

# Casey Tiefenwerth



**Job Title:** Career Building Initiative Program Manager for Access to Recovery

**Organization:** Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.

**Service Area:** Massachusetts

**Partner Affiliation:** Adult

**Challenge:** How do we design a computer technology training program that will not only position graduates to obtain entry-level jobs in one of the top 10 tech cities in the world, but also be appropriate for adult learners who are in early recovery from a substance use disorder—and fit that training into just 5 months?



Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.  
Real World Solutions for Systems Change

# Success Story



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
**WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROFESSIONALS**  
CONNECT, ADVANCE, INNOVATE

*Six participants—four men and two women—graduated from the program, each achieving or reassessing his or her own goals.*



**Describe the steps you took in creating a solution and why it worked.**

Access to Recovery (ATR) and Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT) partnered this year to offer robust computer technology training to people in early recovery from substance use disorders. The training came about because we learned that JFF and Google were partnering to offer an IT Support Professional Certificate that would be achievable in a matter of weeks. When we found out that BFIT, our job training partner, had developed an expanded curriculum featuring the certificate, we jumped at the chance to offer this new training opportunity to ATR participants. The original curriculum was part of a traditional two-year associate's degree program; to make it even more useful to ATR's program participants, many of whom are eager to find employment, we condensed it to a 40-hours-a-week, 20-week time frame that would fit in the bounds of our own six-month program. In addition to allowing ATR participants to complete the program in a much shorter window, this schedule also gave them a better feel for an authentic work week.

We broke the program down into three distinct parts: Introduction to Computer Basics, which exposes participants to the fundamentals of computer technology and incorporates professional "soft skills," and Advanced Computer Technology Certificate Levels 1 and 2, which includes the Google IT Support Professional Certificate and CompTIA A+ Core 1 and 2 and Linux+ certifications. We knew that self-paced programming could be a challenge for our participants, and embedding the Google IT Support credential into a more structured course meant they were able to get the direct support they needed. We provided each participant with a laptop, WiFi hotspot, and accessories to ensure that accessibility would not be a barrier to the successful completion of the training program.

In addition, in the interest of motivating individuals and encouraging their buy-in, ATR provided work-study benefits and used contingency management, a treatment approach that reinforces and rewards positive behaviors. Peer-to-peer support played a unique role in this program. Participants with similar backgrounds and time spent in recovery held each other accountable, encouraged one another, and offered each other tutoring and or companionship while studying for final exams. Full support came from ATR's care coordinators, who act essentially as case managers in helping participants navigate our program. In the context of the computer tech training, they worked closely with BFIT staff to address any issues that arose.

**Describe the outcome/benefits on the population you serve, your participant, or employer after the steps you took to create a solution were implemented.**

Six participants—four men and two women—graduated from the program, each achieving or reassessing his or her own goals. Four students are either beginning or continuing coursework for an associate's degree, something that is now that much closer to reality as a result of their completing the BFIT-ATR collaborative computer technology course. Two passed all industry certifications included in the program. Some struggled with different elements of the program—one with Linux, another with Java—but nevertheless committed to learning them fully by signing up for tutoring this summer. One is taking additional summer courses to advance more quickly toward a degree, as well as reattempting the IT certifications she did not pass. Several program participants have found jobs for the summer; one is using the time to adjust to living in a sober house. One participant arrived with no college experience, and suffered several unexpected setbacks during the 20-week period, yet as a result of completing the program, he was inspired to apply to enroll in a BFIT program and has already secured a scholarship to do so through Boston's Neighborhood Jobs Trust.

