



# Customized Employment: Stories and Lessons from the Field



Cary Griffin and Sherry Beamer  
Editors



## INTRODUCTION

Customized Employment (CE) represents a nuanced departure from traditional competitive and comparative approaches to developing work. True CE is hard to come by actually. This collection of examples is offered to point out the sometimes less obvious nuanced methods vital to customization. These stories represent a broad array of situations from basic to very complex, but represent accessible examples relatable to by most practitioners in the field of community employment. GHA provides these case examples thanks to the hard, brilliant work of our many partners across the United States and Canada. The dedication of families, employment seekers, front-line staff, community rehabilitation program managers, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Workforce personnel, and business owners made each of these examples, and many more, possible.

Each short write-up is designed to tell a quick, concrete story, and to point out specific elements that helped make the person successful in their chosen work. Each is a point-in-time lesson, and certainly not representative of all the hard work that went into the achievements. Some of the individuals profiled have moved on to new work or training opportunities. Some chose to stay in the job they enjoy. Others are moving up the career ladder. *Note that many of the folks represented here were at one time considered “unemployable” due to the multiple barriers to work they face.* These examples tell only a portion of the story.

Any substantive review of the CE process requires us to continuously ask the basic question: *What’s customized about this?* Any credible response has to include some use of the basic methodology of Discovery, mutually beneficial Negotiation, job restructuring, circumvention of traditional hiring approaches, leveraging social and economic capital of stakeholders, et al. Critical to this collection is the understanding that the promise of CE is the creation of a career trajectory. And while “Career Trajectory” sounds anything but nuanced, it is in that critical employer/employee negotiation where the stage is set, often subtly, that is so vital to lasting growth and success. As the Federal definition notes: *Customized employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time . . . one employer at a time.*

Creating a highly individualized job, one that presents a growth path, requires the expectation be set from the beginning. The Employment Specialist might simply add to the negotiation: *“Once Jennifer is stable in her work, we’d like to assist, as needed, in helping you add new tasks to her job so she can grow into her career in the same way other employees grow.”* It really is that simple, but often that one little expectation is omitted or overlooked and the individual beginning work at entry level languishes there because there is no expectation from the employer, the supporting agency, the worker, or the family, for professional growth. This is a problem GHA recognized early on, but due to tight funding for extended supports, the press of time to close one job and move to the next person waiting for services, and the simple belief that once someone is working the rehabilitation process is complete, all conspire to hobble career growth.

Another lesson from these examples is that using CE methods, especially Discovering Personal Genius™ (Discovery) or DPG, leads to much better, faster, and longer lasting employment because job match is more precise. Still, about half of all jobs GHA works on with its community partners are not truly customized. They often reflect the traditional job description and duties. But, the process of getting the job is almost always customized, resulting in better overall outcomes. Proper CE almost demands that the application and interviewing process is circumvented through the use of Vocational Themes™ to identify likely companies, the use of Informational Interviewing to put employers and employees together on common ground, and the development of digital Resumes and career profiles hones the job development approach. So whether the job is restructured or not, use of CE methods augments the employment development process.

This collection of examples is short and to the point. The lessons, while not always explicitly detailed, exist throughout. Please use this publication for staff in-service training, for family education, to bolster employment seekers’ outlook, and to augment examples of successful companies that modified their hiring approaches ever so slightly to accommodate new workers. And always be asking: *What’s customized about this?*

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# First Competitive Community Job

## The Challenge

Albert has a 25 year work history at the SRVS workshop in Tennessee. He was the in-house custodian, and also worked a variety of the production lines making less than minimum wage. Albert joined a pilot group to leave the workshop for community employment. The workshop closed as part of Tennessee's Employment First efforts. SRVS staff used the customized employment process to develop Albert's first competitive job. Albert's key Ideal Condition of Employment is working where he can have some consistency and take time to get accustomed to surroundings and co-workers. He is uncomfortable around a lot of people. Albert is on the autism spectrum, and does not communicate much at first in new situations with strangers.

Albert participated in an Informational Interview with a janitorial contracting company that services large department stores after hours. An after-hours shift matched Albert's ideal condition of a flexible work space without a lot of people. During the interview Albert performed a work duty demonstration by mopping floors that led the company management to consider him for employment. Albert, with support from SRVS staff, fulfilled the company requirement to apply for a job which required waiting in line for two hours to complete an

application. He was then selected for employment from the large group of candidates. Management worked with Albert and SRVS to negotiate the job in a way that worked for the company and for Albert's Ideal Conditions. The typical job description required multitasking throughout the assigned store completing floor maintenance, vacuuming, window cleaning, trash disposal and dressing room maintenance. Albert was instead assigned to a specific area with specific tasks. He worked the second floor in the Perfume and Cosmetics Department where he dust and spot mopped the area. He was also responsible for cleaning all mops and

buckets, vacuum cleaners, and brooms used by the crew as his final shift task.

