



# Promoting Neurodiversity, Fostering Accessibility and Ensuring Inclusion within the Food Industry

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Jody Tick, Executive Director, Sunflower Bakery

MOCO EATS HOSPITALITY CONFERENCE

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# Opportunity: An Untapped Resource

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- Sunflower exists for the same reason it began 15 years ago: to close the employment gap and level the playing field for young adults with learning differences.
- Maryland: approximately 150,000 people working age (18-64) with a cognitive disability. Only 38% are employed.\*
- Montgomery County: employment rate increases to 50.5%, but remains well below 82% employment for residents without cognitive disabilities.

\*2023 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium

# Pathways to Employment: Our Secret Sauce

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- Rigorous training in hard skills of Pastry, Hospitality and Culinary: curriculum align with industry skills
- Soft skills of employment readiness: expectations and accountability
- Employment preparation: resumes, mock interviews, job applications
- Employment matching: understand strengths, weaknesses, and interests of our graduates and job requirements
- Ongoing supports: faded job coaching and Job Services team that support employers

# Partnering with Employers

- Relationship Development
- Ongoing Communication
- Feedback to Inform Training

“I know that if I hire a Sunflower student, a Sunflower graduate, they are going to be committed to seeing it through . . . They are going to have this added support.”

Verelyn Gibbs Watson, Owner, Nothing Bundt Cakes

“I think you have to look at it as a win-win situation. I think you are helping somebody, and at the same time they’re doing the work that you actually need to be done.”-Stephan Beauchesne, Owner Pop-Up Poutine

