

# A coffee shop with a good purpose

## Nonprofit, church partner in program to help train people with disabilities

By Tatiana Flowers



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Coffee for Good Executive Director Deb Rogan shows plans of the Coffee for Good site. The nonprofit coffee shop will provide jobs for people with disabilities and serve as a platform to train for success in the local workforce.



Contributed image

A rendering of the Coffee for Good interior.



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Coffee for Good Executive Director Deb Rogan and Board Chairman Jon LaBerge show the construction of the coffee shop site. The nonprofit shop will provide jobs for people with disabilities and serve as a platform to train them for success in the local workforce. Coffee for Good is expected to open in February in the historic 1858 Mead House next to Second Congregational Church.

**GREENWICH** — After years of watching her nephew struggle to find employment, Deb Rogan said she was spurred into action.

Rogan pitched an idea to her church's minister, the Rev. Maxwell Grant, about a program that would select and train individuals with disabilities — like her nephew — for jobs. The new program would be set in a coffee shop environment and would prepare people with disabilities for permanent employment.

Abilis, a Greenwich-based nonprofit that works with people with developmental disabilities, partnered with Second Congregational Church of Greenwich to bring to life Rogan's idea, called Coffee for Good.

Coffee for Good plans to launch in February in the Mead House on the church's campus. The endeavor could cost more than \$250,000, Rogan said. Abilis and church leaders are working to raise funds to support the program.

The coffee shop will be partially staffed by 20 Abilis trainees during a first phase and 40 more during a second. The individuals will work in shipping, inventory, serving and computer-based roles. Trainees, who must be 21 or older, will work three days per week, earning \$15 per hour, at the coffee shop.

"The goal is to be a paid training program where they come in and learn skills," said Rogan, a Second Congregational Church parishioner who came up with the idea and asked Abilis leaders to join in the effort.

At the end of the program, trainees will graduate with resumes that outline their new skills and interests from the experience.

"The hope is to build relationships with other coffee shops and establishments, so clients can trickle into those permanent positions," Rogan added. "The goal is to reduce the very, very high unemployment rate by creating these coffee shop positions."

Adults with disabilities especially struggle to find employment after they turn 21 and leave their school districts. Many of their services end at that age and they often need additional support, said Amy Montimurro, CEO of Abilis.

The Coffee for Good program will create a "soft landing" for individuals with disabilities and offer a chance to work in a "safe and supported" environment where they can learn and won't be afraid to make mistakes, said Montimurro.

"There's so many people ready for jobs, but there's no jobs," she said.

Rogan's Coffee for Good idea came more than two years ago, as church leaders were brainstorming new uses for the Mead House, said Grant, senior minister at Second Congregational Church on East Putnam Avenue.

"From our perspective as a church, we're obviously really concerned with wanting to support the community and especially find ways to support vulnerable people in the community," he said. "That's just sort of a core church commitment."

Renovations are already underway to create the coffee shop in the Mead House, a historic stone home built in the 1850s on the Maple Avenue side of the church campus.

"It's a nice place to learn and it's a nice place to sit and it's a beautiful community space that we want to offer to this endeavor," Grant said.

"It has served in other capacities for a long time," he said. "It's always been a community space, and this

is just an iteration of that.”

The Coffee for Good shop will have ample parking, a rarity in town, organization leaders said.

“We wanted it to be meeting space where you can relax, find parking, enjoy, be greeted, and served by people with disabilities,” Montimurro said.

To donate to support the Coffee for Good, visit [coffeeforgood.org/product/ donate-to-coffee-for-good](https://coffeeforgood.org/product/donate-to-coffee-for-good) or [charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/cfg-makesjobs-possible](https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/cfg-makesjobs-possible). [tatiana.flowers@thehour.com](mailto:tatiana.flowers@thehour.com)  
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