Technology: Opening unprecedented doors for men and women with disabilities

Across our program lines, Ability Beyond is connecting people with affordable, mainstream technology that enhances their care and brings a greater level of independence within reach. We’ve seen technology open unprecedented doors for men and women with disabilities.

Thanks to major support from New York State through its Balancing Incentive Program (BIP) Innovation Fund, we’re also sharing our expertise with other nonprofit organizations to help them promote even greater autonomy for the folks they serve, while operating at greater efficiency.

In September 2015, Ability Beyond hosted a technology showcase in Chappaqua for the people we serve, their family members, and other New York-based disability care providers. With over 175 people in attendance, leading technology companies such as SimplyHome, Next Health and Philips demonstrated a variety of products that we’re using, day-to-day, to improve people’s lives. These include wearable technologies, smart home products, personal assistant technology and medically assistive products.

Ability Beyond was also invited to hold a showcase at NYSACRA’s 2016 Health and Human Service Leadership Conference in Saratoga in December 2015.

We presented a technology exhibition called, “Beyond the Booth,” which was met with astounding praise from the conference’s diverse audience of nonprofit leaders, legislators, donors, and other service providers. Over 93 percent of people said they left the showcase feeling impressed and inspired by what was presented. Attendees also said they walked away with a better sense of what challenges our fellow providers are facing when it comes to technology integration.

The surveys generated hundreds of responses, which our team analyzed to determine what categories of technology would best suit our needs. They include wearables, like fitness bracelets or watches that are equipped with GPS monitors; personal assistant technology; and technology to enhance safety, independence and privacy at home. The agency is running pilots in each category that may soon be rolled out regionally, like a smart home technology package in a handful of New York homes that includes responsive, remote-controlled thermostats and door locks.

Ability Beyond designed our technology initiative based on the needs of the people we serve—first conducting an in-depth needs assessment across service lines, from residential programs to day services, employment and transportation.

Upcoming Events

**Ability Golf Tournament**
Monday, September 19th, 2016
11:00am-7:00pm
Centennial Golf Course
Carmel, NY
I have been involved with Ability Beyond for over 30 years. When I was Chairman and CEO of Perkin-Elmer, along with other executives from western Connecticut, I was invited to a tour of a work training program then operated by the agency. I remember being struck by the effort and optimism of the people who were working so hard to overcome the limitations brought about by their disabilities. I was impressed with the commitment of the staff who supported the trainees but I thought to myself that I personally didn’t have the patience to help these people and I wondered what the future would hold for them.

Over the years, my wife Eileen and I became more and more committed to the organization. We spoke often of the challenge it would be to raise a child with a significant disability. I was asked to serve on the Board of Directors and quickly came to realize that this is an organization built on optimism and hope. While on the Board, I believe I was instrumental in helping the organization create sound business practices to accompany its passion for its mission.

As we watched the organization grow and impact the lives of more and more people, I now saw clearly what I had been unable to see during that initial tour of 30 years ago – that people with disabilities have great potential if given the opportunity.

Several years ago, before Eileen passed, we decided that Ability Beyond was one of only a few organizations we really wanted to support. We contributed regularly to annual drives and campaigns over the years and, as we developed our estate plans, we both felt that Ability Beyond should be a major beneficiary. While we didn’t have a child with a disability, we have seen the incredible value this organization has had on the lives of thousands of people with disabilities and their families. We thought...what better legacy than one of hope and optimism for people striving to reach their potential?

I hope that my personal journey over the past 30 plus years might inspire others to become involved with and support Ability Beyond.

For information on how to make a legacy gift, please contact Alice Meenan at (203)826-3182

As a member of the Board of Directors at Ability Beyond, Robert Bedoukian has made his commitment to the mission of Ability Beyond known for many years. In addition to a long-standing list of generous financial contributions, Bob has recently helped to marry the expertise and influence of his company, Bedoukian Research Inc., to Ability Beyond’s social enterprise, Roses for Autism.

The creation of ‘Ardent Rose,’ a scent taking cues from the roses grown at the Roses for Autism Farm in Guilford, Connecticut, was made possible by the generosity and expertise of Bob Bedoukian and Bedoukian Research, Inc. Every cent of development and production costs have been donated by the company, leaving Ability Beyond with a luxurious and unique product that can be sold entirely for profit to the organization.

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The relationship between Bob and Ability Beyond is a special one that we are extremely grateful for; it is not every day that an individual is willing to use such a wide breadth of expertise and generosity in such an enormously impactful way. Bob Bedoukian continues to inspire others to get involved with Ability Beyond; his leadership as a member of the Board of Directors is helping to pave the way for the continued success of Ability Beyond for years to come. We are extremely excited to usher in this new enterprise of Ability Beyond, and so very grateful for the support of Bob and Bedoukian Research, Inc.!

