

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **United Way's Career Transition Project Grows**

*Two new employers sign on to hire more young people with disabilities*

Pittsburgh, Pa. (Aug. 25, 2015) – United Way of Allegheny County's 21 and Able program recently announced that Allegheny County is the third employer committed to hiring more young people with disabilities through its Career Transition Project. United Way of Allegheny County, now part of United Way of Southwestern PA, will be working with the county's team in the coming months to finalize its program.

"Ensuring that our county and our community are accessible to everyone and that all who want to participate in our government have the ability to do so has long been a priority of the County. In our administration, we have focused on the employment of individuals with disabilities, and employment with the County is no exception," said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. "I am proud that Allegheny County will now have its own designated Career Transition Professional, a position that will enhance our ability to hire and retain workers with disabilities, starting with the young people who are part of this effort."

In April, the University of Pittsburgh announced their participation in the project, becoming the first employer to engage as a result of its successful pilot phase. The university's goal is to hire 12 young people with disabilities to full-time positions in the coming year.

"This program is important to the County and the University," Chancellor Patrick Gallagher of the University of Pittsburgh said. "It embodies diversity and inclusion which are core values at Pitt because they enrich learning, scholarship, and the communities we serve."

The Career Transition Project, launched as a pilot program in September 2013 by United Way in partnership with Allegheny County, Giant Eagle, Inc. and Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, is an innovative employment and training initiative that helps young people with disabilities secure work experience and paying jobs as they transition out of high school.

In January, the Kessler Foundation awarded United Way a grant to support the expansion of the pilot to three to five companies over the next two years.

There are approximately 1,000 young adults with disabilities that graduate from high school each year in Allegheny County. Forty percent of young adults ages 20 to 24 with disabilities in Allegheny County are neither in school nor working.

"With the expansion of this project, we intend to not only increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but drive systemic change toward inclusion of people with disabilities in the

workplace, and build a bridge to lifelong employment through early work experience,” said Heather Sedlacko, director, programs for seniors and people with disabilities at United Way of Allegheny County.

The Career Transition pilot program originally launched at Giant Eagle. The original goal of the pilot was to employ 24 students during the two-year pilot. During that time, 40 youths have been employed by Giant Eagle, and 200 young people with disabilities have received job search assistance.

**About United Way of Allegheny County** – United Way of Allegheny County, now a part of United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania serving Allegheny, Westmoreland, Fayette & Southern Armstrong Counties, brings people together to tackle our community's most challenging issues, because no one person or organization can do it alone. United Way leads and mobilizes the caring power of individuals and organizations to help people in need measurably improve their lives. United Way creates long-lasting change and helps children and youth succeed, strengthens and supports families by promoting financial stability, ensures the safety and well-being of vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities, and provides county-wide access to information and referral sources meeting basic needs.

**About 21 and Able** - 21 and Able, an initiative of United Way of Allegheny County, is working to create a roadmap for youth with disabilities who are transitioning out of the education and supportive services system to continue their education, work, live independently, and participate actively in their communities. 21 and Able is working toward this goal via three strategies: the development of a public policy agenda and coordination of advocacy efforts; the creation of a public awareness campaign to draw attention to the urgency of issues related to youth transitioning to adulthood; and the design and launch of pilot projects that address the transition needs of youth with disabilities and their families.

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