The typical work schedule is five consistent days with two days off. To fulfill his negotiated work role and to have a consistent schedule by his request, Albert was scheduled to work Monday - Saturday with Sunday off.

The transition out of the workshop was much more successful than anticipated due to the customized techniques.

Albert joined a pilot group to leave the workshop for community employment.

Albert's ideal conditions for employment have changed as he learned to communicate more with others while on the janitorial job.



Albert worked the job for over 2 1/2 years, performing well and earning minimum wage. His typical work schedule was 6:30-10a Monday-Saturday. Albert often worked Sunday or earlier shifts sometimes starting at 4am. He independently used paratransit services to work. Albert works quickly, and needs periodic quality assurance checks to assure he meets the required level of cleaning detail. SRVS staff provided job coaching assisting Albert to clean to the company's standards, trust his co-workers so he would accept their quality feedback on the job, and to problem solve for periodic late transportation. The transition from a Monday-Friday 9a-3p workshop schedule to a varying Monday to Saturday 6:30-10a work schedule did not cause any life disruptions for Albert, though it was an adjustment for his brother with whom he lives.

The janitorial company recently lost the renewal bid to maintain the department store contract, and there was not a location for Albert to be assigned. Albert and his staff are following the customized employment process again to find his next job, updated by his latest work experience. His ideal conditions for employment are now adjusted as Albert became more communicative while on the janitorial job.



Louis, Albert's key employment staff, reflects on the workshop closure and using customized techniques to develop employment. The transition from the workshop was emotionally challenging for a lot of the workers and staff. Louis found employment development less challenging after learning and using the customized approach as compared to the traditional job development techniques he had used. The person centered, detail oriented approach assisted staff to match worker skills to job site surveys SRVS staff conducted of multiple businesses. The transition out of the workshop was much more successful than anticipated due to the customized techniques.

*Albert lives in Tennessee*

# Welding Apprentice

Brayden attends a post-graduation life skills transition program for adult students with disabilities age 18-22 in the Alpine School District in suburban Salt Lake City, Utah. The Alpine School District is a participant in the Utah State Employment First Initiative with technical assistance provided by Griffin Hammis Associates. The school staff were often joined in practicing customized employment techniques by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, staff from the local adult service provider UWORK, and representatives from the State of Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities. The team worked collaboratively to create new policies and practices for seamless support and fluid customized employment processes to assure students are employed in jobs that continue after they complete educational programs. For example, teachers started making home visits as part of the Discovery process, and an adult service provider was assigned to students by the Office of Rehabilitation early in their educational program.

Brayden started a customized employment process with his enthusiastic Transition Teachers, Cassie and Suzanne. They used the Discovery process to establish Brayden's themes. Brayden is a strong, quiet, organized young man. He works best with his hands, and likes welding. He often works with his father on home welding projects. Brayden tried a few jobs in high school that included welding. One of Brayden's dominant themes is construction. He worked with his teachers to create a visual portfolio as this was a more direct way for Brayden to showcase his skills than to verbally describe his work experience. Brayden's team started Informational Interviews to gather more information about his Vocational Themes and to learn more about local employment in welding.



Brayden and a finished staircase project

The use of multiple resources and supports bring job seekers the most opportunity.

Vocational Rehabilitation is a vital partner in creating employment opportunities, collaboratively blending funding with other systems.

Brayden worked with his teachers to create a visual portfolio and resume as this was a more direct way for Brayden to showcase his skills than to verbally describe his work experience.



The team arranged visits to welding and manufacturing companies close to Brayden's home. Larger businesses required welding employees to be certified. Brayden is not a certified welder. He wasn't able to meet the speed and quality requirements to complete a certificated welding class at the local technical school, and his request for accommodations was not approved. Instead of advocating for accommodations, "warmer" calls eventually led to a small welding shop. With the full Employment First team in attendance, Brayden participated in a short Informational Interview without saying much. As the group was leaving, the business owner surprised Brayden by asking if he would like to learn welding with him. This led to an hour discussion that resulted in the Vocational Counselor making a commitment on the spot to fund an On-the-Job Training (OTJ) arrangement that compensated both the business and Brayden. A meeting to gather information unexpectedly turned into an opportunity more quickly than anticipated, and the team was ready to take advantage.



Brayden started working at the welding shop the following week as a paid trainee. Typical OTJ arrangements are set for 3-6 months. Brayden's training program was extended by his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor beyond this period to allow him more time to learn welding. The school district provided transportation for Brayden to and from the welding business. Brayden worked on projects like playground equipment and staircases.

The owner's business closed shortly after the OTJ period due to unforeseen personal issues, but he still welds as an independent contractor. He includes Brayden on periodic jobs. Brayden is now pursuing other work with his hands. He is on track to finish the transition program working at least six hours a week with support from UWORK as he pursues his employment career and interests. Brayden's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will keep his case open until he is stabilized in a job.

