



Nonprofit Spotlight

Human First Takes *Pride* in Exceptional Care and Service

Since 2001, Human First has transformed the lives of individuals with special needs across New York City and Long Island. With a focus on person-centered care, the nonprofit organization strives to provide opportunities for individuals to reach their goals and become more independent.

At the heart of that mission is Human First's Day Habilitation Program, which enhances personal growth through the development of daily living, vocational and socialization skills. The Pride Center, located in Farmingdale, is one of five Day Hab programs at the agency, currently serving individuals with developmental disabilities. Cooking, cleaning, computer training, behavior management and travel training are among several skills taught, all of which are designed to improve individuals' self-sufficiency and productivity. Music and theater workshops offer opportunities for creative self-expression, while volunteering and recreational outings foster increased community integration.

In 2015, the Pride Center introduced Supported Employment. "Our Transition to Employment Program strives to further enhance the quality of life of our individuals," explains Cheryelle Cruickshank, Chief Executive Officer, Human First.

To facilitate job opportunities for Day Hab participants, Cruickshank implemented a Business Advisory Council to cultivate relationships with Long Island businesses and community leaders. The Council recently held an open house showcasing the many skillsets our individuals gained at the Pride Center and, as a result of the event, a Pride Center program participant now volunteers every Friday at the office of State Senator John Brooks. In addition, Human First is identifying potential applicants for a position with Atlantic, Tomorrow's Office. Human First continues to explore opportunities with other vendors throughout Long Island.

Perhaps one of the Pride Center's biggest success stories is John, who works at a local Home Depot mixing paint. "He's learned about structure and routine, and the value of earning a wage, which has given him a strong sense of responsibility,"

Cruickshank points out. "He's become one of the store's best employees. He knows everything there is about mixing paint, and he particularly enjoys interacting with customers."

Further growth opportunities will soon be available when the Pride Center unveils its own store later this year. Operating a cash register will enable individuals to hone money management skills, while others will strengthen their organizational skills by stocking shelves.

"Supporting individuals to accomplish their goals is what the Center is all about. We pride ourselves in quality service and their work reflects that same Human First philosophy," Cruickshank says.

As the agency grows its successful Day Habilitation Program, other services continue to expand on Long Island, including Medicaid Service Coordination, currently serving approximately 500 individuals. There are also plans to develop housing in Nassau and Suffolk County over the next four years.

With expansion comes the need to secure funding, something Cruickshank and her staff hope to accomplish at Human First's 2017 Gala at the Engineers Country Club in Roslyn Harbor on October 5, 2017. Proceeds raised will help to support the Pride Center, Supportive Employment, and the acquisition of smart technologies.

"We want to be a household name on Long Island for servicing individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities," Cruickshank says. "The support of donors, sponsors and community leaders will help us to better meet individuals' needs and ensure brighter futures for everyone we serve."

For more information on Human First's programs and services, visit their website at www.humanfirst.org.