

Voice



Improving the Disability Employment Landscape

This turbulent year has exposed new challenges for workers in the disability community. Here's how we're helping.



Employment means much more than a steady paycheck—it affects self-confidence and the ability to live independently. But while this year marked the 75th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, observed in October, qualified individuals with disabilities remain underrepresented in today's workforce.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with disabilities across all age groups and education levels were far less likely to be employed than people without disabilities. And since the start of the pandemic, one in five workers with disabilities have lost their jobs.

In response to these statistics, The Viscardi Center is preparing individuals with disabilities to navigate an unpredictable job market and providing businesses with the necessary resources to achieve an inclusive workplace culture.

Building Diverse Workplaces

The disproportionately lower employment rate for people with disabilities suggests that employers require better access to diverse applicant pools. To address this need, the **National Business & Disability Council (NBDC)** at The Viscardi Center has recently launched a job board and workforce development platform called the **Disability Employment Source (DES)**. This intuitive tool serves both job seekers of all abilities, as well as businesses in the NBDC network looking to diversify their workplaces.

Igniting Entrepreneurship

Launched late last year, our **National Center for Disability Entrepreneurship (NCDE)** offers innovators with disabilities from across the U.S. a free, virtual, fully accessible program, professional benefits assistance, and opportunities to receive funding for viable business ideas. This

fall, it held its first-ever **Founders with Disabilities PitchFest Competition**, in which a cohort of aspiring entrepreneurs battled it out in front of a panel of exacting judges for thousands of dollars in equity-free cash grants and special prizes.

Closing the Digital Accessibility Gap

As Americans continue to work remotely and depend on technology, employers must be proactive about making digital content accessible to employees with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments. Viscardi's **Digital Accessibility Services** eliminates the guesswork when it comes to meeting evolving compliance standards, providing fully accessible websites and documents, video and real-time captioning, and audio descriptions.

Learn more about NBDC, NCDE, Digital Accessibility Services, and other employment-related services by visiting ViscardiCenter.org

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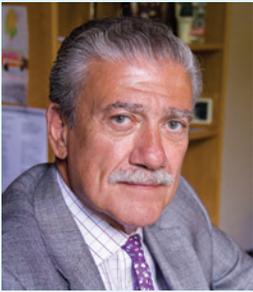


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I can say with confidence that most of us are eager for 2020 to come to an end. While we may not know exactly what lies ahead in 2021, I, too, have my wish list.

- ★ I want to see 'out and proud' people with disabilities as elected officials – Governors, US Senators, US Representatives – who will add disability wisdom and drive more inclusive policymaking.
- ★ I want to see more C-suite executives and Board of Directors members with disabilities who embrace their identities and assure full diversity and inclusion in employment, customer experiences and the supply chain at a minimum.
- ★ I want to see parity in full employment of people with disabilities, where we obtain meaningful work at the same percentage as non-disabled workers.
- ★ I want to see the elimination of poverty that's forced upon us, and the inequities in housing, healthcare and other fundamental programs, as a result of negatively biased public policies.
- ★ I want to see full and equal digital accessibility built into all information and communications technologies, and in fact, all technologies, as you just will never know who will need it.

I am and will always remain hopeful despite continued uncertainty. My wish for you is a new year filled with peace, good health, and hope for an even better future together.

John D'Henry
President & CEO

Where Are They Now?

Catch up with these Henry Viscardi School alumni



Chris, Class of 2016

An outgoing, positive personality has not only garnered Chris over 330,000 followers on social media, but also opened doors on his educational journey. Since graduating at the top of his class, Chris went on to Adelphi University where he received dual degrees in journalism and economics. He is now honing his craft as a multimedia storyteller at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



Dayna, Class of 2012

Dayna's time at Viscardi unleashed a potential she couldn't tap into in public schools. Since then, she has embraced every chance to expand her skills. Dayna graduated from St. John's University this past spring with a 3.9 GPA and is currently enrolled in a master's degree program with a concentration in humanities, cultural studies, and social science. This lifelong learner looks forward to furthering her quest for knowledge in the years ahead.



Alex, Class of 2009

These days, Alex is "Keeping it Real" on his aptly named podcast, sharing opinions on everything from politics to social issues. Alex, a Queen's College media studies grad, often calls out Viscardi for helping him find his unique voice. Outside of podcasting, Alex produces the 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. shows at New Jersey-based talk radio station AM 970 *The Answer*. Despite a busy schedule, he still regularly serves as a guest announcer at Viscardi sporting events.



Kathy, Class of 1987

What am I going to do with the rest of my life?

That was the question Kathy grappled with after raising her two children. Finally, after putting off college for many years, she began discovering the answer by enrolling at Purdue Global University at age 48. After receiving a degree in health and human services, she is determined to mentor others with disabilities. As Kathy puts it, it's never too late to pursue your goals.

