



Delaware agency gives clients jobs, ray of hope

Goal of Connections is to help achieve better life

BY ADAM TAYLOR • THE NEWS JOURNAL • AUGUST 1, 2010

Comments (3) Recommend Print this page E-mail this article Share Type Size **A A A**

WILMINGTON -- Richard Coon was making a comeback last year, staying sober while on probation for a DUI-related offense.

Then the **restaurant** where he was the kitchen manager closed, making his self-reclamation harder. But he didn't use the setback as an excuse to drink and asked his probation officer for help.

Coon was directed to Connect to Work, which got him into a job training and certification program. Last month, he landed a position as manager of the recently re-opened A&G Steak Shop in Wilmington's West Center City neighborhood.

"Now I haven't drank in more than a year," Coon said, noting that being employed is a key to staying sober. "It's not easy -- I mean, you have to be willing to go out and look for work and you still have to do the job when you get it. But there's plenty of help out there if you really want it."

Connect to Work was created by **Connections Community Support Programs Inc.**, a nonprofit social service agency with more than 40 locations that expects to serve about 9,000 clients this year. Connections provides a wide array of services, including mental health and substance abuse treatment, [medical care](#) and housing for low-income families.

It also has provided employment support since the mid-1990s, said Connections' Chief Operating Officer, Chris Devaney. But that effort was strengthened in October 2009, when it created Connect to Work.

Since then, about 200 people have gotten jobs providing janitorial services or cleanup duties at construction sites, said Michele Mirabella, Connect to Work's executive [director](#).

"The goal of Connections is to help people achieve a good quality of life, and one thing that really gets people back on the path of life is a good job," Mirabella said.

Darla Nowell, a Connect to Work case manager, said some of the program's clients receive the traditional services that Connections provides, but some only need help finding a job. Nowell goes to Delaware's prisons to look for potential clients.



Richard Coon of Wilmington prepares a sandwich at A&G Steak Shop, which was recently reopened to offer jobs and training for Connections clients. (The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER)



Purchase this Photo

Garry S. Beauford Jr. of New Castle works in front of the pizza oven at the A&G Steak Shop in Wilmington. (The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER)

Delaware agency gives clients jobs, ray of hope

Goal of Connections is to help achieve better life

BY ADAM TAYLOR • THE NEWS JOURNAL • AUGUST 1, 2010

Comments (3) Recommend Print this page E-mail this article Share Type Size **A A A**

(2 of 2)

"Sometimes they need simple things, such as obtaining identification, clothing or a month's rent for a place to stay," she said. "Others need job training or [financial](#) literacy classes to help them with their budgeting."

The A&G Steak Shop, which serves cheesesteaks, hoagies and sandwiches as its main fare, was a popular spot on West Ninth Street for decades until it closed about a year ago. Connections bought it and re-opened it in July.

There are eight employees at A&G. Six are ex-offenders participating in Connections' re-entry program that is paid for with a grant from the U.S. [Department of Labor](#). Two of the workers were A&G employees under the previous ownership, Connections spokesman Darius Brown said.

Devaney said Connections' work to restore A&G as a part of the neighborhood has value on its own. But using it as a training ground for clients makes the shop even more important.

"My pie-in-the-sky dream is that it will do even more," Devaney said. "I'd like it to help the employees become entrepreneurs -- learn [how to run a business](#) and one day open an A&G franchise of their own."

A&G is in City Councilwoman Hanifa Shabazz's district. She said Connections' employment division is crucial to the agency's overall mission of helping people get well and be productive.

"It's a logical next step for helping people with the social ills as Connections does," she said. "A lot of times, programs offer employment training, but there's not a job at the end of the tunnel. This program not only provides that light but does it for those that many people wouldn't normally give the time of day to."

Contact Adam Taylor at 324-2787 or ataylor@delawareonline.com.

Previous Page | [2](#)