The Ability Beyond transition team is currently researching best practices and is working to develop a model program to support the growing number of students who will require transitional support services in the future.
Hailed as an innovator in an article The News-Times ran a short while ago, our very own Tom Fanning was applauded for spending four decades helping people with disabilities break one barrier after another. Those efforts also earned him the CCPA Lifetime Achievement Award this year.

Here is a brief look back at some of the highlights of his career with Ability Beyond

Since joining the organization in 1974, Tom has continually sought opportunities that would help Ability Beyond emerge as a leader in the field. It was under his unwavering dedication and visionary leadership that Ability Beyond grew from an organization of a small group of parents who wanted a better life for their children, into a network of services that now supports more than 3,000 people with disabilities each and every year.

The impact Tom has had on the community can be seen each and every day as people with disabilities are living, working, volunteering and enjoying life alongside those without disabilities. In 2005 a huge step toward full community inclusion for people with disabilities was realized when Tom oversaw the closing of Ability Beyond’s sheltered workshop, putting Ability Beyond on the national radar as one of the first organization’s in the country to move to full community-based employment.

In the years that followed, Tom has continued to forge ahead with his vision of inclusion for people with disabilities, expanding services and creating new opportunities despite a difficult economic climate. In 2012, Tom’s vision propelled Ability Beyond to yet another level of national recognition, this time among the business industry. Tom had the idea to share decades of disability employment knowledge with the corporate world and created a business focused consulting division, Disability Solutions @Ability Beyond. The consulting group works directly with national and regional businesses on improving strategy and implementation for sustainable, company-led hiring and retention initiatives for jobseekers with disabilities. The development of Disability Solutions furthers the mission of Ability Beyond and will have exponential impact on the employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities nationally. We have been very fortunate to have Tom's leadership for the past 42 years and we look forward to his continued involvement with the organization.

Tom is a true human rights activist who has inspired so many through the years. We invite you to join us in honoring him for all he has given through the years by making a gift to our Endowment Campaign.

Roses for Autism Launches Ardent Rose Perfume

Roses for Autism debuted their new signature perfume, Ardent Rose, at a hugely successful launch event on March 31st at their farm in Guilford. Proceeds from the sale of the fragrance will fund scholarships and other programs for the non-profit social enterprise that offers employment for individuals with Autism. Ardent Rose Eau de Parfum Spray is available at the farm’s Guilford CT Retail Store and on their website rosesforautism.com. The perfume is on sale for $60 per bottle.
Our annual fundraising gala, was held on Saturday April 30, 2016 at the Amber Room Colonnade in Danbury, Connecticut, raising over $600,000 with donations still coming in.

Over 420 guests were awed by this year’s Night of 10,000 Cranes themed fundraiser. As guests entered the auction tent they were transported to Japan complete with vibrantly colored parasols, authentic Japanese music and fresh rolled sushi. As the evening progressed, guests filed in to the elaborate ballroom. What awaited them was nearly 10,000 pink and white origami cranes carefully folded by community volunteers and representing good wishes for the future for the men and women supported by Ability Beyond.

Guests joined together to raise much needed funds through Silent and Live Auctions and a raffle – to which scores of area businesses and individuals donated items and services – and a special auction titled “Lend-a-Hand,” in which guests simply raise their paddles to give outright gifts to support the mission of Ability Beyond.
This year’s gala was extremely successful, raising money for the critical supports we provide in the community.

Longtime supporters and community business partners, David and Darren Beylouni were honored with the Robert S. Young Humanitarian Award for their unparalleled commitment to the community and Ability Beyond. During the presentation, the honorees announced a gift of $50,000 from their family and Subaru of America. Harvey and Suzanne Kramer, the co-chairs of the event, have also been heavily involved with the organization for the past 20 years and Harvey is currently a member of the Board of Directors.

“This year’s gala was extremely successful, raising money for the critical supports we provide in the community,” said Kim Bragoli, Director of Development and Communications at Ability Beyond. “I would like to thank all of our donors, co-chairs, and our honorees Darren and David, for helping to make our Night of 10,000 Cranes Gala so successful and an evening to remember.”

Diamond Sponsors for the event featured renowned companies including: Colonial Automobile Group, Maplewood Senior Living, and PepsiCo.
Ability Beyond made history last year by partnering with the University of Wisconsin to bring a research-backed program called “Transitioning Together” to New York: an empowering way to bridge the gap between high school and adulthood for students with disabilities and their families.

