Last month, Ability Beyond Special Olympics Local Coordinator Alanna Licursi-Rich and athlete Krista Grenier participated in a trip with seven other individuals from Special Olympics Connecticut including two other athletes to St. Kitts and Nevis for their 2017 National Games.

Krista has been an athlete of Ability Beyond Special Olympics for several years now, taking part in soccer, softball, bowling and basketball. Krista was given the opportunity to participate in some different sports while in St. Kitts and Nevis including track and field (running and softball throw), swimming in St. Kitts and bocce while we were on a trip over to the sister island, Nevis.

Krista not only received several medals and ribbons while on this trip but came away with some new friendships and an experience of a lifetime. Krista also was able to meet two gold medal-winning Olympic athletes while we volunteered at the St. Kitts and Nevis Cross Channel swim where 180 swimmers from all over the world swam two-and-a-half miles from Nevis to the beach in St. Kitts.

Alanna and Krista had the pleasure of meeting 1992 Pentathlon Winner Greg Whyte and three-time world champion Kerri Ann Payne. All had a really great time and came home with amazing memories!
Every year, more than half a million individuals depend on life-sustaining services provided by Connecticut’s community nonprofits. As we face a $1.7 billion shortfall in the FY18 budget, the governor and legislature have two choices to balance the budget: shift services into the community to save services and move thousands of individuals off waiting lists, or continue with business as usual and cut vital services to thousands of the state’s most vulnerable individuals and their families.

On March 22, 40 members of Ability Beyond staff, clients, and supporters traveled to the Capitol Building in Hartford to advocate against proposed cuts to nonprofit organizations and the private sector.

People served by Ability were able to meet with eight different legislators to voice their concerns over the possible FY18 budget.

“Having the opportunity for our individuals to explain what [Ability Beyond’s] supports have meant to them and describe where they might be if they didn’t have our services, was extremely powerful,” said Michelle Weinstein, Residential Clinical Services Manager for Ability Beyond. “This opportunity for the people we serve to take place in the advocacy process and speak directly with legislators was also a great life experience for them. Something that we really encourage at Ability Beyond is community involvement, all the way up to our capitol.”

While definitive answers to the pending budget are not expected to come out until July, we are hopeful that the power of our voices has the ability to go beyond and make a difference in the political landscape for nonprofits across the state.
Here at Disability Solutions, we know inclusion works. It not only creates a more inviting work culture, but it also helps your business by increasing retention rates and improving your employer brand with both customers and potential team members.

We work with our clients to design and implement disability hiring initiatives. Our consultants are able to work with both Human Resources and other executives at the company, as well as the jobseekers, while facilitating a Soft Skills training course. This course, provided at no cost to jobseekers, helps prepare potential candidates for interviews and, hopefully, a position at the company.

Our Consultant, Keith Meadows, recently had the chance to work with Julie Cuesta, a new Synchrony Financial call center employee out of Dayton, Ohio. Julie Cuesta went through the course in August and was offered the position that same month. She was thrilled to be joining this innovative company and was very enthusiastic about sharing her story with us.

Julie, a person with a disability, has spent most of her career as a nanny working with a family in their home. When she arrived at the Soft Skills training, she was ready to learn more about interviewing in a different work environment. Julie kept reiterating how helpful Keith was throughout the process. In fact, she said that she “would not have got the job without him,” citing his interview prep advice as particularly helpful. Throughout the training, Keith worked with Julie encouraging her to speak about the company and what she can do for them rather than approaching the hiring manager with questions about what they can do for her. As someone who had not interviewed recently, this advice provided insight into what the hiring manager is looking to hear from candidates.

Synchrony candidates go through a timed online questionnaire followed by a phone interview. Julie’s experience was unusual, as she had a technical glitch at the end and was unable to submit the questionnaire electronically. Julie said that Keith was able to help make sure this error would not prevent her from moving forward in the interview process.

Julie started training for the position on August 29th. Not only was she looking forward to starting a new career, but she also could not be more excited to be working for this company. Synchrony was immediately welcoming, making her feel included and part of the team.

Julie’s experience serves as one example of why hiring people with disabilities is simply good business. These initiatives allow innovative companies like Synchrony to find great team members and allow qualified jobseekers like Julie to find meaningful and rewarding careers. To learn more, please visit: disabilitysolutionsatwork.org.
With generous funding from the Women’s Club of Danbury/New Fairfield, Ability Beyond will soon create a sensory therapy room in one of our Danbury condominiums for adults who are learning to manage their mental illness and recover from addiction.

With everything from bubble lamps to beanbag chairs, zero-gravity chairs, yoga mats, exercise balls, aromatherapy and music equipment, our sensory space will advance wellness, creativity and self-expression. The space will also help our staff de-escalate or prevent crises.

This isn’t our first foray into sensory environments. Ability Beyond operates a Snoezelen multi-sensory room at Howland House, our Beacon, N.Y., home for aging men and women with significant physical and developmental challenges. There, sensory equipment like a shimmering curtain or color-switching lamps create a relaxing environment that not only calms anxiety but also encourages communication and interaction.

Thank you to the Women’s Club of Danbury/New Fairfield for investing in our program; community partnerships make above-and-beyond efforts possible—and change the lives of the people we serve. “Staff from our mental health programs will attend the Women’s Clubs’ award ceremony April 25 for a check presentation.

Welcome to the Team!

We are so excited to announce that we had 24 members of our Ability Beyond family officially join our employee team at the end of January (they are excited too)! We are transitioning individuals served (who currently work at our commercial facilities) to Ability Beyond positions. This transition includes training and merit increases that are in line with similar positions in the organization.
AN EVENING IN THE GARDEN

From Our Roots We Grow

ABILITY BEYOND GALA

April 29, 2017

Amber Room Colonnade
### From the Grant Desk...

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<td>Bob's Discount Furniture Charitable Foundation, Inc.</td>
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- Fred L. Baker, Esq., Secretary & General Counsel

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- Raymond Curatolo
- Keith Ila
- Scott McNulty
- Buddy Pitt
- Saurin Shah
- Rambabu Vallabhajoyasulu

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