

# Governor's Council on Disability

## 2024 Inclusion Award Winners and Nominees

*Winners exemplify standards of excellence in enhancing life for individuals living with disabilities*

The Inclusion Award and one Honorable Mention are presented annually to recognize private and public employers, individuals, businesses or organizations in Missouri that have worked toward greater disability inclusion by taking exceptional, proactive, and innovative measures to integrate and mainstream people with disabilities into their programs, activities, and operations.

The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) selected the following award winner and honorable mention for the **33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Inclusion Award** in 2024.

### 2024 Winners

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#### Winner: True Manufacturing – O'Fallon, MO



True Manufacturing, based in O'Fallon, Missouri, has demonstrated outstanding leadership in disability inclusion through its partnership with the BCI Skills Center. For the past five years, True has provided a specialized job training program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, creating meaningful pathways to competitive employment.

Since launching the program in 2019, True has hired 51 graduates, with 39 still employed today—a remarkable 76% retention rate, significantly higher than their traditional hires. Upon graduation,

students secure competitive roles at True, earning at least \$20 per hour. The success of this initiative reflects True's strong commitment to inclusive hiring, with its 15th training cohort currently in progress.

True executives, including Steve Young, Director of Operations, and Matt Lucas, Operational Specialist, are personally invested in the program's success. They visit every class, interact with students, and emphasize their availability to support employees' well-being and growth.

Engineering Project Manager Ken Tally works closely with BCI to ensure future graduates are well-prepared for their roles.

Additionally, True has outfitted BCI's training space with \$15,000–\$20,000 worth of equipment and continues to provide updated resources for future employees. True's HR team, experienced in disability employment, guides prospective students through plant tours, helping them visualize their future careers.

Employees hired through this program receive the same wages, benefits, and expectations as their peers, including health, dental, and vision insurance, a 401(k) with company match, paid time off, and career advancement opportunities. True Manufacturing's inclusive hiring practices have not only strengthened their workforce but have also set a powerful example for other businesses. Their efforts earned BCI's 2024 Talent Pipeline Project of the Year from the Economic Development

Council of St. Charles County. By championing equal opportunities and embracing innovation, True Manufacturing exemplifies the power of inclusive employment.

### **Honorable Mention – Kit Brewer, Project CU, Inc. – St. Louis, MO**



For over 25 years, Kit Brewer has been a driving force in disability employment, transforming opportunities for individuals with disabilities. As Executive Director of Project CU, Inc., he has built a model of inclusive employment that ensures equitable access to meaningful careers. Under his leadership, Project CU now serves over 100 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health conditions, traumatic brain injuries, and physical, hearing, or visual impairments. His holistic approach integrates employment services, workplace accommodations, and advocacy to create lasting success for employees.

As a Board Representative for the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) and Vice President of The Coalition for the Preservation of Employment Choice, Brewer advocates nationally for disability employment rights. He works directly with policymakers, shaping legislation that expands vocational training, improves accessibility, and preserves

employment choice for individuals with disabilities. His leadership ensures that disability inclusion is not just discussed—it is implemented at every level.

Brewer has expanded career pathways by redesigning Project CU’s workforce development programs, offering customized employment solutions that empower individuals who once faced barriers to thrive in sustainable and meaningful careers. He has also forged strong employer partnerships, demonstrating that disability inclusion strengthens workplace culture and boosts productivity. His outreach has helped businesses across Missouri recognize that hiring individuals with disabilities is not just an ethical responsibility but a smart investment.

Through mentorship and training, he equips employees with the confidence and skills to succeed in professional settings. Brewer’s commitment to inclusion has transformed lives, strengthened Missouri’s workforce, and set a standard for disability employment nationwide.

### **2024 Inclusion Award Nominees**

The Governor’s Council on Disability congratulates the following nominees on being nominated for the 33rd Annual Inclusion Award:

#### **Dr. Beth Emmendorfer – Cape Girardeau, MO**

Nominated by Traci Ritter, for her decades of advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Even in retirement, Dr. Emmendorfer serves as Vice Chair of the Cape Girardeau County SB40 Board, working to expand support for local nonprofits and promote inclusion in her community.

#### **Kansas City Royals – Kansas City, MO**

Nominated by Rebeca Swank, for their partnership with Job One, providing high school students with disabilities valuable work experience at Kauffman Stadium. This collaboration builds

confidence and essential skills, enhancing students' employability and preparing them for future career success.

### **Cheryl Chatham – Poplar Bluff, MO**

Nominated by Jake Dunn, for her leadership and advocacy in promoting disability inclusion. Chatham has led workshops empowering individuals with disabilities and implemented a mentorship program that improves job placement while encouraging greater community engagement.

### **Job One – Independence, MO**

Nominated by Rebeca Swank, for their Community-Based Day Service program, which empowers individuals with disabilities to explore new interests, build independence, and engage in their community. Participants develop skills in budgeting, public transportation, cooking, and social connections, promoting self-reliance and meaningful inclusion.

### **Kelly Logan – Independence, MO**

Nominated by Rebeca Swank, for her 40 years of dedication to Job One, where she oversees Human Resources and ensures compliance, safety, and professional development. As a CARF Surveyor, Logan brings innovative practices to Job One, championing inclusion and mental well-being for employees and the community.

### **Mercy Hospital – St. Louis, MO**

Nominated by Lesa Allsop, for their commitment to disability inclusion through initiatives like the Pre-Employment and Supported Volunteer Program, which provides career exploration and volunteer opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. Mercy's efforts have earned them the NOD Leading Disability Employer Seal and recognition as one of "America's Greatest Workplaces for Diversity" by Newsweek.

### **Platte County Board of Services – Platte County, MO**

Nominated by Cassidi Jobe, for their dedication to the disability community, highlighted by the opening of Neuro Diverse City, a safe and inclusive social recreation center for neurodivergent and developmentally disabled adults to network, build self-advocacy skills, and create meaningful relationships.

### **Natalie Mackay/Unlimited Play – St. Peters, MO**

Nominated by Jason & Sarah Schott, for creating accessible playgrounds where children of all abilities play together. Unlimited Play was founded by Natalie McKay, who was inspired by her son Zachary. To date they have built 42 inclusive playgrounds nationwide, integrating dignity and respect into inclusive play experiences.

### **Stephanie Mahfood – St. Louis, MO**

Nominated by Stacy Elster, for her transformative work in special education, including the STEPUP Employment Training Program. Dr. Mahfood introduced Mursion simulated learning technology, enhancing vocational training for individuals with disabilities and achieving a 73% job placement rate.

For additional information, please contact the Council at 573-751-2600 or by email at [gcd@oa.mo.gov](mailto:gcd@oa.mo.gov)