*Brayden lives in Lehi, Utah*

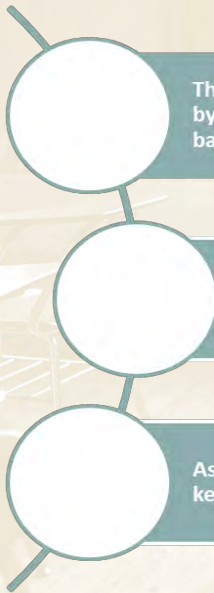
# A Natural Teacher



## The Challenge

Chelsea is a smart, caring young woman. She has a rare chromosomal disorder that causes some health and intellectual concerns. Chelsea's past work experience includes washing hair in a beauty salon, and racking clothes and cashiering in a retail store. Chelsea obtained these jobs with the help of her family to gain work experience. Then Chelsea received job development and initial job coaching from Covenant Services, LLC through Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) for a position in a day care facility. This job ended without having long term supports available.

Chelsea is now on a waiting list for long term employment supports through the State Departmental Disabilities system. When Chelsea is unemployed, she keeps busy at home accessing technology on her smart phone and laptop. Chelsea is an active social media user, always up to date on the latest technology. Chelsea initiated a volunteer job in the kindergarten class at the neighborhood elementary school she attended. This led to a job in the school office a few hours weekly making copies. Often there was no work available even after Chelsea visited all the classrooms offering her assistance. Recently Chelsea started to job seek again with Covenant's support. Then the State made some long term supports available to Chelsea, and through the Utah Employment First Initiative grant she and Covenant staff embarked on a customized employment process.



The elementary school better assisted students to make academic progress by adding Chelsea as a resource with her natural teaching talents and I-pad based program.

By providing Chelsea the option of owning the I-pads as an exploitable resource, she was able to provide a valued solution for her employer and create an opportunity for good income.

As Chelsea starts her third year, she is updating the Ipad applications to keep the service fresh.



## Chelsea's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

Chelsea and the Covenant staff completed a thorough customized employment Discovery process. Chelsea's dominant Vocational Themes included Children and Technology. As the job prospecting process began, Chelsea wanted to maintain her contact with the elementary school where she was working. So she and the Covenant staff conducted an Informational Interview with the Principal. They learned the school could benefit from a classroom pull-out resource for children who were not keeping pace with grade level learning. The idea of an Ipad based pull-out instruction service was born by melding Chelsea's Themes with the employer's needs. The Principal agreed to a short pilot of a weekly pull-out session. With Covenant's support Chelsea accessed a Resource Ownership grant from Griffin-Hammis Associates, funded by the Utah State Employment First Initiative (Division of Services to People with Disabilities) to purchase five Ipads and educational software applications.

### The Results

The pilot was successful, and for two years Chelsea has been providing pull-out sessions with groups of kindergarten students. With Covenant's support Chelsea plans with the teachers each school year, taking their suggestions for preferred educational applications and coordinating her program with their lesson plans. Chelsea offers focused practice to the students in letter, sound and sight word recognition. She is paid \$2.25 more an hour than the minimum wage. Chelsea works one to two days a week during the school year, adjusting her schedule as needed when unexpected health issues occur.

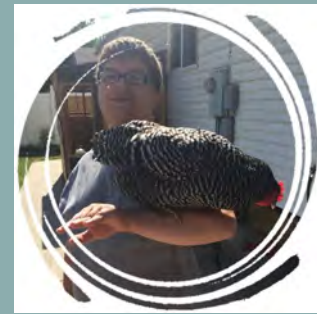
As Chelsea starts her third year, she is updating the Ipad applications to keep the service fresh. Chelsea plans to work with Covenant staff to market her service to other schools. A local television station ran a story about Chelsea's work in which she remarked the instructional service she provides is "the perfect fit" for her.



