

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

Edited by: Howard Green and Jennifer McDonough

Success Stories

May, 2008



Sara

"Sara" was born in Afghanistan and is 36 years old. She resided in Pakistan for 12 years as a refugee. Her native language is Dhari and she is familiar with Urdu and Farsi languages. Sara completed school through the 8th grade. She speaks very little English and has no functional reading or writing skills in English which presented some challenges when assisting her with her job search and communication on the job. Sara may have had polio as a child and has sustained additional trauma to her leg. When she was in Afghanistan she was struck by mortar. She was diagnosed in 2002 with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The injury to her leg makes it difficult for her to walk long distances, climb stairs with ease or stand for a full shift. She has some difficulty lifting heavy items due to issues of balance.

Sara's employment goal was to be a full time Housekeeper at the University of Virginia. She has numerous friends and family employed at UVA. When she was referred to Career Support Services, she had been employed for four years as a Sewing Machine Operator at the Virginia Industries for the Blind in Charlottesville. Sara demonstrated a strong work ethic and her supports consist of some cousins living in the area. In addition, she is connected to the Afghan community in Charlottesville. Sara has also utilized services and supports from the International Rescue Committee.

Sara participated in several Situational Assessments which assisted her Employment Consultant in assessing her skills and abilities. She worked one day at a church performing housekeeping duties. The Employment Consultant determined she had great difficulty with climbing stairs and standing while vacuuming for long periods. Sara was thorough in all cleaning tasks and used her time well. The second assessment was at a Custom Sewing shop and she worked about 4 hours. Sara followed directions and was able to perform more detailed sewing tasks than what was required of her at her last sewing position. She was offered a part time position with possibility of full time and benefits. Sara declined since she desired and needed a full time position with benefits.

The Employment Consultant assisted her in obtaining an interview at UVA. They were concerned with her physical abilities and requested another Situational Assessment for 40 hours over a one week period. Sara worked a full week at Goodwill processing

clothes. At times she was allowed to sit for short periods to perform the required tasks. Her stamina was good and she showed good judgment on garment condition standards. She was offered a position with this employer if her goal to become a housekeeper was not viable. Based on the assessment outcome, Sara was offered a position and began training at UVA January 2007.

Sara works full-time in the Hospital Environmental Services for \$7.75/hour. She receives Health and Dental benefits as well as vacation and sick leave. She is responsible for cleaning offices and outpatient clinic rooms. Sara is allowed extra breaks as needed. The Employment Consultant assists with facilitating communication with Sara and her employer. Sara also receives professional interpreters' services for training on safety and infection control procedures. UVA developed Sara's assignment to match her strengths with the needs of the outpatient and office facility.

Sara is very appreciative for the advocacy in the application and transition period. She continues to benefit from Follow Along services from Career Supports when issues concerning payroll, benefits, or workplace expectations arise. Sara has expressed satisfaction with her current position as meeting her long term employment goal. She has been able to save money while paying back her immigration expenses and living independently. During her recent citizenship interview, Sara explained to immigration staff that the opportunity for women to make a living outside the home and to live independently is the primary reason she has wanted to live in the United States.

Sara's employer states the customers in Sara's assigned area speak with great affection and appreciation for Sara's thoroughness with cleaning, her thoughtfulness in working around the office staff needs, and her pleasant and even-tempered manner. Her direct supervisor consistently voiced her appreciation for timely intervention to maintain Sara's performance and co-worker relations. Specifically, Sara came to this position without any experience with a "teamwork" approach to work, which initially caused significant discord between Sara, supervisors, and co-workers. The Employment Consultant was able to take the additional time needed to identify the "ethic" that was limiting Sara from operating as a team player. Sara was afraid to leave her assigned area as she believed this would be seen as abandoning her job. Once this problem was identified, discussed and resolved, Sara was able to understand her role as a member of a team and the expectations for behavior. Sara is now esteemed as a consistently reliable and positive team member.

