

## Abilis Expands Special Needs Services in Darien With Four Programs Soon, More Later

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Abilis, a nonprofit that serves people with special needs and their families, will be expanding programs and services in Darien, starting with four programs in the areas of job training, life skills, employment and housing.

— *an announcement from* [Abilis](#)

Abilis is now accepting applications for two programs: Abilis LEAP Transitions Program, which helps people acquire life skills, as well as Project SEARCH, a 10-month internship at the Darien YMCA to provide job training.

Two other programs are still in the works: Sometime later this year Abilis will open Darien Library Café. Later this summer and early fall, the organization will run the supportive living program for 12 new, large studio apartments on East Lane, as part of the Corbin District project.

“Having these four initial Abilis programs, and more to come, in the Darien community, will only strengthen our ability to help more individuals with disabilities or special needs,” said Amy Montimurro, CEO and president of Abilis.

The organization, headquartered in Greenwich, already serves 800 people in Darien, Greenwich, Stamford,

Norwalk, New Canaan, Westport, Wilton and Ridgefield.

“We have found that our most successful programs are those that are within the communities we serve, where community members have friends and family close by and program participants are familiar with the streets, shops and residents,” Montimurro said.

### **Life Skills, Employment, Advocacy, Partnership**

The Abilis LEAP (Life Skills, Employment, Advocacy and Partnership) program is a partnership with the Darien Depot Youth Center. The program helps young adults with special needs develop important independent life skills to become more independent, obtain meaningful jobs and participate in community activities.

“We are providing space and the use of our facility and know this will be a very successful partnership and program for the community.” said Janice Marzano, program director at The Depot Youth Center.

This highly sought-after program is currently supporting communities in Greenwich, Stamford, Norwalk, Wilton, Westport and Ridgefield.

The Darien program is taking applications. Those interested may apply by contacting Luis Velazquez, Abilis’ senior director of day services, at 203-531-1880 or [Velazquez@abilis.us](mailto:Velazquez@abilis.us).

### **Project SEARCH: Work Skills and Self-Esteem**

Project SEARCH is a 10-month internship program that uses an evidence-based curriculum designed to help individuals with special needs increase their vocational skills and self-esteem, with the end result a job in the community upon graduation.

Project SEARCH Darien is being run in partnership with the Darien YMCA and participants must apply and be selected for this competitive opportunity. The Project SEARCH participants will rotate through different jobs within the YMCA learning marketable job skills.

This program is specifically for those with special needs and disabilities. Abilis currently operates a successful Project SEARCH program with Greenwich Hospital and the curriculum is part of a national program run by Project SEARCH at hospitals throughout the nation. To apply for the Darien Project SEARCH program, call 203-531-1880.

“Having Abilis come on board and bring its successful Project SEARCH internship program to the Darien YMCA is a win-win for both organizations, the individuals in the program, and the community as a whole,” said Jennifer Gardner, chief executive officer of the Darien YMCA. “We are excited to see the program develop and hopefully expand in the future.”

## **Darien Library Café**

Opening later this year will be the Darien Library Café — a partnership between the Darien Library and Abilis to manage and staff a café at the library and provide training and work opportunities for community members with special needs.

Modeled after the successful partnership with Greenwich Library, the Darien Library Café will feature partnerships with local popular eateries that Abilis will bring in to serve at the Darien Library.

The food will feature grab-and-go breakfast items, bagels, coffee and tea, along with lunch items such as sandwiches, salads, wraps, snacks and drinks.

“We are really looking forward to having Abilis be part of the Darien Library,” said Kiera Parrott, director of the Darien Library. “We’re especially excited about the delicious, locally-sourced food and amazing coffee the new Abilis-run Café will offer our patrons.

“The inclusiveness of the Café and Abilis’ mission are very important to us, and we are excited to be able to provide meaningful employment to adults with special needs and involve them in the fabric of the Library and our community.”

## **Supported Living**

Later this summer and early this fall, 12 new large studio apartments in two Darien homes with close proximity to Exit 13 and I-95, located in a residential area, will be made available as part of Abilis’ Darien REACH Supported Living Program (Residential, Education & Employment, Activities, Community, Health) for individuals 18 and older with special needs.

The Abilis Darien Apartments on East Lane are a partnership with Baywater Properties to provide affordable housing that allow people with disabilities to live in their own apartment with supports from Abilis.

These unique units fill a void in the housing market and are being built specifically with ADA compliant features to help those with disabilities live a more independent life. Abilis will provide overnight staffing at this Darien location, as well as vehicles to transport individuals to jobs, shopping locations, and social and recreational activities.

Additionally, the residential facilities include a recreation room and outdoor picnic areas. Abilis is accepting applications for its Darien location now, so the REACH team can introduce community members and develop friendships.

Abilis anticipates strong demand for the 12 apartments and encourages interested families to contact Jennifer O’Gorman, director of Admissions and Clinical Services at Abilis at [OGorman@abilis.us](mailto:OGorman@abilis.us) or 203-531-1880 x 132.

## *Darienite*

### *News for Darien*

<https://darienite.com>

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To find out if this opportunity is a good fit for your loved one or to learn more about our REACH program, visit the Abilis website at [abilis.us/life-services/reach.html](https://abilis.us/life-services/reach.html).

“As a company, we are deeply committed to providing accessible, affordable and inclusive housing in Darien,” said David Genovese, founder of Baywater Properties. “We know that having individuals supported by Abilis actively a part of our community, as residents and working in local jobs, will help bring so much joy and pride into their lives — and our lives.”

Abilis is also thankful for the generous \$65,838 grant from The Darien Foundation to fund the technology and equipment to start the new programs in town.

“These are successful programs that will bring opportunities to individuals in Darien and enhance our community,” Sarah Woodberry, executive director of The Darien Foundation. “It is wonderful to be a part of this collaborative partnership led by Abilis.”

#### **Find Out More**

To learn more about Abilis’ programs and services in Darien, call 203-531-1880 or email [info@abilis.us](mailto:info@abilis.us).

[Abilis](#) is celebrating its 70th year in 2021 of being a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that supports more than 800 individuals with special needs and their families from birth throughout their lives. Along with the organization's [website](#), you can find Abilis on [Facebook](#), on [Instagram](#) and on [Twitter](#).