthening Teams Through Targeted Technical Assistance On November 13 and 18, VCU consultants Lauren Avellone and Carol Schall provided virtual technical assistance alongside Employment Provider Let's Go Texas. These sessions offered hands-on staffing support and caseload review, allowing teams to problem-solve in real time and refine employment strategies. This collaborative approach helps ensure services remain person-centered, responsive, and aligned with best practices in supported employment.

Strategic Job Development in Action

November 20, 2025



Strategic Job Development in Action On November 20, the Texas Beacons of Excellence Project hosted a live virtual training titled Strategic Job Development: People, Places & Platforms for Employment Specialists, Job Coaches, and Teachers. Participants explored innovative ways to discover employment opportunities by aligning assessments with individuals' interests and strengths, leveraging personal and community networks, and using online platforms to research employers and build professional connections. This training emphasized practical, real-world strategies that help professionals connect people with disabilities to jobs where they can thrive.

Creating Pathways from Internship to Employment

December 3, 2025

On December 3, EmpowerAble Skills and Lubbock's Business Relations Coordinator (BRC) came together to discuss collaboration strategies with local businesses aimed at creating internship-to-employment pipelines. These conversations focused on building sustainable relationships that open doors to long-term employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Sustaining Partnerships for Employment Success

December 9, 2025

On December 9, partners participated in a virtual training titled Employment and Empowerment Through Sustainable Partnerships. This session highlighted the vital role Centers for Independent Living (CILs) play in advancing employment and independent living outcomes. Through DETAC's Empowerment Through Partnership toolkit and insights from community stakeholders, participants learned how to initiate and sustain meaningful partnerships, demonstrate the value of collaboration, and formalize relationships through tools like Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). These strategies help ensure long-term, impactful employment outcomes for people with disabilities.





New TBE Partner Alert: Dallas ISD Career Institute North and South



Dallas ISD Career Institutes' vision is to provide high school students with vocational education and experience to prepare them for future career aspirations. By utilizing the Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway with Dallas ISD, these students are trained on state-of-the-art, industry-standard equipment; have the potential to earn certification(s)/ dual credits; and be connected with industry-partners to prepare for post-graduation career endeavors. Students are taught by Instructors who currently hold industry level certifications and have years of experience within the specific program's field.



Programs of Study Available at CI-North:

- Architecture and Construction: Architecture, HVAC, Electrical, Construction, Plumbing, and Interior Design
- Health Sciences: Patient Care, Dental, EKG & Phlebotomy, and EMT
- Information Technology Programs: Game Design, Cybersecurity, Software Development
- Manufacturing Programs: Welding and Electronics
- Transportation & Logistics: Automotive and Aviation
- Functional Life Skills: Food Handler and Robotics

Programs of Study Available at CI-South:

- Architecture and Construction: Architecture, Construction, Carpentry, Interior Design, Electrical & Solar, HVAC & Refrigeration, and Plumbing
- Health Sciences: Patient Care, Dental Assistant, EKG & Phlebotomy, Pharmacy Technician, and Emergency Medical Technician
- Information Technology Programs: Game Design & E-Sports, Cybersecurity, Software Development
- Manufacturing Programs: Welding and Industrial Robotics
- Transportation & Logistics: Automotive and Aviation

Students have the opportunity to earn multiple industry level certifications aligned to their chosen program of study. Career Institute students can earn the following certificates:

- OSHA-10
- NCCER Certifications (Core and Levels 1-3)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Pilot
- Student Pilot Certification
- Autodesk Revit
- Autocad
- Certified Production Technician (CPT)
- Industrial Technology Maintenance 9TIM)
- CompTia Network+, CompTia Security+
- CPR-AED

Dallas ISD's Career Institute admission is free to Dallas ISD students. Enrollment into a Career Institute program is completed online on the Dallas ISD Career Institute Main page. Enrollment into CI-North or CI-South depends on a student's home campus. There are no grade requirements for a student to participate in the Career Institute.



New TBE Partner Alert: Ft Worth ISD Transition Center



Fort Worth ISD's Transition Center mission is to "Prepare and empower out students to successfully Integrate into the Community so they can lead Positive, fulfilling, and productive lives". The Transition Center has multiple programs for Fort Worth students to access.

- **PREP:**

- The Grind Coffee Shop: Students focus on developing customer services ands coal skills while working in a coffee shop environment on campus.
- The Bistro: Students focus on developing safe food handlers skills while working within a kitchen environment on campus.
- Landscaping
- PAES Lab

- **LIFT:**

Wellness program - LEAP (Life Experience and Preparation): Help prepare post-secondary students learn complex independent living skills. The program's goal is to "help students graduate with clear employability, with a clear vision of what they want their lives to look like, and how to make that vision happen".

- Such complex independent living skills tasks could include: learning how to use the Fort Worth city bus systems, Volunteering within the community, participating in personal finance curriculum, and more.

- **LIFE:**

Cooking class



Employee Spotlight: Alexis Martin

Alexis Martin is currently an Employment Specialist with Goodwill Dallas as part of the Texas Beacons of Excellence Project. She graduated from the University of North Texas with her B.S. in Human Development and Family Science.

She has previously worked as a Job Coach working with children and adults with Autism as well as physical disabilities, teaching them job-related skills, advocating for accommodations, while simultaneously promoting independence in a work setting. A Life Skills Coach, working with adults with Neurodiversity, providing support and resources towards the furthering development of their independent life skills.

With a focus on client specific goals that promote autonomy within each individual to their unique needs, through the use of ABA Therapy Programming. As well as working as a Teacher for nonverbal children in a school setting with a focus on speech therapy and the use of AAC devices to foster growth academically with an emphasis on communication.



