



Texas Beacons
of Excellence

Apr, May, & Jun
2026

Upcoming Conferences

DCDT 50th Anniversary International Conference

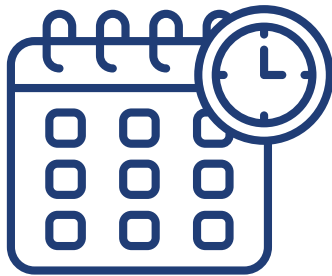
October 14-17, 2026
New Orleans, LA
[Register Here](#)

2026 College Autism Summit

November 8-11, 2026
Baltimore, MD
[Register Here](#)

2027 DADD Annual Conference

January 6-9, 2027
Phoenix, AZ
[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!

As we wrap up another quarter, we'd like to take a moment to celebrate the many partnerships, milestones, and opportunities that continue to move the Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) Project forward. From building relationships with employers to supporting participants as they begin meaningful employment, each success reflects the collaboration and dedication of our project staff, community rehabilitation providers, employers, and state partners. Thank you to everyone who continues to make this work possible.

Coffee Club with the San Antonio Men's Home *May 2026 | San Antonio State Supported Living Center*

The San Antonio SSLC Social Work Department recently launched a Coffee Club designed to promote socialization, routine development, and community readiness for male residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This structured gathering provides a comfortable, low-pressure environment where participants can build friendships, practice communication skills, and engage in conversations that mirror everyday community experiences. Activities like these help reinforce independence while supporting transition planning for individuals preparing for community living.

TBE Coordinator Karina Saucedo and Employment Specialist Kristian Salinas were invited to speak with participants about employment preparation, workplace expectations, and the many opportunities available through competitive integrated employment. We were grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a meaningful initiative and look forward to future collaborations.



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Texas Beacons of Excellence

San Antonio Zoo Worksite Tour & Informational Interview

April 2, 2026 | San Antonio State Supported Living Center

Sometimes the best opportunities come from unexpected circumstances! One of our TBE participants, Adrian, was scheduled to interview at the San Antonio Zoo. Although the interview had to be postponed due to a pipe bursting in the Administrative Building, the day still proved to be a valuable learning experience.

Rather than reschedule and head home, Employment Specialist Kristian Salinas from Let's Go Texas connected Adrian with Jenny, a Zoo employee who works in the giraffe enclosure. During their informal interview, Adrian had the opportunity to ask questions about Jenny's career path, opportunities for advancement, and what she enjoys most about working at the Zoo. The conversation provided meaningful insight into the workplace while helping Adrian build confidence and practice his interviewing skills.

Thank you to the San Antonio Zoo staff for turning an unexpected setback into a memorable learning opportunity!



Partner Spotlight | Expanding Opportunities Through DirectEmployers

May 2026

During the first week of May, TBE Program Director Ryan Cole met with Michelle Krefft, Disability and Community Outreach Specialist with DirectEmployers.

A special thank you goes to our Business Relations Coordinators, Ricardo Rendon and Nicholas Casillas, for making this connection possible!

Michelle works closely with both employers and job seekers to promote successful employment matches for individuals with disabilities. Thanks to this new partnership, our TBE Coordinators and Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) have been added to a distribution list that shares employment opportunities across our project sites—creating even more pathways to competitive integrated employment for the individuals we serve. We look forward to growing this partnership in the months ahead!

Second Chance Job Fair

April 15, 2026 | San Antonio State Supported Living Center

TBE project staff attended the Second Chance Job Fair to connect with employers interested in providing meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with justice involvement backgrounds.

Building relationships with inclusive employers is an important part of expanding employment opportunities for our participants, and we appreciate the organizations that are committed to giving individuals a second chance to succeed in the workforce.

San Antonio SSLC Provider Fair

June 12, 2026

Employment Specialists Kristian Salinas and Cecilia Gutierrez from Let's Go Texas participated in the San Antonio SSLC Provider Fair, where they shared information about the employment services available through the Texas Beacons of Excellence (TBE) Project.

