

## Case Study: Training to Succeed

### The Organization

Launched in 2008, The Information Technology Knowledge and Abilities Network (ITKAN) is an organization providing development opportunities for technology professionals with disabilities. Within this fully inclusive space, members promote a sense of leadership and pride as passionate technology users who also happen to have disabilities. Growing to a strong community of over 190 members, ITKAN is the provider of choice for leading professionals with disabilities into focused, high-demand technology skill-sets and professional roles.

With its influence and impact, ITKAN has strived to foster knowledge, community and opportunity for its members, ensuring that individuals with disabilities continue to bring their unique and highly-valued perspective to the technology field. With the creation of the strategic Advisory Team in late 2014, ITKAN aimed to further establish its training-to-hire initiatives. ITKAN was honored as a Laureate Program by Computerworld Honors in the Collaboration category in 2012.

### The Mission

ITKAN has the mission of developing professionals with disabilities into passionate technology leaders to support the aggressive adoption of Deep Diversity™. The motto “Exploring technology without limits” represents the organization’s commitment of assisting members to achieve their fullest potential in every aspect. The organization maintains a clear focus on creating a direct talent pipeline for individuals with disabilities to enter and exceed expectations in the professional information technology field.

ITKAN’s success is rooted within two main tenets:

- 1) Members who demonstrate incomparable quality and dedication
- 2) Strategic partnerships with organizations that see the necessary value of diversity in the workforce

ITKAN’s members have a variety of opportunities to develop their role as valuable technology professionals. Membership provides training in high-demand skills (SQL Business Intelligence through Microsoft and Directions), collaboration on projects such as ChiSafePath (a civic tech tool to make Chicago safer for accessible travel), and active participation in core advisory committees. Monthly meetings consist of networking sessions followed by immersive programs where members can engage with presentations and subject matter experts about cutting-edge technologies such as Internet of Things and cloud intelligence. ITKAN members don’t just show up; they display an unmatched understanding of technology, which fosters a willingness to dig deeper into technological development, progress, and inclusion. The unparalleled quality of discussions and projects demonstrate that ITKAN members are ready to learn, grow, and perform with the best.

The strategic partnerships of ITKAN allow the organization to leverage its network and resources to better serve ITKAN members. ITKAN’s advisory team consists of leaders that come from a broad range of organizations, all of whom are committed to support ITKAN’s mission of diversity. The collaborative power of these partners adds incredible value to achieving ITKAN’s goals. For example: SPR Consulting provides outreach, subject expertise and topic management; Microsoft hosts space, speakers and trainings; and IMPACTinsights connects ITKAN members with innovative hiring fields. Among many other organizations, AbilityLinks, an innovative employment program and core partner associated with Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital, is dedicated to identifying and supporting candidates with disabilities. The incredible productivity that results from having a diverse set of voices effectively maximizes the potential of ITKAN membership.

These key components of strong membership and dedicated partnerships build a strong foundation for ITKAN’s future success. Having established a base of knowledgeable, active, and professional members, the next step was to expand training-to-hire initiatives. With a clear goal of training and placing individuals into high-demand tech jobs, ITKAN ensures that its members can continue to act as advocates for professionals with disabilities in the technology field.



## Case Study: Training to Succeed

This case study focuses on one of ITKAN's first workforce placement opportunities, where the success of Chris Ludwig — progressing from intern to full-time IT staff member at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) — serves as a defining example of the value and diversity that ITKAN realizes.

### The Opportunity

The strength of ITKAN's network was the catalyst for its great success. After transitioning into the training-to-hire phase, the Advisory Team identified a need to find businesses whose missions aligned with ITKAN's support of Deep Diversity™. It was Kathie Topel, one of the leaders of the Advisory Team, who used her years of experience as CEO of IMPACTinsights to reach out to a number of executive clients, including the Executive for Information Technology of the ELCA, Jonathan Beyer. Eager to partner with ITKAN due to alignment in their diversity and equal employment opportunity objectives, the ELCA brought on two successful ITKAN members into their internship program. After exceeding expectations in his 3-month internship, Chris Ludwig has established an excellent ongoing professional relationship with the ELCA.

Chris Ludwig was placed with the IT Service Delivery team, which focuses on providing end-user support for the entire organization. As a Help Desk Specialist, Chris' day-to-day responsibilities include coordinating and assisting the ELCA staff with access to various technologies, troubleshooting hardware and software, and creating detailed support documentation. These responsibilities were in perfect alignment with Chris' skillset and passion as a professional and trustworthy communicator.

In addition to his daily responsibilities, Chris also took part in the POWERSHIP model, an IMPACTinsights initiative to bridge the communication gap between business and technology. Across the entire organization, Chris co-led a project to create, promote, and distribute an IT Service Catalog, which is a comprehensive platform to inform, educate, and connect all the IT teams within the ELCA.

