

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

Edited by: Howard Green and Jennifer McDonough

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Rachel

Rachel is 33 years old and has a diagnosis of major depression disorder. After trying 25 different medications she agreed to take part in a new approach to depression treatment that involves stimulation of the vagus nerve. She has come to realize that there is no one cure for her depression, that several factors need to be considered, including medication, proper nutrition, exercise, support groups, family understanding of mental illness, and a supportive work environment with appropriate accommodations. She is pleased to report that this is currently her situation.

After earning an Associate in Social Work, Rachel worked for a non-profit, a healthcare organization, and state government in payroll, benefits, accounts payable and other administrative positions before obtaining her current part-time Administrative Assistant position with a state agency. She applied with one of the two staffing agencies that are approved to provide staff to state offices, and describes them as efficient, nice and effective. She describes how issues can escalate so quickly, however, when her medications are not working effectively, or other areas of her life impact her ability to maintain her perspective at work and the employer does not understand. These conditions resulted in numerous short-term employment experiences, the type that may prompt a prospective employer to label her as a “job-hopper”, and that became a significant barrier. Rachel identified the opportunity at her current employer as a result of her networking efforts, and worked with the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative services and her job coach at The Choice Group behind the scenes to develop interview skills and an effective resume, advocate for herself, and later to process concerns and learn how to depersonalize issues she encounters in the work environment.

Rachel enjoys her current position and has done well there for a year. She has the appropriate medications, gets exercise and proper nutrition, has offsite support from her job coach, and enjoys a more positive work environment with a supportive supervisor who understands her issues and allows her the flexibility to take time off when it is simply not possible for her to work effectively. She also benefits from her association with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and support groups. Her work schedule is 40 hours a week during the busy season and 24 hours a week during the slower months, so she does not exceed the 1500 hours limit for P14 state positions. She wishes that benefits could be offered in these positions, since the hours are good and the job responsibilities match her qualifications and interests, and hopes one day to have a full-time position with benefits.

Rachel’s supervisor describes her as sincere, conscientious, and, although she admits this was initially a concern, very reliable. She repeatedly stressed how Rachel appreciates the opportunity and the positive support, and works with her in a professional way when she needs time off. Rachel wants to do things the right way and is secure in her job. “She is a success story.”



