



Pennsylvania

**Department of Labor & Industry**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Real Opportunities, Real Impact: Shapiro Administration Tours Philadelphia Site of L&I's Summer Employment Program Empowering Young Adults with Disabilities with Meaningful Work**

*The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's (OVR) MY Work program is providing more than 500 students with paid work experiences at 100 worksites across 57 counties this summer, including at Philabundance where more than a dozen workers are helping pack and prepare meals for local children.*

*Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget proposal calls for an additional \$5 million for OVR. The proposed investment would play a key role in supporting OVR's work to help Pennsylvanians with disabilities of all ages find and keep employment, including through the MY Work program.*

**PHILADELPHIA, Pa.** – Today, **Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Secretary Nancy A. Walker** visited the **Philabundance Community Kitchen** to spend time with more than a dozen young adults who are gaining real-world work experience while also making a difference in their community. The students are employed through **MY Work**, a summer program for high school students with disabilities created by L&I's **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** to match students with job opportunities and work experience in their local municipalities.

"Every summer, I'm inspired by the determination, talent, and enthusiasm of the students in the MY Work program. This visit to Philabundance highlights the impact MY Work is making not only on the students participating, but also on thousands of local children who are able to have breakfast and lunch thanks to the work being done at the organization's community kitchen," said **Secretary Walker**. "Programs like this don't just build skills, they build confidence, instill purpose, and provide real opportunity. I am thankful to have the Governor and First Lady as such strong champions of OVR's work, and their continued support is helping to provide Pennsylvanians with disabilities access to meaningful employment and brighter futures."

**Governor Josh Shapiro's** [proposed 2025-26 budget](#) calls for an additional \$5 million investment in OVR, which helps people of all ages with disabilities find employment through personalized services such as vocational counseling and guidance, goal setting, training, and job placement. OVR also offers a variety of other supports that

enable a person with a disability to be successful in the competitive labor market. The proposed investment would play a key role in helping OVR continue to offer the MY Work program, as well as many other crucial services.

Since program year 2016, more than 478,500 Pennsylvanians have received services from OVR, including vocational counseling, evaluations, medical diagnostic services, medical restoration services, employment training, placement services, and career support services.

This summer, OVR has connected more than 500 students with paid work experiences at 100 worksites across 57 counties. In partnership with **Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP®)** – a 50-year-old Harrisburg-based nonprofit that partners with public systems to provide community-based wraparound and behavioral health services as an alternative to residential care and incarceration – OVR has helped 17 students get hired at the Philabundance Community Kitchen. The students are helping make sandwiches, pack meals, and label boxes as part of Philabundance's LunchBox 2025 program, which is providing 40,000 lunches and 20,000 breakfasts to local children this summer to meet the meal gaps for students who typically rely on meals at school and are currently home for the summer with no access to school lunches.

"Philabundance is deeply grateful for the YAP and OVR volunteers who help us not only pack meals but also feed our community through our Summer LunchBox Program," said **Loree D. Jones Brown, CEO of Philabundance**. "One in six children in our region are food insecure. For many children, school meals provide nourishment they may not be able to receive at home. This partnership enables us to close the summer meal gap and deliver on our mission to drive hunger from our community today and end hunger for good."

This is the fourth year for YAP® and OVR's partnership; together in that time, they've supported more than 300 young people through the MY Work program. In addition to the students working at Philabundance, two students are employed through MY Work as assistant art counselors at West Park Cultural Center.

"YAP® is thrilled to partner with Philabundance and the West Park Cultural Center again this year," said **YAP® My Work Program Manager Chanel Summers**. "Partnerships with these organizations and others provide opportunities for young people to gain an immense amount of confidence, valuable job readiness skills, and become more self-sufficient. We are simultaneously building a stronger Pennsylvania workforce for the future. The YAP® implementation of MY Work has been highly impactful in supporting program participants in their endeavors and broadening their scope of career choices that helps lead to fulfilling and productive futures."

Piloted in nine municipalities throughout Allegheny County in 2016, the MY Work initiative established a collaboration between OVR, local education agencies, local government, and non-profit organizations, providing paid work experiences for 50 high school students. In 2021, MY Work was expanded across the Commonwealth, providing

more high school students with disabilities paid work experiences to help them gain essential skills that allow them to become successfully employed in a competitive integrated environment following graduation. To date, more than 2,000 students have participated in the MY Work program since its statewide expansion.

OVR covers the MY Work program's wages for all student workers, with no cost to the municipality. Additionally, OVR has developed work readiness guidance that includes soft skills training and interview preparation to assist participants in a variety of fields, including beautification projects, children's programming, and customer service.

MY Work also helps students build independent living skills, learn effective communication skills, manage a paycheck, and more. Worksite training and on-site supports are provided to students by Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), which are funded by OVR.

**Governor Shapiro** is committed to investing in Pennsylvania's workforce and ensuring all Pennsylvanians have access to real opportunities. In his 2025-26 budget proposal, the Governor is calling for continued bold workforce investments. Some key highlights of his budget plan include:

- **\$3.5 million** for the **Schools-to-Work Program**, helping students transition into high-demand careers;
- **\$5 million** to create the **Nurse Shortage Assistance Program** to recruit, train, and retain the next generation of nursing professionals; and
- **\$10 million** to expand **apprenticeship programs**, offering more earn-as-you-learn opportunities to build a skilled workforce.

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