Sustaining Our Mission

Over the past eight months, The Viscardi Center team has found new ways to safely sustain education and employment programs and services that thousands rely on every day. Our commitment to empowering children and adults with disabilities has never been stronger or more focused.

- ★ Medically fragile pre-K-12 students are receiving high-quality in-person and remote instruction, with customized assistive technology and expert teachers and therapists;
- ★ Adolescents with intellectual disabilities are developing the daily living and work-based learning skills to confidently transition into adulthood and build fulfilling lives;

- ★ Job seekers and budding entrepreneurs, including veterans, are connecting with mentors and resources to secure meaningful employment or start businesses;

- ★ Adults and seniors, who might otherwise be without socialization, are experiencing recreational and community interaction through our day habilitation programs;

- ★ At-risk youth, through structured programs, are developing self-esteem and beginning to positively shape their futures.

As we approach the end of 2020, we're grateful for the friends, partners, and fellow employees who keep us moving forward. Together, we can continue



to help people of all ages achieve independence and actively participate in our communities.

You can help preserve and sustain The Viscardi Center's mission to educate, employ, and empower. Support our work at [ViscardiCenter.org/Jumpstart](https://www.ViscardiCenter.org/Jumpstart)

out & about



It's been a bountiful autumn at Viscardi! After a slow summer season, Youth Transition students were back in their aprons, hats, and gloves, meticulously tending to their first fall crops at The Viscardi Center's Smile Farms raised garden beds. The harvest yielded a variety of hot peppers that were ripe for the picking in October, which are now being made into a signature Smile Farms hot sauce.

Smile Farms at The Viscardi Center offers a farm-to-table paid work experience for students, whose responsibilities include planting, cultivating, and harvesting produce to be sold locally and served at the Café Viscardi located on campus.

AWARDS & ACCOLADES



The Viscardi Center is committed to generating meaningful employment opportunities for all, and it starts within the walls of

our organization. We're proud to be named a Leading Disability Employer by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) for the third consecutive year. We joined dozens of national organizations and companies honored for demonstrating exemplary hiring and employment best practices.

NOD annually shines a spotlight on businesses that are leading the way in disability employment and seeks to encourage other employers to tap into the benefits of building an inclusive workforce.

NewsBytes



Meet the recipients of the **2020 Henry Viscardi Achievement Awards!** Visit our YouTube channel on December 3 to learn about the accomplishments of 11 global leaders with disabilities. **Tune in at [YouTube.com/ViscardiCenter](https://www.YouTube.com/ViscardiCenter).**



Find an Accessible Dentist Near You!

Project Accessible Oral Health (PAOH) at The Viscardi Center's Accessible Dental Provider Directory can help you locate culturally competent care for children, teens, and adults in the downstate New York area.

Download now at
[ViscardiCenter.org/PAOH-toolkits-resources](https://www.viscardicenter.org/PAOH-toolkits-resources)

You're

I N V I T E D

Celebrity Sports Night

20 | The Viscardi
MAY | Center/Virtual

SAVE THE DATE!

Interact with professional athletes and empower the disability community. We're re-imagining and planning a hybrid event, allowing you to attend either in-person or virtually, and look forward to surprising you with new and exciting enhancements. **Tickets or tables purchased by December 31, 2020 receive a 20% discount.**



Stay tuned for more information about our 2021 Celebrity Sports Night fundraiser in the coming months at [ViscardiCenter.org](https://www.viscardicenter.org) or call 516.465.1593.

YOUR LASTING IMPACT

Long Island will forever remember Frank Castagna as a leader, mentor, and philanthropist. The Viscardi Center, deeply fortunate to benefit from the Castagna Family's generosity of time and resources, will forever remember Frank for making a lasting difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities for generations. Frank's ultimate contribution, a planned gift, will see his philanthropy live on for years to come.

For decades, the Castagna family and their company, Castagna Realty, have taken an active interest in charitable works throughout the local community. At Viscardi, they have long been instrumental in enhancing vital programs and services that enable people with disabilities to learn and work without limitations.

Frank's wife, Rita, an integral member of the Reach for a Star Committee for many years, assists in planning an annual fundraiser for children with severe physical disabilities at the Henry Viscardi School.

Their daughter Cathy currently serves on Viscardi's Center-wide Board of Directors.

"Frank leaves a magnificent legacy as a role model, mentor, and philanthropist," The Viscardi Center's President & CEO John D. Kemp said.

"Frank and Rita's family philanthropy has profoundly impacted thousands of children and adults in our communities now and will continue to do so well into the future."

To learn more about planned giving opportunities that make a lasting impact, call 516.465.1593.

