

## Six new grant awards support HarrysButtons expansion

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**easterseals**  
HarrysButtons



**Uniform  
T-Shirts  
Buttons  
Magazines**

**Six new grant awards totaling nearly \$70,000 provide base funding for the HarrysButtons expansion plan, enabling Easterseals Academy students and individuals with disabilities to have expanded job training.**

HarrysButtons at Easterseals has been providing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities since 2010. The social enterprise, under the leadership of Jason Reis, Employment Services Coordinator, is charting a path toward expansion building on a business plan that was developed with support from consultants at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). The expansion will

include more jobs for people with disabilities as well as a more comprehensive job training model for students at Easterseals Academy at the campuses in Chicago, Tinley Park, and Machesney Park.

Six new grants are providing the opportunity to begin this process of expansion: from the **Associated Bank, Cook County Community Development Block Grant, the Henrietta Lange Burk Fund, Huntington Bank, the Service Club of Chicago, The Special Kids Foundation.**

“At HarrysButtons, we employ people with disabilities, customize supports for them, and provide a unique work opportunity centered on using their strengths and helping them develop their job training and life skills,” explains Jason Reis, Employment Services Coordinator for [HarrysButtons.com](http://HarrysButtons.com) and its three offices in Chicago, Tinley Park, and Machesney Park. “With the addition of these new generous grants, we will be able to expand our business and provide more opportunities for our Easterseals Academy students and HarrysButtons employees to explore all different sides of employment and job training.”

Thanks to a grant from the Service Club of Chicago, Patrick and David—both former students of Easterseals Academy who have been working at HarrysButtons for over 5 years—are now able to create brightly colored buttons with messages and images at a much higher speed with a new electric button-making machine.



- [Learn more about HarrysButtons staffer Patrick](#)

“Our employees are so excited to have a new electric machine that allows HarrysButtons to accept high volume, quick turnaround orders that we previously would have had to turn down,” says Reis. “It’s another opportunity for our staff to learn a new skill with new technology, while also still having access to their manual button machine.”

The new machine, which allows bulk orders, will also empower HarrysButtons to cover the cost of hiring more individuals with disabilities. HarrysButtons works on a range of products beyond buttons, including magnets, T-shirt apparel, and other custom work. Custom orders can be placed on

their [website](#) or products purchased at their [online store](#).

Xander and Jacob are students at [Easterseals Academy](#)—an alternative school placement for young people ages 3-21 with an autism spectrum disorder, emotional disability, developmental delay or intellectual disability. With new support from **Associated Bank**, the **Cook County Community Development Block Grant**, the **Henrietta Lange Burk Fund**, and **Huntington Bank**, they are currently exploring different jobs and developing employment skills at HarrysButtons, a practice that will become more formalized for students in the new school year with the launch of the HarrysButtons Training Program at Tinley Park. This new training program will expose Easterseals Academy students to all aspects of the business and develop their skills in new areas. With support from the **Special Kids Foundation**, the training program will also purchase Smartboards to be used for small-group training opportunities and presentations about topics like quality checking, inventory-taking, and graphic design.



“We have big plans for HarrysButtons, with a goal of providing significantly expanded employment for adults with disability and also, deeper, more comprehensive training opportunities for our youth with autism at Easterseals Academy,” notes Sara Ray Stoelinga, President & CEO of Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford. “We are grateful for the generosity of these foundations, corporate foundations, and donors who are supporting us in reaching our expansion goals.”

“Our long-term goal is to ultimately transform our employment-only model into a comprehensive

training model,” Reis adds. “With a training model, our Easterseals Academy students and HarrysButtons employees will move through every single aspect of the HarrysButtons business to experience varied jobs to expand their skillsets and experiences. We are so grateful for the new grants that are making this possible.”

To learn more about HarrysButtons and their work, visit <http://harrysbuttons.com/>.