*Chelsea lives in Salt Lake City, Utah*



# A Passion for Poultry



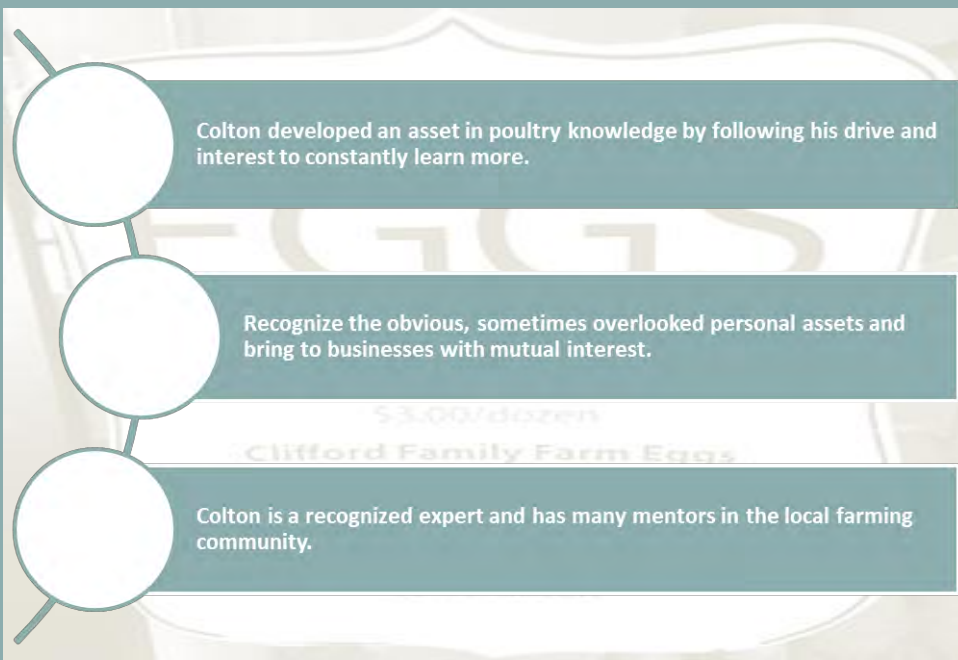
## The Challenge

Colton is an articulate, witty, engaging, intelligent young man. He also is a person with autism. Colton started reading about chickens at age twelve and his interest has continued to develop. He is a devoted researcher of chickens, constantly adding to his knowledge of breeds and maladies. His love of animals created challenges in some earlier living arrangements. Shocked staff once discovered he was caring for several dozen snakes in his closet and drawers. This led to many trials over the years in getting the supports that work best for Colton, causing great frustration which he was quite vocal about. Colton found a good fit with CTA Community Supports in Utah. Staff made arrangements in the group home where Colton lives for him to care for his pets, build his chicken flock responsibly, and to continue as an enthusiastic gardener.

## Colton's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

CTA has a history of embracing individual special interests. The customized employment Discovery process was a natural fit, providing staff a systematic method to more quickly get people employed and open up possibilities that hadn't been imagined before. Colton's dominant Vocational Themes included Animals and Agriculture. This was evidenced by the skills he showed in caring for various pets, especially chickens, and his enthusiasm and knowledge of gardening tasks. All this informed the job development process.

Informational Interviews started at Urban Farm and Feed in Sandy, Utah that led up the supply chain to a nearby organic egg farm. Colton "outchickened" everyone he met, his deep knowledge and passion an immediately recognizable asset.



*Colton lives in greater Salt Lake City, Utah*



### The Results

For the past year Colton has been working at Urban Farm and Feed 1-4 hours a day, 4 days a week making 75 cents more than the minimum wage. His main responsibility is to care for seventy chickens, including feeding and watering, cleaning boxes, fixing cages, and collecting eggs. He also harvests vegetables like beans and tomatoes. At the popular Saturday breakfasts Colton clears the tables and washes the dishes, and shares his poultry knowledge with customers. Colton will soon finish his post-graduation school transition program that's focused on gainful employment. He receives academic credit for his work hours by turning in his paystubs. Some weeks he attends the program only one day due to this work schedule.

Colton is a recognized expert and has many mentors in the local farming community. The owner of Urban Farm and Feed recently introduced him to staff at an urban farming initiative. There is a good possibility Colton will get a plot of land through the initiative. Having the resource of land will support his idea to open a duckling and gosling hatchery. Colton is saving most of his income to purchase a \$1000 incubator. The incubator will allow him to practice hatching eggs for his business idea. When asked how life is going for him now, he re-

"I am happy  
because my  
dream

Is no longer a  
hobby."

# A Second Career in Retirement

Dan had a 31 year career as a federal employee after graduating from Galludet University with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. Galludet, based in Washington DC, is known as the world's only university designed to be barrier-free for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Dan worked at the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Maryland as an Inventory Control and Procurement Clerk. His duties were to maintain accurate shipment documentation, process orders, and operate forklifts. Dan received multiple awards for exemplary and accident free performance. Dan and his wife retired ten years ago then relocated to Jacksonville, Florida to live closer to family.

After settling in Florida, Dan wanted to continue working. He had a difficult time finding work. For a few years he worked with the Area Hospitals Network educating staff about the Americans with Disabilities Act and coordinating sign language interpreters. Later he took a job as a custodian with a social service agency because he could not find work that fit his background and experience. After a few years of frustration working the custodial job, he registered with the Department of Rehabilitation for job placement assistance and was referred to Progressive Abilities Support Services (PASS).