Held twice each year, the Provider Fair connects residents and their families with community group home providers and other transition resources as they prepare for life in the community. Events like these provide an excellent opportunity to discuss how employment services can complement a person's transition goals and long-term success.

We appreciate Let's Go Texas for their continued commitment to helping individuals with disabilities obtain and maintain meaningful employment.



Lubbock vs. San Antonio SSLC Basketball Game May 29, 2026

Friendly competition was on full display as the Lubbock Hotshots traveled to take on the San Antonio Bulldogs in an exciting day of basketball! The event featured two games—one showcasing resident athletes and another featuring staff from both centers. The Lubbock Hotshots earned the victory in the resident game, while San Antonio claimed the win in the staff matchup.

More importantly, the event brought together residents, staff, leadership, and families from both centers for a day filled with teamwork, sportsmanship, and community. It was a wonderful reminder that shared experiences like these strengthen relationships and create lasting memories.

Lubbock SSLC Provider Fair

June 25, 2026

The TBE team also participated in the Lubbock SSLC Provider Fair, where residents and families had the opportunity to meet with local day habilitation and group home providers while exploring community living options. The event also allowed our staff to strengthen relationships with providers serving communities where several TBE participants are expected to relocate following their transition from the SSLC. These connections help ensure employment planning remains an integral part of each individual's journey into community living.



Congratulations to Our Recent TBE Placements!

Please join us in celebrating three participants who recently achieved competitive integrated employment!

- Corey Moore began working as a Crew Member at Doc's Cafeteria on June 23, 2026, where he primarily washes dishes and assists with food preparation as needed.
- Kerisa Dewitt began working as an Event & Catering Assistant at the San Antonio Zoo on June 27, 2026. She works alongside the catering team in The Ralston event venue, assisting with event setup, guest service, and breakdown for catered events.
- Cory Stephens recently began employment as a Dishwasher at Mark's Outing on June 29, 2026. We are excited to celebrate this accomplishment and look forward to watching him grow in his new role.

Congratulations to Corey, Kerisa, and Cory on reaching this important milestone! We wish each of them continued success as they begin their employment journeys.



San Antonio SSLC Fiesta Festival

April 18, 2026

The San Antonio SSLC celebrated its own version of the city's beloved Fiesta tradition, bringing together residents, families, staff, and community partners for a day of fun and celebration. Several TBE participants proudly represented the center as members of the Royal Court, riding through the parade on a festive float.

The event provided a wonderful opportunity for the TBE team to cheer on participants, connect with their families, and celebrate alongside the campus community. This marks the second consecutive year that TBE staff have attended the celebration—not only to support current participants, but also to share information about employment services with residents, families, and others interested in learning more about the Texas Beacons of Excellence Project.

We are grateful to be part of such a meaningful tradition and always enjoy celebrating the accomplishments and community spirit of the individuals we serve.





Summer WBL Program with Joppy Momma's Farm Dallas ISD

During the Summer, Dallas ISD students participating in Extended School Year get to partner with the historic Dallas farm, Joppy Momma's Farm.

Founded in 1872 by Henry Hines, an emancipated slave, Joppy Momma's Farm is a community farm and garden located in Joppa, Texas. Nestled between the Trinity River and Great Trinity Forest, Joppa is one of the last remaining Freedman towns in Texas. Joppa, Texas has been federally recognized as a food desert; however, Joppy Mama's Farm remains committed to supporting its community by providing access to fresh, year-around produce and products.

Joppy Momma's Farm has remained a family-run 501c(3) non-profit organization, now managed by Henry Hines' great granddaughter, Kimberly High. Joppy Momma's Farm hosts Arts and Farmers Market every third Saturday. To learn more, donate, or volunteer with Joppy Momma's Farm, visit their website JoppyMommass.org or reach them at (214) 272-7121.

Strategic Planning & District Development

Dallas ISD | Fort Worth ISD

Over the Summer, Dallas and Fort Worth ISD leadership meet with the TBE team to discuss project successes and challenges during the first year of TBE project implementation. During these separate meetings, district leadership, Texas Workforce Commission, Employment Specialists, Texas A&M, and UNT WISE personal were able to come together to discuss how we can support each other with providing exceptional services towards students with disabilities, during and post-TBE project.

