



Cape Abilities: One Woman's Dream Job

by Katie O'Sullivan

Jen Dennehy is a program manager for Cape Abilities, in charge of the staff and residents at Harwich House. She doesn't hesitate in the slightest when asked if she likes her work.

"I love my job," she says with enthusiasm. "I go to work and they all give me hugs. They are always happy to see me."

The mission of Cape Abilities is to serve individuals with disabilities on Cape Cod. They do this through education and counseling, and by providing residential, therapeutic, social and employment supports. The goal is to empower people with disabilities to achieve meaningful and valued roles in society, and active lives in their own towns across the Cape.

Cape Abilities was founded as Nauset Workshop in 1968. Since then, the organization has grown to serve all of Cape Cod – from Bourne to Provincetown. The services have expanded to include jobs, housing, transportation, day habilitation and entrepreneurial businesses.

"It's an amazing agency, full of amazing people," Jen says. "They work with disabled people, so everyone is genuinely kind. I work for kind people, and am surrounded by kind people... I love it so much."

Born and raised on Cape Cod, Jen hasn't always worked in the field of special needs, but says "My mother knew I should have gone into this field before I did. I was always making friends with the kids that other people left out, always wanting to include everyone."

When one of Jen's children was born with developmental and learning issues, she became educated on the issues in order to become his advocate. "It really woke me up to this part of myself," she explains.

For the last five years, she's worked in the Special Needs Department of the Chatham public school system, helping to educate and advocate for other people's children. She had to leave that job recently when her part-time position at Cape Abilities turned into a full-time, 40-plus-hours a week role. She couldn't be happier about the change.

"My job varies every single day now," Jen explains. "I'm in charge of the four special needs people who live in the house, as well as a staff of about ten, and I need to make sure the staff takes care of everything that has to do with these four people's lives. It's running a house, but it's more than that. My job is to make sure they are happy, healthy, and well-adjusted, and to get them out into the community and involved."

While her job has flexible hours, she says it's been difficult juggling her work and home life recently as she gets up to speed with her new responsibilities. Her family has been very supportive. "My husband is an amazing father, 100% involved with the kids, and he is an amazing partner. Communication is key, but he is father of the year. I couldn't do it without him."

Jen thinks the best part of her job is being with her people. "I call them the folks, not residents or clients," she explains. "This is their home. One of the women has lived in the house for twenty years! I'm coming into their home to help them."

While Jen is MAT-certified (Medication Administration Training) to give the residents their various medications, a Cape Abilities nurse comes to the house once a week to meet with her and with the residents.

Cape Abilities "is a real team-effort kind of place," Jen says, promoting her employer. "Everyone is accepting and kind, and it's a friendly work atmosphere. It's a wonderful agency to work for, and they're always looking for relief workers. The agency will even pay for training and certification."

"It's rewarding to work with genuine people," she says, smiling. "There's no politics or gossiping behind backs. You get what you get, and it's real. I'm very happy being with these people."

And, she'll remind you again, she loves her job.



Jen Dennehy

Interested in being a
[Cape Abilities](#) volunteer?

We have a wide variety of opportunities
available across Cape Cod.
You can make the difference in the life
of a person with a disability.

Watch a brief video about
volunteers at Cape Abilities [here](#).

Volunteer opportunities range from regular weekly appointments
to one-time special events.



[Katie O'Sullivan](#) is the Editor and a contributing writer of this magazine. She lives in Harwich with her husband, three children and two large dogs.

In addition to reporting and editing, she writes contemporary fiction. Her first suspense novel, "Unfolding the Shadows", was released October 1, 2009 from Cerridwen Press. Visit Katie at her [website](#) or visit her [blog](#).