After extensive training with the university’s Waisman Center, Ability Beyond hosted our first eight-week “Transitioning Together” session in Brewster and the group graduated in December. Our first class included seven students and their families. Once a week, students participated in workshops about job readiness, socializing and more, while their parents learned from trained experts how to guide their kids into a healthy, happy adulthood.

The goal is to increase the number of young adults with disabilities who attend college, gain employment and begin to live independently when they graduate from high school. The Thomas and Agnes Carvel Foundation supported the program in 2015. This year, we will bring “Transitioning Together” to more cities, including Danbury, Connecticut!

Transitioning Together

“SPACES OF HOPE”

Ability Beyond resident, Maureen, is getting the kitchen of her dreams!

Thank you all of the companies that helped complete this life changing project!

“Spaces of Hope” Special airing 7 am ET/PT Lifetime Network this June.

We’ve had unique help; during our technology pilots our two states also assembled an exceptional team of technology wizzes, called the TIP Squad, to help address those needs.

Squad members meet face-to-face with folks at Ability Beyond who seek solutions to their everyday challenges. These range from issues of mobility to speaking, managing one’s schedule throughout the day, and traveling throughout the community. Our TIP Squad has gained praise in its first year from local and national organizations, including The Coleman Institute.

Laurie Dale, our senior leader of empowering technology solutions, even represented Ability Beyond at the renowned Coleman Institute’s 2015 Conference for Cognitive Disabilities with a presentation called “Redefining Assistive Tech.” The TIP Squad also presented. Since then, they have been invited back to speak at the 2016 Conference in October.

In July 2016, Ability Beyond will share our best practices even more broadly through an online resource center we’ve been developing for the past year. The resource will help other nonprofit providers implement assistive technology in homes, clinics, day programs and more to increase self-direction and yield long-term operating efficiencies.
Disability Solutions and PepsiCo recently expanded the Pepsi ACT program to 5 new PepsiCo locations throughout the United States, including Orlando, Nashville, Denver, and Indianapolis. Beyond anchor clients PepsiCo and American Express, Disability Solutions has recently launched work with global corporations Synchrony Financial, BD Schenker in partnership with Proctor and Gamble, and Avatar. In addition, they have been contracted to provide consultation on a national employment initiative with Autism Speaks and New York Collaborates for Autism – the ADVICE project.

Designing talent acquisition and retention strategies for people with disabilities not only benefits the candidates but also improves the corporation’s bottom line. An inclusive workforce encourages employee engagement and retention as well as boosts company morale throughout the organization. The Human Resources team at PepsiCo in Phoenix takes this to heart. The team created matching PepsiACT T-shirts to show their support.

Not only is the Phoenix office getting into the team spirit but they stay involved in all aspects of the initiative and were recognized for their efforts. Pepsi and Disability Solutions received the E75 Diversity Builder Award for being a model of inclusive employment practices excellence in Phoenix.

SHRM Diversity & Inclusion Conference

The Society for Human Resource Management held its annual Diversity & Inclusion Conference this past October. Members of the Disability Solutions team were in attendance. Kevin McCloskey, Director of Partnership Development represented the company and educated other conference attendees about the consulting practice’s services and the importance of Disability Inclusion in the workplace.

Disability Solutions Corporate Client Expansion

Ability Beyond Golf Tournament
Save the Date! - September 19, 2016

On Monday, September 19, we will hold our seventh annual golf tournament at Centennial Golf Course in Carmel, N.Y.

Registration will begin at 11a.m. with lunch following and a shotgun start at 12:30p.m. Afterwards, golfers are invited to stay for the main program, cocktails, and hors d’oeuvres, taking place at 5p.m. Saurin Shah, Board of Trustee Committee member is the chair.

Last year’s event brought together more than 140 golfers and raised over $100,000 towards our mission!
For the second year in a row, Microsoft has made a significant investment in the agency’s technology infrastructure—this year, with a $1,402,048.00 gift of the latest software. The contribution includes Microsoft 10 Pro for the entire agency, and dovetails with ongoing work by Ability Beyond’s technology department to set a cutting-edge precedent of care. By updating our system, Microsoft will help us get better, faster and more efficient at everything from communicating within the agency to keeping people safe and healthy at home. “At Microsoft, we believe technology can do amazing things,” said Lori Forte Harnick, general manager of Microsoft’s Citizenship & Public Affairs. “That’s why we partner with thousands of organizations like yours around the world to help each one achieve its mission. Through our Corporate Citizenship efforts, we provide technology tools, training and resources that can help create opportunities and transform communities.”

This is the second year that Microsoft has included Ability Beyond in its corporate giving program. Altogether, their gifts total more than $2 million. To learn more about technology at Ability Beyond, follow Senior Leader of Assistive Technology Solutions Laurie Dale on Twitter. Her handle is @thelauriedale.

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