With the conclusion of the meetings, both Dallas and Fort Worth teams developed goals to enhance special education classrooms to promote universal design and vocational skill development. Teachers will have the opportunity to meet the Texas A&M team to receive one-on-one consultation and guidance. The Texas A&M team also agreed to support both school districts with enhancing TEA required functional vocational assessments. This guidance and support will support Dallas and Fort Worth ISD students and leadership to gauge person centered career interests and work skills in a creative new way.

Employment Success!

Dallas ISD | Fort Worth ISD



Dallas ISD and Fort Worth are celebrating three successful community placements over the Summer. With the collaboration between school districts, Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRPs), and families, 3 students have been able to utilize job coaching, benefits counseling, and continued follow-ups to ensure successful job placement.

- Endya Pigg (Dallas ISD Student) began employment as Retail Associated with AutoZone. Endya's has always expressed interest is becoming a mechanic and construction; Endya's is enrolled in Dallas ISD's Career Institute Construction pathway.
- Yaw That (Dallas ISD Student) began employment as Game Room Attendant with Chuck E Cheese. Yaw expressed that working at Chuck E Cheese has been his dream job. Yaw's management is committed to supporting job growth and teaching Yaw how to work on arcade machines. This aligns with his interests in Robotics and Dallas ISD Career Institute track.
- Edward Colunga (Fort Worth ISD Student) began employment at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve at a Custodian. Edward was offered a full-time position with access to employer healthcare benefits.



Updates From Our Partner - Garza & Carrillo Consulting

The Garza & Carrillo team continues to provide individualized employment supports and strengthen community partnerships to help adult learners succeed in the workplace and in their communities.

Employment Specialists Anja Techen and Lisa Filer have enhanced collaboration with the Bridge Center, resulting in improved communication, stronger coordination of services, and greater alignment among support teams. As part of this partnership, the Bridge Center now works alongside the Employment Specialists to provide interview preparation for TBE participants, helping adult learners strengthen workplace readiness skills and increase their confidence as they pursue employment opportunities.



Updates From Our Partner - Garza & Carrillo Consulting (cont.)

Scott Coulter continues to thrive in his role as a Lot Loader at Home Depot with individualized workplace support in place. Anja has worked closely with Scott and his management team to address workplace challenges, develop effective support strategies, and strengthen Scott's self-advocacy skills. Scott's family also remains actively involved, reinforcing workplace expectations and employment goals at home. This collaborative effort between the coach, employer, and family has supported Scott's continued growth and long-term success in his employment.



Spreading the Word!

Amarillo, TX

The impact of the TBE program has continued to receive notable recognition this quarter as well. Employment Specialist Cindy Lanham was invited to present to the Amarillo College President's Cabinet, providing an opportunity to showcase the effectiveness of TBE and strengthen partnerships that benefit students throughout the region.



Growth at the Mercer Botanic Gardens

Humble, TX

Another exciting milestone has been achieved by Michael Salua, whose dedication and perseverance during his internship at the Mercer Botanic Gardens have resulted in significant personal and vocational growth. Although Michael requires a higher level of support, he has consistently demonstrated increased independence in problem-solving, task completion, and workplace routines. His progress indicates he is ready to transition into job development services and pursue competitive integrated employment with continued structured supports.

Michael's family has been instrumental in his success, and his mother has expressed great pride in the progress he has made. She fully supports his transition into paid employment and looks forward to seeing him continue building independence and meaningful community participation.

These accomplishments reflect the collaborative efforts of adult learners, families, employment specialist school staff, and employers working together to create lasting employment opportunities and successful transition outcomes for Klein ISD adult learners.



Expansion and Recognition

Amarillo, TX

Community partnerships continue to expand as well. Cindy has established a collaborative relationship with Amarillo College, which has expressed interest in partnering with TBE to develop internship opportunities for transition-age youth across multiple college departments. This partnership will broaden work-based learning experiences and create additional pathways to competitive integrated employment.

