

# 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

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## Success Stories

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**Sandy**

Sandy is a 61 year old woman who sustained a traumatic brain injury approximately 14 years ago. She is a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) and received her Associates in Science from J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College. Sandy is very knowledgeable and skilled in working with a variety of disabilities and diagnoses. She has excellent interpersonal skills, customer service skills and very empathetic. In addition to her passion for working with individuals, Sandy has a love for art and turned a hobby into a small business with a partner producing leather art pieces.

Sandy has many natural supports in her life including family, friends, the Brain Injury support network, her manager and many co-workers. Some of the challenges she faces on a daily basis are short term memory loss, low self-esteem, fatigue, and medical conditions such as Rheumatoid Arthritis and cataracts.

Sandy was referred to Career Support Services for to assist her in finding a job. Some of the jobs she held in the past included a COTA Home Health and a COTA in Rehab facilities. Career Support Services assisted Sandy in obtaining a job at the Mill House working as a Unit Coordinator. When the Mill House began down sizing due to budget cuts, Sandy lost her job and returned to Career Supports to assist her in finding another job. Her job coach at Career Supports assisted her in obtaining a position for Henrico County Parks and Recreation as an Inclusion Coach. This turned out to be a summer job and so together, Sandy and her job coach continued to look for employment opportunities. Sandy obtained a part time job at Ukrops Supermarket as a cashier. The job coach provided on the job training with Sandy and after several weeks determined it was not a good job match. The noises of the scanners and all of the people were too much for Sandy to handle. The stress and noise caused her to have headaches and dizziness on the job.

Finally, Sandy obtained a position at Virginia Commonwealth University Health Systems (VCUHS) working as a COTA in Rehab. Sandy needed some assistance from her job coach in completing the on-line application but was able to set up her interview independently. The job coach attended the interview with Sandy and explained Career Supports services to the hiring manager. The job coach also advocated for the necessary accom-

modations and strategies that Sandy would need to use in order for her employment to be successful. Sandy needed assistance in evaluating the expectations of the job and determining whether it was a good fit for her.

Sandy was hired in September 2001 as a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in General Rehab at VCUHS. Her starting pay was approximately \$15.00 per hour. Currently, her wages are \$30 per hour. Her duties include: providing dressing program treatment, lead and assist with group treatment, and provide 1:1 therapy with patients. She is responsible for writing daily progress notes and completing weekly billing summary and charge reports. Sandy's accommodations include allowing a job coach on site to assist Sandy in her initial training; extra breaks if needed and a "cheat sheet" to track all information that she needs to refer to daily. The job coach developed a form to prompt her of the patients to see that day, the treatment to receive, patient precautions, patient room number, a place for notes, how much time she spent with that patient, and boxes to check off when she completes the file note and charges. She also is allowed a little extra time in the morning to complete a form that assists her in organizing her day. Since she has begun using this form, many of the other therapists have begun using the same format to help organize their work day.

Sandy loves her job and the support she receives from Career Supports. She states "My experience with Supported Employment and Job Coaches has been excellent. My current job coach developed a form, which enables me to perform my Occupational Therapy duties as well as completing the required paperwork for each patient. With both the specialized form and monthly check-ins I have been able to perform my job at VCUHS with excellent results. This October marks my six year anniversary."

Sandy's employer has written the following comments. "I have been impressed by Sandy from the moment I met her – and impressed by the entire job coaching program from that first moment as well. Sandy approached the job interview like any other candidate. I was surprised to discover that she had a job coach but have been grateful to Stephanie for all the work she has done to make Sandy's work with us so successful. From the beginning, Stephanie has helped Sandy learn and integrate skills. She has worked with Sandy on the development of compensatory strategies, which Sandy, in turn, has employed well to help her do her job successfully. Stephanie also has provided Sandy with encouragement and support. Sandy sometimes doubts herself and can be self-deprecating. Stephanie consistently points out to Sandy what she does well and encourages her to be proud of the work she is doing. Stephanie and Sandy have a very positive and supportive relationship. Sandy is quite at ease talking through things with Stephanie. Stephanie is open and direct with Sandy. What a great relationship!! Sandy does a wonderful job with patients and is beloved by her co-workers. She is thorough, responsible, professional and studious. Things in health care work are constantly changing. Changes in routines and procedures are not a favorite of Sandy's. However, Stephanie has seen Sandy successfully through each one. The experience with Sandy and Stephanie has been wonderful for me – and for our staff and our patients – in every regard. I don't know if job coaching is always this successful, but based on my experience with Stephanie and Sandy, I am totally impressed."

