

April is Autism Awareness Month and, since Asperger's Syndrome is considered to be on the Autism Spectrum, we feel that it is appropriate that we celebrate Asperger Works and Aspies at this time.

The story of Asperger Works embodies the dedication, passion, and determination of a handful of individuals who are deeply committed to helping put adults with Asperger's Syndrome to work. Our continuous goal is to give employment-related services and training that will result in having talented, but very under-served, individuals find fulfilling work, stay employed, and advance in their careers.

Let me tell you what led me to this point in my life. It was when I was in first grade that my parents took me to a neurologist in Boston to investigate my clumsiness and difficulties at school. The result was a misdiagnosis. It was felt that I had non-specific learning disabilities requiring both physical and occupational therapies. My parents were told that occupational therapy was too expensive and insurance would not cover it. So, they agreed to enroll me into Chapter 766, a law under which I could get occupational therapy. But, instead of necessary services, I received a couple of labels – SPED from my teachers and retard from many of my fellow students. These I would carry with me into high school. After graduation, I went to NECC where I earned my Associate's Degree and then to The Evergreen State College in Washington for my Bachelor's. But, after graduation, I could not get a full-time job and most of the jobs I did get were not in my field. It was not until 2004 that I found out that I had Asperger's Syndrome. With that diagnosis, everything fell into place.

Still, not having a job that was challenging or well-paying did not sit well with me. So, instead of sitting around feeling sorry for myself, I decided to earn a Master's degree to make myself more marketable.

It was while working towards my Master's at Endicott College that I came up with the idea of Asperger Works. Founded in 2012 with the help of an Aspie friend and with only a vision for a better future for adult Aspies like me who had difficulty finding appropriate employment, our organization has evolved.

The first big step in our story is having achieved 501(c)(3) non-profit status almost five years ago. Although great challenges still lie ahead of us as we move forward on our promise of providing much-needed services to those with Asperger's Syndrome, we have made major advancements thanks to many wonderful people and organizations, some of whom are here tonight.

I am proud to report that we now have a permanent home at 60 Island Street in Lawrence. Also, our networking efforts have paid off with increased recognition in Lawrence and throughout the northern part of our state. But all of our advances could not have been achieved on our own. We rely on the hard work of our Boards of Directors and Advisors, our Volunteer Coordinator and volunteers, the goodwill of community organizations, and supporters like you.

With your help, the only place we can go is up. By working together, we can raise awareness of the devastating effect lack of employment and underemployment have on a large segment of the population and change the perception that people on the Spectrum are useless in the workplace.

Thank you for coming and thank you for your support. We will do everything we can to make sure that your trust in Asperger Works has not been not misplaced.