Making Waves in Amarillo

Taking Strides in Transportation

Amarillo, TX

Transportation independence has been an area of significant growth in recent months for the Alliance team. Through structured travel training provided by Employment Specialists Cindy Lanham and Kimberly Young, 12 TBE participants are now independently using ACT Connect paratransit services to access their communities and employment opportunities. Additionally, four participants have completed their ACT Connect applications, while two more have been approved and are scheduled to begin travel training. These accomplishments demonstrate measurable progress toward greater independence, self-sufficiency, and community inclusion.



New Employment Alert!

Amarillo, TX 🚨🚨🚨

Over the past quarter, the Alliance team has supported students in gaining valuable hands-on experience, developing workplace skills, and making progress toward their individual employment goals.

A major milestone in this reporting period is Riley Dunn's successful employment. Riley secured a Dietary Aide position for Riley at Hillside Heights Rehabilitation Center Suites, representing another successful transition into competitive integrated employment and highlighting the effectiveness of individualized job development services.

Working Together For Their Future

Amarillo, TX

Collaboration with families and community employers remains a cornerstone of successful transition planning. On April 16, 2026, a planning meeting was held with Amarillo ISD student Faheem's parents, Quentin owner and mentor of Rebellion Creative and the principal of Amtech to discuss Faheem's senior-year practicum. Together, the team explored a supported practicum experience designed to build vocational skills while supporting Faheem's long-term career goals. This collaborative planning process reflects TBE's commitment to individualized transition services and meaningful employment outcomes.



Growing Our Partnerships

We're excited to welcome Imagine Enterprises in a new capacity. Georgeanna Santarelli and Anna Kluth will serve as the Employment Specialists supporting 11 participants throughout the Seabrook and Houston areas. We look forward to the positive opportunities this new role will create and the impact it will have on the individuals being served.



Internship Program Update

Amarillo, TX

ADVO has identified its newest group of interns at Hope Village and is implementing a new internship structure designed to enhance the learning experience, provide greater support, and create more opportunities for professional growth. We're excited to see this new group of interns develop their skills and contribute to our mission.



Welcome Aboard, Mandy and Rehma!

We're excited to welcome Mandy Vargas and Rehma Musa to the ADVO Companies team as our newest Job Coaches!

We're thrilled to have them on board and look forward to the knowledge, dedication, and support they'll bring to our team and the individuals we serve.

Welcome to the team, Mandy and Rehma—we're glad you're here!

Every new partnership, community event, and employment milestone brings us one step closer to our shared vision of expanding competitive integrated employment opportunities for Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Thank you to our participants, families, SSLC staff, CRPs, employers, and community partners for your continued collaboration and dedication.

We look forward to sharing even more success stories in the months ahead!

Sincerely,

**The Texas Beacons of
Excellence Team**



Goodwill Placements Dallas, TX



Congratulations to Roy Ruiz on his successful placement with NFI Logistics! Roy has accepted a full-time position as a Material Handler, marking an important milestone in his journey toward Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). This placement reflects the collaborative efforts of the employment team, employer partners, and Roy's dedication to achieving his employment goals. We look forward to watching him grow and succeed in his new role.

ADVO Progress Dallas, TX



The ADVO team has made significant strides with the restructuring of the Hope Village Internship Program. The enhanced internship model is designed to provide each participant with individualized task orientation, structured skill development, and consistent feedback throughout their experience. This person-centered approach allows participants to build confidence, strengthen workplace skills, and better understand employer expectations while receiving meaningful coaching and support.

These improvements are creating a more engaging and impactful internship experience that better prepares participants for successful transitions into Competitive Integrated Employment.

The momentum continues to build, with several additional placements expected in the coming weeks. A tremendous thank you to the entire ADVO team for their dedication, innovation, and commitment to ensuring every participant has the opportunity to develop meaningful skills and pursue successful employment outcomes. Your hard work is making a lasting difference in the lives of the individuals you serve.