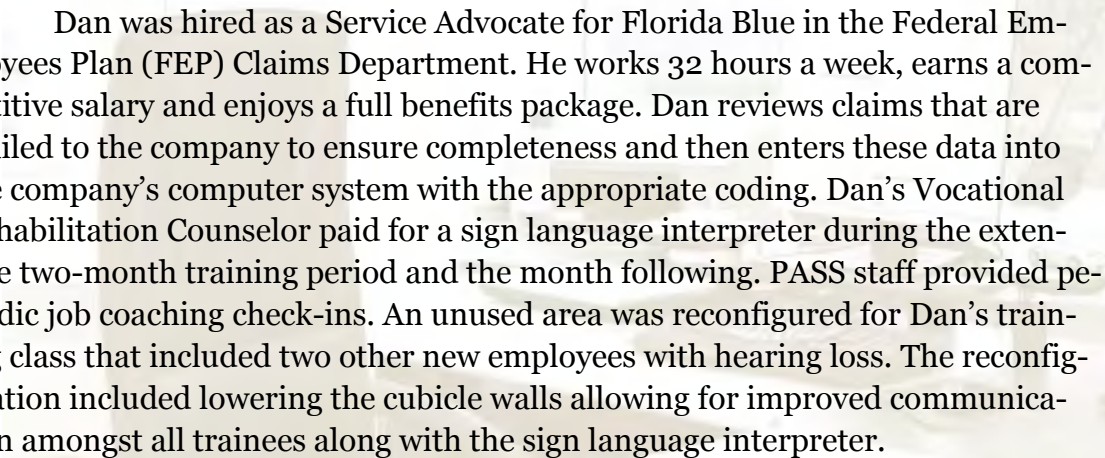



Dan worked with John, the PASS Supported Employment Manager in Jacksonville. Dan's goal was to seek a career that provided for longer term employment. John used an adaptive form of the Discovery process, due to Dan's solid, long-term career history, collecting in-depth interest information through multiple personal and informational interviews. In reviewing Dan's past work experiences and transferable skills, mid-level clerical work was a thematic path that was followed. The process led Dan and John to pursue data entry positions. John grew up in Jacksonville, with a ten year background in real estate sales along with three years tutoring students with disabilities. John has many positive relationships and connections with local business owners and community leaders. John contacted one of his connections, an executive at Florida Blue, a Guidewell Company that offers health solutions through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. John introduced Dan, and they learned the company was initiating a new process to recruit and hire workers with disabilities.


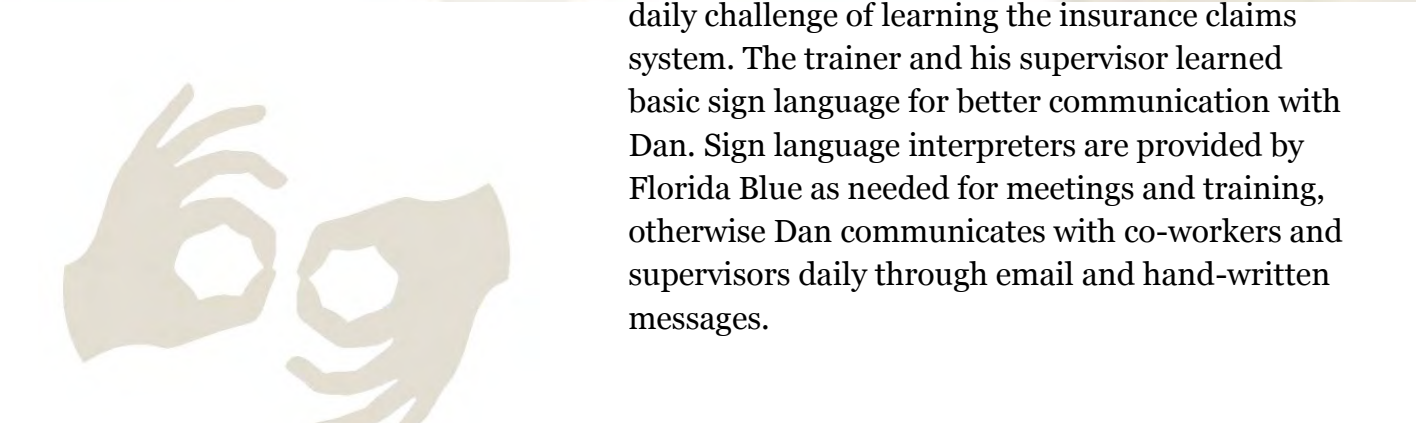


*Dan highlighted in the  
Florida Blue employee  
newsletter*


Florida Blue is an active lead member of the First Coast Business Leadership Network and a partner in the national organization. The United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN) is a national nonprofit that helps businesses drive performance by leveraging disability inclusion in the workplace. Florida Blue's point of view is that the community is full of capable people with disabilities who can perform job functions as offered, and assures their workplace is accessible to people with disabilities. The company employs an accessibility consultant to make accommodations when needed. As a federal contractor, the company is vigilant about complying with civil rights laws against discrimination. Florida Blue was one of the first companies in the country to complete the USBLN's Disability Equality Index, and yearly continues earning the top score and receiving the designation of one of the Best Places to Work for people with disabilities. The Index is an annual benchmarking tool that offers businesses an opportunity to receive an objective score on their disability inclusion policies and practices.




