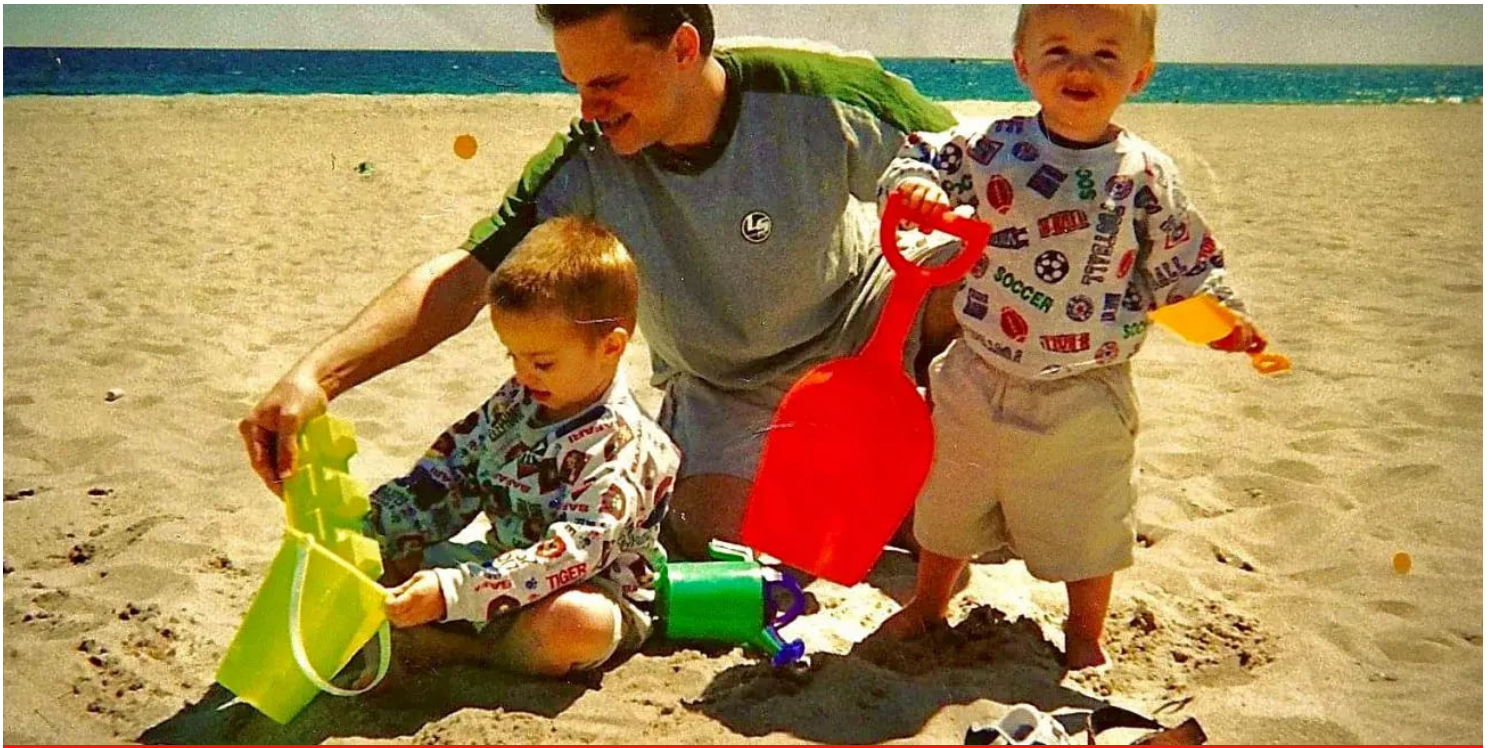


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## SONS INSPIRE FATHER'S WORK AT BRIDGEWELL PEABODY

BY CHARLIE MCKENNA | June 18, 2022



*Darren Goad plays with his sons, Josh and Jake on the beach.*

PEABODY — Darren Goad, a career specialist at the nonprofit Bridgewell and the father of two autistic sons, might just be the definition of a super dad.

Goad, who joined Bridgewell two years ago, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, said he wouldn't be working as a career specialist if not for his two sons, Josh and Jake. When his sons were young, Goad worked as an area manager for an art retail company, working long hours and missing out on countless therapies for his two sons, who are nonverbal. It was that drive to support his children that led him to quit his job and get a job at the school his children attended.

Six months later, Goad got a job as a job developer at a Lowell-based company and never looked back.

"I stayed with that company for over 20 years, building up that program and job developing and working in employment mostly," he said.

Being a father is a major part of the work Goad now does at Bridgewell, where he helps disabled people land jobs best suited to them and their skillset.

"Working in this field is really the only thing I could do. It helps me be a better parent, it helps me be a better advocate for people that I work with here because I look at them, like how would their parents want them taken care of," he said in an interview Friday afternoon. "That's my benchmark [it's] as if they're my own child. What I'm doing for them needs to be of the same caliber that I would assume for my own children. And I don't know if I'd have that perspective otherwise."

Through his role at Bridgewell, Goad helps people in the employment program find jobs that interest them and fit their skill set. He helped a Bridgewell program participant find a unique opportunity at Peabody's Create and Escape, a downtown Peabody business that specializes in DIY projects and events.

Over the years, he said, his biggest challenge has been getting companies to treat disabled employees fairly and equally – and to get them to realize the value they can bring.

"A lot of the contracts that we had with employers they almost read as if they were charity, like they were doing us a favor, the wages were what we call sub minimum because a lot of the ideology behind that was the individuals that we have did what we call job carving," he said. "They couldn't do everything required in that job description, they could do pieces of it, so therefore, they were only paid a percentage of wages for the pieces they could do."

"But in reality, that's not fair," he continued. "I worked very, very hard for a very long time with current employers and new employees, and thankfully, the state felt the same way they started to push this so this became a big push over the past two decades that everybody got fair and equal wages for the work they were doing."

Goad now lives in Salem, moving to the North Shore after his youngest son turned 22, effectively aging out of the education system. Now, his sons are in services and live residentially in different houses. Goad and his wife moved to be closer to their sons – effectively living in between them and staying close so they can home anytime they want.

"It works," he said.

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