

Promoting Partnerships and Employment for People with Disabilities

Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and Virginia Commonwealth University,
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention

Success Stories

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Nikki

Nikki is 33 years old and happily employed with a community college where she has daily contact with students with disabilities. Getting to this point, however, was a difficult journey and required a great deal of perseverance. She was diagnosed with depression when she was a teenager, but had three major episodes as an adult, one after the birth of her child, one at the break-up of her marriage, and one in a very stressful job. Due to extenuating family circumstances, Nikki was unable to attend college. She later married and moved out of state, where she was a stay-at-home mother to a child with autism. Her former husband and child still live out of state and she sees them occasionally.

The stress of traffic forced her to stop driving, which limited her employment opportunities after she returned to Virginia. She was referred to the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services for testing in the summer of 2006. Nikki had worked as a Telemarketer and a Front Desk Clerk at a motel. When she returned to Virginia she was able to obtain employment doing political surveys for research, work as a Customer Service Representative, Receptionist and performed credit card collections. Collections proved to be overly stressful and she accessed DRS services again and was referred to The Choice Group to provide employment services. Barriers to employment included social anxiety and she reports that she found talking to people very difficult. Nikki registered with one of the two employment agencies approved to provide staff to state offices. She enjoyed working with them, where she was tested but not placed. The Vocational Counselor at The Choice Group worked with Nikki behind the scenes to assist her with her resume, interview skills, support in the application process, and ongoing support after employment. A position at the local community college was identified through networking, and Nikki was interviewed and hired.

Nikki reports that the job has changed her life and credits the support of her supervisor, her job coach, her brother and sister-in-law, and having the right medication. She is driving again and commutes an hour each way every day. She has returned to school and has received A's in all three classes she took in her first semester. Nikki's interests now include computers, animals, psychology, social work, disability issues and people with disabilities. She enjoys working in a positive environment with people who are earnest and want to learn, and her goal is obtain and Associate in Social Sciences and transfer to a state university. She is off food stamps, has improved her organizational skills, people skills, self-confidence and self-image. Nikki meets challenging people every day and enjoys it. She appreciates the sense of camaraderie and connectedness, and feels that she is now impacting the lives of others in a meaningful way, doing something vital, and mentoring students with disabilities. "Work here is fun."

Nikki supervisor agrees with her. He is familiar with the services offered to Nikki and is fully supportive. She is "doing great!" He had been hiring retirees, but found that they did not have the same job skills and level of support, and did not seem to understand the students as well. He was looking for someone who wanted to be part of the team in a professional atmosphere. He is very pleased with her work and the initiative she demonstrates to make the office better. He reports that she is dependable and there every day, willing to stay extra hours if needed, and is taking classes to improve her skills and vocational opportunities. She is good with the students. She relates well to them, can speak to their issues, and no amount of attitude ruffles her feathers. She is able to be calm, under-react and have a soothing influence. There are a lot of people who would not do well in that chair, he says. "She understands."





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