Dan was hired as a Service Advocate for Florida Blue in the Federal Employees Plan (FEP) Claims Department. He works 32 hours a week, earns a competitive salary and enjoys a full benefits package. Dan reviews claims that are mailed to the company to ensure completeness and then enters these data into the company's computer system with the appropriate coding. Dan's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor paid for a sign language interpreter during the extensive two-month training period and the month following. PASS staff provided periodic job coaching check-ins. An unused area was reconfigured for Dan's training class that included two other new employees with hearing loss. The reconfiguration included lowering the cubicle walls allowing for improved communication amongst all trainees along with the sign language interpreter.



Dan is doing well on the job, and enjoys the daily challenge of learning the insurance claims system. The trainer and his supervisor learned basic sign language for better communication with Dan. Sign language interpreters are provided by Florida Blue as needed for meetings and training, otherwise Dan communicates with co-workers and supervisors daily through email and hand-written messages.



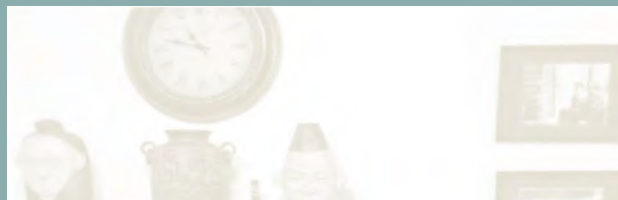
In reflecting on his new job Dan says that PASS helped him find a job that was the perfect fit for him with work he wanted to accomplish. He remarked that people who are deaf and hearing impaired can work like any other employee.



# Mark Making

## The Challenge

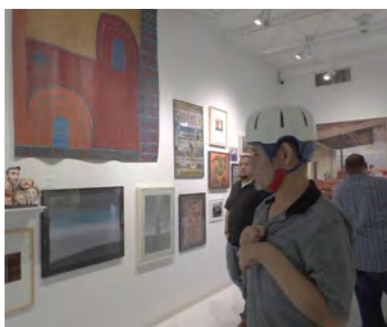
Mark making is a term that describes the lines, patterns and textures that create a piece of art. Felix learned he likes to make his mark with color. He shows how much he likes something by grinning or excitedly clapping his hands, and turning away to show disinterest as he does not use words to communicate. Felix contracted a high fever when he was very young which caused brain damage resulting in significant disabilities, including sensory processing challenges and uncontrolled seizures which require him to wear a protective helmet. Felix has received care for living and day supports for many years. His aging parents are still partners in his care from a distance. Felix was known to staff to have a fifteen minute attention span. It was a challenge for staff to identify his interests to provide him with meaningful experiences with these sensory challenges. Staff set up a paper shredding activity with him as an interest exploration. It took two years for him to accept a piece of paper to shred, then ten minutes to shred one piece.



The team of service staff guides the process of creating a genuine small business.

Business success stems from the love of one's labors, then discovering the customers for the product.

... Then one of Felix's residential support staff noted that he seems to like color.





### Felix's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

The Discovery process began with Felix's team, including his day and living support staff, State community inclusion coordinator and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor. At first there were many hours of discussion of what staff learned over the years about what Felix did not like. Then one of Felix's residential support staff noted that he seems to like color. He stated Felix likes to look at colorful objects when on community activities. This information led the Discovery activities. A Discovery activity was scheduled for the local museum of modern art. Felix spent two hours looking at paintings on the initial visit. Staff remarked they had never seen him so engaged. So a community was built around Felix by connecting him to a local artist and nonprofit art collective. An informational interview was held with the artist. She became Felix's mentor and he started taking art lessons, learning and experimenting with paints, colors, brushes, tools and techniques. Felix's mentor is a self-taught artist, who worked for many years determinedly honing her craft until she perfected her skills to make an income. She brings this unwavering approach to providing instruction for Felix that is provided untraditionally through experimentation with sense and experience activities that does not require the use of many words. He is learning which colors and tools make art that satisfies him. Felix creates energetic abstract paintings that are con-

### The Result

Felix's team worked on a plan for a business within a business named Color Conspiracy. Felix's business concept is to transfer his art creations onto items like note cards, pillows, and coasters he will eventually sell in his own space in the art collective, then in other businesses. Vocational Rehabilitation is in the process of pursuing approval for a sublimation machine and supplies to heat press his images onto products. The team negotiated a work space, where the machine will be placed, in a local print shop owned by a local council person. Felix continues to build his body of work to have enough designs for production. His connection to the collective provides him the potential opportunity to collaborate with other artists on the final products as needed. The plan is for Felix to hold an art show at the collective after his products are produced to introduce his work in a manner that is comfortable for him.

