



## **Disability Inclusion Program Models: Julie's Family Learning Program**

This feature is one in a series of four program features that showcase how adult education programs in MA have used program-based coaching and the [Basic Disability Screening for Adult Educators](#) to make their programs more disability inclusive. To read the additional features, visit the [Disability Inclusion: Four Program Profiles and BDSAE Resources resource page](#), and to learn more about SABES Program Support offerings related to ADA & Disability Inclusion, visit the [SABES ADA and Disability Inclusion website page](#).

### **About**

Julie's Family Learning Program is a family support, wellness, and education center focused on building strong, stable, healthy family functioning. Serving around 276 adult learners, this community-based program operates part-time, with its core work centered on preparing students for the high school equivalency exam.

Founded in 1974, the program originally served mothers, helping them recognize their existing strengths and apply that knowledge to stabilize and improve family life. In 2019, its mission broadened to include all underserved learners aged 16 and older seeking flexible pathways to educational credentials and workplace skills. As the program states, it aims to be "a welcoming, inclusive space that provides free educational programs and supportive services to help develop strong, successful families and adults."

### **Disability Inclusion Goal**

Julie's set out to evaluate its own program environment, identifying both strengths and gaps related to disability inclusion. The purpose of this evaluation was to inform the development of a more disability-inclusive environment for adult learners, many of whom come from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds.

## Summary of the Work

The coaching and program-based work followed three phases: planning, training, and follow-up.

The planning phase began with an information session and initial meeting to establish training goals and format. During the training phase, the coach introduced the Basic Accessibility Checklist for ADA Coordinators and Administrators and worked with staff to develop an action plan. In the follow-up phase, the program adapted and implemented BDSAE forms, using them to build disability inclusion into program operations and to help individual students apply for and secure accommodations for HiSET and GED testing.

## Lessons Learned

Two years into the process, the program identified three key takeaways.

- First, the Basic Accessibility Checklist is not a one-time exercise. It requires regular revisiting to keep the program aligned with its accessibility goals over time.
- Second, staff turnover poses an ongoing risk to sustaining disability inclusion protocols. Program leadership determined that dedicated time must be set aside to train new employees on these tools, rather than assuming continuity by default.
- Third, collecting detailed student educational histories can surface painful memories for learners. Staff identified it as essential to communicate these histories to classroom teachers, so that instructors can avoid inadvertently triggering or re-traumatizing students.

## Conclusion

Julie's Family Learning Program worked step by step to check and improve how it includes people with disabilities in its adult education services. After two years, the program learned that this work needs regular checklist reviews, careful training for new staff, and thoughtful communication about student histories to keep learners safe from harm.