Spotlight on Mounting Horizons, Inc. (Houston)

This quarter, TBE is thrilled to shine a spotlight on Mounting Horizons, Inc. (MHI) an extraordinary organization making a real difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities and seniors. Founded in 2003, MHI is a community-based,



consumer-controlled nonprofit dedicated to empowering their clients and breaking down barriers to independence. MHI provides low-cost, door-to-door transportation services, and countless TBE participants rely on these services to get to work, appointments, and social events. The impact of this service cannot be overstated: it's not just transportation, it's freedom, opportunity, and connection. Participants and their families consistently share glowing

feedback about the reliability, compassion, and dedication of the MHI staff.

Speaking of the staff, they are nothing short of incredible. Every team member embodies MHI's motto, "The Sky is the Limit!" From drivers to coordinators, each staff member goes above and beyond to ensure participants are supported, safe, and empowered. Their energy, commitment, and creativity make the impossible possible every single day.



We are proud and honored to partner with Mounting Horizons.

Together, we're removing barriers, creating pathways to employment, and helping participants live fuller, more independent lives. To the amazing staff at MHI: thank you for inspiring us, raising the bar, and showing what dedication and heart can achieve.

Celebrating Employer Partnerships (Houston)

Garza and Carillo remain dedicated to empowering individuals to achieve their career goals. Over the last quarter, they successfully made four placements, including two volunteering opportunities, helping participants gain valuable experience and skills.

TBE, along with Garza and Carillo, wanted to recognize and show appreciation to employers who have taken the time to learn about Customized Inclusive Employment (CIE) and created supportive environments for participants to grow. Certificates of appreciation were presented to Ceyonna Howard, Manager at Little Caesars Pizza, and Amanda Melena, Manager at Dollar Tree.

These managers have embraced the concept of CIE and demonstrated a genuine commitment to developing participants' skills and abilities. Their leadership and support make a meaningful difference in helping individuals thrive in the workplace.





Certified Supply Chain Specialist Certification Course

Sept 2025 - DHL Nike - Dallas, TX

During this full-day course, April, Darius, and John earned their Certified Supply Chain Specialist certification as well as their DHL Passport. The training was highly interactive and included numerous hands-on activities that kept participants engaged throughout the day. Among the entire group, April, Darius, and John stood out for their enthusiasm and

active participation, which was genuinely appreciated by the instructors. The course covered how the supply chain operates across cities, states, and international locations. Instructors also highlighted DHL's organizational goals, including fostering a welcoming and inclusive workplace, creating a positive employee experience, and implementing initiatives to reduce the company's carbon footprint.

Throughout the day, all three participants consistently asked thoughtful questions, contributed to discussions, and remained fully engaged. They also participated meaningfully in the diversity and inclusion segment of the training, demonstrating strong interest and understanding of the material.

The Latest For QUEST Amarillo - Amarillo, TX

This quarter, the QUEST Team continued to strengthen employer and community partnerships, creating meaningful pathways for employment, skill development, and career exploration. These efforts resulted in two (CIE) placements and the development of two new volunteer opportunities within the community.

The QUEST Team has been building strong community relationships, including a partnership with the local fire department. Through this collaboration, one participant was provided the opportunity to participate in a ride-along and job shadow experience, gaining firsthand insight into public safety careers.

Participants also made exciting strides in employment and vocational experiences. Javier Chavez started at Ms. Piggy's Bakery as a seasonal employee and was later offered a permanent part-time position as a Bakery Production Assistant. Kimberly Young returned to a familiar role as a bagger at United Grocery Store, bringing her previous experience and skills back into the workplace. Caitlyn Cash explored her vocational interests through an unpaid internship at FAVS Restaurant, where she gained practical, hands-on experience as a dishwasher.

These accomplishments highlight the QUEST Team's ongoing commitment to supporting participants as they explore career opportunities, build skills, and connect with the community.





Texas Beacons of Excellence is proud to recognize Javier Chavez for being hired at Ms. Piggy's Bakery in December.

Congratulations Javier on your new job!



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 ADVO Annual Christmas Party

December 12, 2025 | Amarillo, TX

Happy Holidays! ADVO Companies had their annual Christmas Party on December 12, and we were excited to see all the smiling faces. ADVO accepts donations from the community to help make this event a success. The room was filled with Joy and happiness.

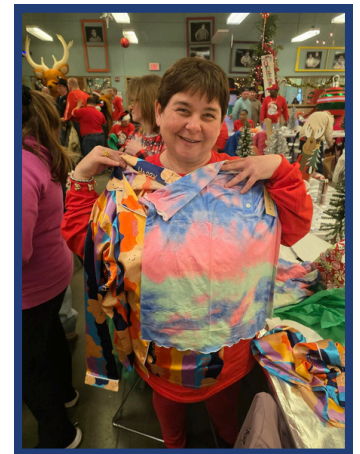


Recognizing Greater Potential

United Supermarkets | Amarillo, TX

Aimee Street has been a valued employee at United Supermarkets for 18 years. For much of that time, she worked one day a week for four hours as part of the bakery team, assisting with packaging baked goods.

Through a deeper look at Aimee's skills and by spending time learning more about her interests and passions, we discovered that Aimee had so much more to offer. After meaningful conversations with the management team at United, the TBE team learned there was a desire to expand Aimee's role by increasing her hours and providing cross-training opportunities.



Aimee's passion for decorating cakes and cookies has allowed her to grow into an even more valuable member of the United Bakery team. She has increased her schedule from 4 hours to 12 hours per week, now working three days a week—and loving it!

Congratulations, Aimee! The TBE team is incredibly proud of you and all that you've accomplished.