Felix's process has taken over a year to set up. Along the way there were unforeseen challenges, like his VR Counselor passed away suddenly and his key day support staff relocated. But new staff are in place, and the process continues. Felix's art mentor commented that everyone has a mark to make and enjoy for themselves. It is brave for anyone to put their mark out for others to enjoy, like Felix is doing.



*Felix lives in Roswell, New Mexico*

# Bee Keeper



## The Challenge

Staying calm usually keeps bees from stinging the keeper. When humans are afraid, pheromones are released that bees can detect making it more likely they will sting. Jimmy is amazingly calm around bees, and has been interested in insects and animals most of his life. Jimmy is also very social. His mother Cindy often refers to him as “Mr. Mayor.” When Jimmy was close to completing a post-graduation transition program at age 22, his parents attended a conference to brainstorm work options with him. Jimmy was diagnosed with a developmental delay at an early age. As he developed so did more challenges, such as depression, a speech delay, and sensory integration concerns. It was obvious to Jimmy’s parents he was not a candidate for a typical sheltered workshop option where he would need to sit and focus on production tasks. The conference led to a three year job, with support from employment provider Community Integrated Services (CIS), at Temple University in the cafeteria. The job was better than sheltered work, but was not the best fit for Jimmy. Jimmy was more interested in socializing with students and found the work boring. He talked about insects a lot. CIS staff could not fade from providing supported employment services as Jimmy needed ongoing prompts to stay focused on his job. So, working with Griffin-Hammis Associates, CIS staff initiated a Customized Employment approach to explore Jimmy’s interests and find a better job.

Good working relationships and active partnerships between provider organizations and families are key to uncovering capacity and opportunity in the community.

Focusing intently on one person at a time allows the concentration of efforts and resources that are otherwise thinly spread and do less good for the masses of people with disabilities receiving long-term rehabilitation services.

Jimmy is becoming a bee resource for friends and neighbors.





## Jimmy's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

CIS staff assisted Jimmy in getting a PASS (Plan for Achieving Self Support) Plan approved by the Social Security Administration to complete the Discovery process. At the start of the process, Jimmy's interest in insects was explored but no viable opportunities were recognized. The staff continued the Discovery process faithfully. This led to a work trial at an urban bee apiary on a building rooftop. Jimmy exhibited his skills and knowledge in bee keeping immediately. He knew the inner working of the hives. Without staff support he could remove the hive frames without distressing the bees. Beekeeping turned out to be Jimmy's path. CIS staff assisted Jimmy in writing a basic business plan and he received an equipment start-up grant through the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council.

### The Results

In Year 1 Jimmy learned the bee keeping business.

In Year 2 he restarted most of his hives, and lost some during the winter.

In Year 3 Jimmy met the owner of a local bee company, Don, through a friend.

In Year 4, Jimmy experimented with Chris rendering his bee's wax for proprietary lip balm, furniture polish and food-grade wood conditioner ; he sells through established networks and a local farmer's market.

As Jimmy heads into year 5, he has learned a lot about what he loves and does not like about the bee business.

Jimmy is in his fourth year as a bee keeper with support from CIS staff Chris. In Year 1 Jimmy learned the bee keeping business. He purchased the necessary equipment to start colonizing bees, including hives, frames, treatment products and a protective suit. He set up his hives in a community garden and an educational farm. Jimmy also joined the Philadelphia Bee Guild, where many others share his "Insects" Vocational Theme. He lost many of his colonies due to a bacterial disease, mites and other viral maladies and had to burn most of the hive boxes. In Year 2 he restarted most of his hives, and lost some during the winter. But, he still had a good light honey harvest of 35 pounds. Jimmy sells his honey quickly through his informal network of family and friends. A local restaurant featured his honey in their recipes. In Year 3 Jimmy met the owner of a local bee company, Don, through a friend. Don's company manages many apiaries throughout Philadelphia, specializes in honeybee education, and removes colonies from houses and other structures that are re-hived into apiaries. Don is a leader in urban bee revitalization. He is a great resource and natural partner to Jimmy. Don was looking to start an apiary in a part of the city he



A nonprofit organization revitalizing a cemetery contacted Don with an interest in establishing bee hives. Jimmy and Chris were in discussion with Don for a hive management site opportunity, and the cemetery became the location. Jimmy accepted Don's invitation to assist in managing 10 cemetery hives, while looking after 10 hives of his own. In Year 4, Jimmy experimented with Chris rendering his bee's wax for proprietary lip balm, furniture polish and food-grade wood conditioner that he sells through established networks and a local farmer's market. Jimmy is expecting a much greater honey harvest this year. He is also exploring how to create a reliable inventory of wax products to sell. This adds profit and social inclusion to Jimmy's active life.

