

From Paycheck to Purpose

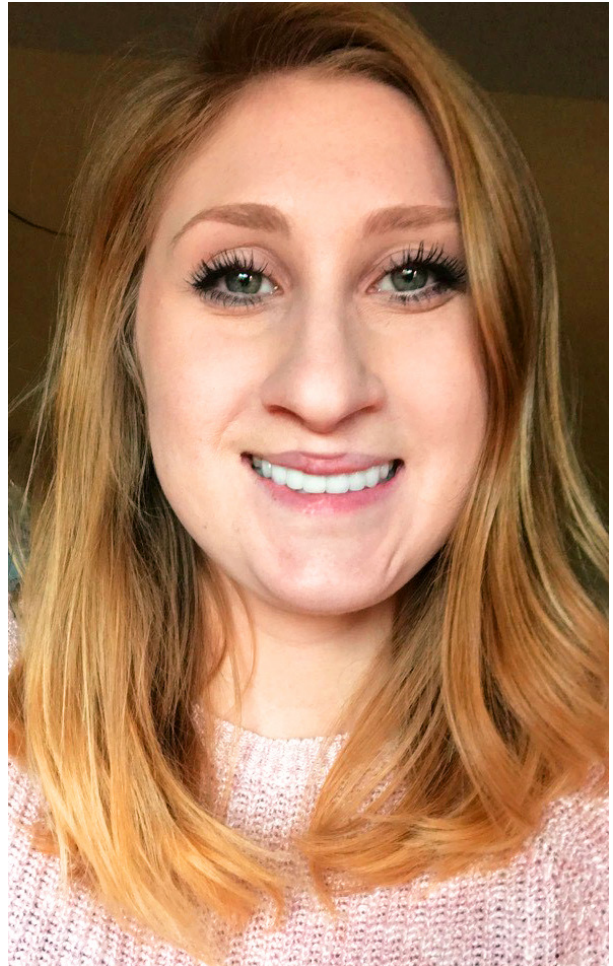
Amanda's Career Path at Easterseals NH

For Amanda, the need to pay the bills after college graduation led to a job in an unlikely place for someone who majored in homeland security and minored in psychology: Easterseals NH. What started as job security right out of college evolved into a new philosophy on life.

In May 2018, Amanda was on the verge of graduating from Southern New Hampshire University in Manchester. Like many of her classmates, she needed to find a job, and fast. On the advice of a friend, she was introduced to Easterseals; specifically, a Youth Support Specialist position with Easterseals NH's Youth Transitional Services (YTS) program. "Not only did I receive a generous sign-on bonus, I was hired immediately. I remember I graduated on a Saturday, and by Monday, I was in training," Amanda says.

As a Youth Support Specialist, Amanda worked one-on-one with youth who had modified school schedules, refused to go to school, or spent much of their time isolated at home. "We would practice daily living skills, including budgeting money and exploring jobs," Amanda says. She supported one client in attending his warehouse packaging job and remained near him during his shift in case he struggled with some aspect or needed a supportive focus. Amanda's YTS position presented challenges, like any job, yet she found the work to be meaningful.

Then COVID-19 hit, resulting in fewer YTS placements and a drastic reduction in Amanda's work hours.



When the opportunity arose to work within the Residential & Educational Services program, Amanda readily agreed to accept a new client-facing position as a Paraprofessional at the program's Gammon Academy on Mammoth Road in Manchester. She got to know the younger residents, ages 8 to 12, as she assisted them in achieving their individual educational goals and exercising interpersonal skills. She started her busy days early, arriving at the

student residence before school to help with morning routines, assisting in the classroom throughout the day at school, and transitioning students in the afternoon.

Amanda enjoyed assisting the teacher in preparing and delivering the curriculum, especially the more hands-on, science-oriented projects. She found the job would present

physically demanding moments. However, the trauma-informed care intervention training she received from Easterseals prepared her with the skills to safely navigate challenging situations, like emotional meltdowns and physical outbursts. The connection she made with the students through her assistance with school activities and events made it all worth it for her. "Seeing their faces light up, and seeing their happiness, reminded me that I can make a positive difference in their day."

Two years into her Paraprofessional position, Amanda questioned whether working directly with clients was still the best fit for her. She began looking at job postings on LinkedIn and at other organizations. It was during this time that she was introduced to an Easterseals Residential & Educational Services Director of Admissions. Amanda presented her resume, interviewed, and was offered the promotion to her current role as Admissions Specialist at Easterseals NH Gammon Academy at Zachary Road.

With her education and experience working with student residents, Amanda felt prepared

for the higher level of administrative challenge that came with her new job. She was excited to

be able to take her career in a new direction at Easterseals. "I feel like I 'fit' here," she says. "I really like the Easterseals mission, I like this salaried position, I enjoy learning about my new Easterseals responsibilities through my new coworkers and welcoming new student residents."

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—Amanda

Amanda's workdays allow her to connect potential students to the Easterseals services they need to succeed at home, at school, and in the community. Her transition from her client-facing role to her current behind-the-scenes role meant a shift to a traditional nine-to-five work schedule as well as more interaction with parents and caregivers than students. Ironically, given that Amanda first joined Easterseals because of the needed income to pay expenses, she now recommends others join Easterseals for the community and the intrinsic rewards that come with making a difference in the lives of others.

"In summary, I think the number one benefit of working at Easterseals would definitely be the experience of meeting this population of kids along with the population of staff here. I feel fortunate that I now understand the challenges faced by Easterseals kids as well as the staff members, and I now see that we're all here for each other. I believe Easterseals opens hearts and eyes, including mine, to the needs of others," Amanda says.

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