

Employee



Spotlight Jay MacKay



For the first act of his career, Jay MacKay designed corporate brochures and magazine ads. The work was engaging, and graphic design was a natural match for his creative talents. But when Fidelity Investments sold the business he was working for, Jay began to wonder if it was time for a change.

That led to the second act of his career.

Jay's interest in helping others led him to volunteer at Eleanor Slater Hospital, where he assisted activity therapists with arts and crafts sessions and day trips into the community.

It was worlds away from the grind of marketing and graphic arts, but he enjoyed it – enough that he soon took a full-time with RICLAS, as a Community Living Aide.

"I was at a point where I wanted a change," he says. "I was burnt out from doing the marketing, and I enjoyed the hands-on work, where I was directly helping people."

Two decades later, Gerard "Jay" MacKay is still helping people, in his role as Associate Administrator for Employment Services at BHDDH's Division of Developmental Disabilities. Beyond his essential administrative duties, Jay essentially serves as a liaison – listening to concerns raised by supported employment providers, helping to match clients with providers, and assessing the state's efforts to identify employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD).

"I'll meet with the providers and try to find out what's working, what's not working, and what's missing," he said. "It's basically being the eyes and the ears of the employment efforts on the ground."

His focus on goes to the heart of the DD Division's work to ensure that individuals with I/DD have opportunities to work and improve their lives, as required by the Consent Decree the state entered in 2014 with the U.S. Department of Justice.

Those efforts continue to pay off. Since October 2023 alone, the number of BHDDH clients with I/DD who are employed has grown by 330, to more than 1,300, with the state meeting or exceeding the goals set in the Consent Decree.

"Jay's work with the provider community has contributed significantly to the increase in individuals either finding employment or finding supports that lead to future employment," said Kevin Savage, Director of BHDDH's Division of Developmental Disabilities. He is committed to helping individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities and working with providers, and he is always available to give his time, energy and expertise to ensure that people's needs are met."

Jay says this work is helped by the fact that the culture around individuals who live with a disability is improving, with more employers recognizing the skills and potential they offer. He said the DD Division tries to emphasize this, by getting “people out into the community” to see “what’s out there,” which helps them to make connections and start relationships with potential employers.

“It means not just going through the drive through at Dunkin’ in the van but actually getting out, and eventually learning how to order your own coffee, if that’s an obstacle,” he said. “That makes a huge difference, and then we start to see behaviors disappearing, attitudes improve, and the community starts to embrace more.”

Jay, who’s been with BHDDH since 2003, has not lost his love for art, and he especially enjoys painting cityscapes and closeups of koi fish. While the cityscapes allow him to show his eye for detail – even to the point of counting, for instance, the number of windows in Providence’s “Superman” building – his paintings of koi fish, with their vibrant colors, allow him to take greater artistic license.

His works have been displayed at art shows throughout New England, and he has picked up awards and honorable mentions along the way, including one from the Providence Art Club, for an entry in a contest open to artists from across the globe.

“I submitted to see if I would get accepted,” he said. “I thought that would be a good indicator as to whether I should seriously continue to pursue painting as a side project.”

The experience demonstrated to Jay on a personal level one of the principles he adheres to in his role at BHDDH.

“Work is one of the best ways for people to create a social outlet for themselves, and get connected to the community,” he said.



Jay in front of one of his oil paintings.