As a dedicated individual and ITKAN member, Chris went above and beyond the expectations of a typical internship. During this time, Chris took a leadership role, acting as an advocate and representative of the disability community within the ELCA itself. Chris gave himself the opportunity to collaborate with and prove himself to technology and business leaders in the ELCA; these executive team members recognized the organization's strong commitment to diversity and his value as a professional.

Thanks to his value to and leadership within the team, Chris was offered to transition from an internship into a full-time position to reinforce his confirmed success with the ELCA IT Service Delivery Team, where he continues to work with the organization since starting his association with the ELCA in September, 2015.

“Individuals with disabilities can be such key contributors in the workplace of today. The way they view and understand concepts adds a dimension to the work place that can't be overlooked.”

- Kathie Topel  
ITKAN Advisory Team  
CEO, IMPACTinsights

“He has brought skill, unrivaled professionalism, a drive to learn more, and is using each opportunity at his disposal to further demonstrate his value to our organization.

I'm proud to call Chris a member of my team.”  
- Joseph Clairmont  
IT Service Delivery Supervisor,  
ELCA



## Case Study: Training to Succeed

Chris has Cerebral Palsy (CP), which affects his physical presence, including mobility, range of motion, and muscle tone. Chris requires the use of a power wheelchair and walker, but his disability has no mental, emotional, and/or behavioral carryover. Throughout his professional experience, his biggest adjustment is coming to terms with the fact that **“very few workforces include people with disabilities in positions of high expectation, responsibility, or authority.”**

Like every ITKAN member, and no matter what challenges lie ahead, Chris remains an advocate through his personal desire to prevail as an intelligent, capable, and productive leader in business and society. Regarding his professional advancements, Chris recognized the role of respect in allowing individuals with disabilities to reach their full potential. **“I’m expected to do the job I was hired for, and the simple trust, commitment, and empathy contained and expressed within that basic, humane expectation really demonstrates why the ELCA is a company worth working with.”**

Chris has continued to act in his role as a leader and communicator, working for over fifteen years as a professional with a disability, and striving to see an increase in the rate of representation and respect for other individuals with disabilities in all realms of civilization. Chris’ continuing leadership in the ELCA and ITKAN reflects his dedication that **“It’s important to me to ally with and reinforce companies that enrich the prospects of people with disabilities in our world.”**

### The Achievement

For many years, ITKAN has been supporting the potential of technology professionals with disabilities. During his membership in ITKAN, Chris co-presented on the value of communication in career development and continues to actively participate in promoting the development of passionate technology leaders with disabilities. We are proud to stand by Chris Ludwig’s success as a proven example of value and potential in our training-to-hire initiative for professionals with disabilities in the technology field. Chris embodies the ITKAN qualities of a lifelong-learner and passionate technologist that make him a wonderful advocate for people with disabilities everywhere.

We hope that this case study provides inspiration to individuals and organizations in recognizing and supporting the critical impact of ITKAN’s initiatives. The achievements of ITKAN members such as Chris and many others serve as proof of the invaluable contributions that individuals with disabilities bring to the technology field. The development and placement of these professionals is crucial to creating a more inclusive and successful workforce. With the dedicated membership and strategic partnerships that help ITKAN grow, the organization welcomes all opportunities to collaborate and achieve. Together, we can ensure that society continues to advance the productive value of diversity.

“What I love about the ELCA (and why I want to continue to serve within the organization) is that, whenever I wanted to discuss, qualify, or pursue an accommodation, that option was always available to me.”

- Chris Ludwig  
ITKAN member  
IT Service Delivery, ELCA

“We are looking forward to meeting with members of our Advisory Team to encourage their partnership in this pillar of the ITKAN mission to establish passionate professionals with disabilities for the tech industry. Chris’s success at ELCA has certainly been a great way to start!”

- Pat Maher  
ITKAN co-founder  
Director of Civic Engagement,  
SPR Consulting



## Case Study: Training to Succeed

### Acknowledgements

This case study was authored by ITKAN member Kevin Wei. Kevin is a Microsoft Chicago Civic Tech Fellow and a student at the University of Chicago, studying Economics and Public Policy.

Special thanks to Chris Ludwig, Joseph Clairmont, the ELCA, Kathie Topel, Pat Maher, and Adam Heckman for providing their time, information, and opportunity to promote the success of ITKAN and its initiatives.

ITKAN also thanks the organizations and sponsors for their continued partnerships and support of its diversity goals.



**SPR CONSULTING**



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



**AbilityLinks.org**<sup>SM</sup>

**The Job Opportunity Website for  
Persons with Disabilities and Inclusive Employers**