As Jimmy heads into year 5, he has learned a lot about what he loves and does not like about the bee business. He makes income from his honey and product sales, but less than his wage employment job. He loves maintaining the hives and completing routine inspections so honey is made, but does not prefer building hive frames and making and selling products. Jimmy may explore wage employment in the bee business next. As with many young people, he is exploring a circuitous route to an individualized career of choice.

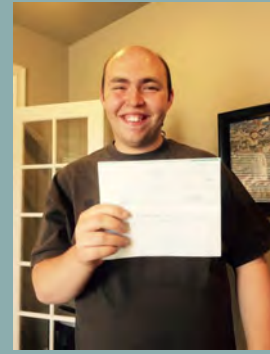


*Jimmy at work.*

Jimmy is very proud about his bee keeping accomplishments. He is becoming a bee resource for friends and neighbors. Cindy is amazed that even though Jimmy can't read or write well, he can comprehend how to care for bees. She reports CIS staff have gone above and beyond in their work with Jimmy to build his bee business.

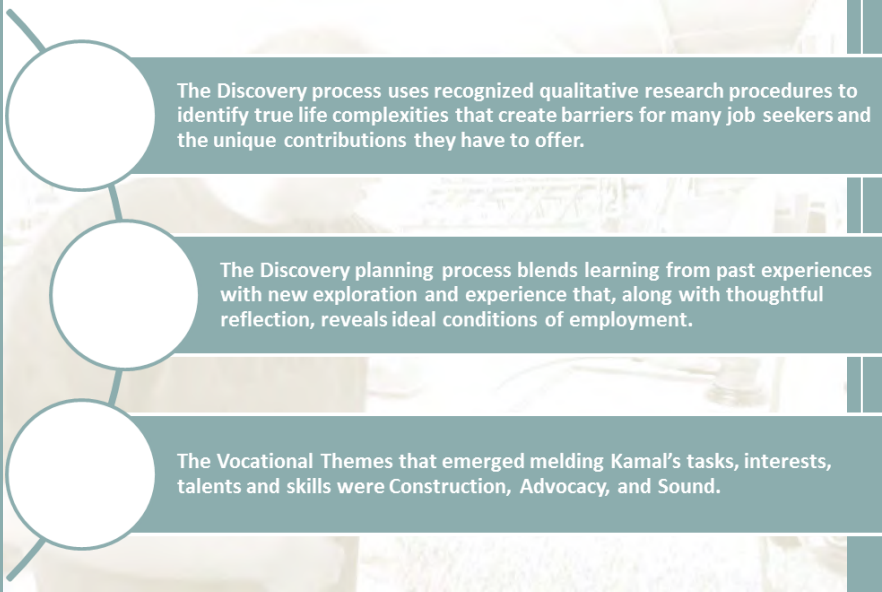
*Jimmy lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

# First Job in Carpentry



## The Challenge

Kamal has a lot of energy and a full schedule of activities. He likes to stay in motion helping others and staying healthy. He did not develop language by developmental milestones after the age of two years and, at age four, was diagnosed with autism. Beginning at two years of age, Kamal participated in various therapies (physical, occupational, speech and discrete trial training) to build his expressive and receptive communication skills and to learn job-related abilities. Kamal verbally expresses his dislikes when he is uncomfortable in certain situations or when requested to do certain tasks. He has a great interest in checking doors for squeaks and creaks; oiling the hinges so doors open and close without a sound. He often carries a can of WD-40 at the ready to “fix” doors. Kamal has a collection of handheld recording devices that he uses to record sounds like squeaking doors or people laughing. His employment background includes transition job training experiences such as janitorial help at elementary schools; gardening at botanical gardens; cleaning doors, railings and gym equipment at a local gym; and sanitizing menus at a café. Kamal and his team started preparing for part-time paid employment six months before he finished a post-graduation transitional school program.



The Discovery process uses recognized qualitative research procedures to identify true life complexities that create barriers for many job seekers and the unique contributions they have to offer.

The Discovery planning process blends learning from past experiences with new exploration and experience that, along with thoughtful reflection, reveals ideal conditions of employment.

The Vocational Themes that emerged melding Kamal's tasks, interests, talents and skills were Construction, Advocacy, and Sound.

### Kamal's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

The Discovery process took place, intermittently, over a five-month period with more than ten activities and Informational Interviews with employers. The school district staff and adult employment service provider, UWORK, thoroughly completed the Discovery Staging Record (DSR) by documenting observational data from Kamal's experiences. During the initial meeting, home visit, history review and observation, it was evident that Kamal is sensitive to sounds like clocks, doors, squeaky floors, and vibrations. Some noises, like squeaks, are very disturbing to Kamal and cause him to vociferously express frustration. Initial Discovery activities were held in local gyms and hotels performing cleaning activities, while staff learned to think beyond these stereotypical options. In these environments, there were many distractions that led to frustration for Kamal, which reinforced the need to dig deeper into who Kamal really is. The Vocational Themes that emerged melding Kamal's tasks, interests, talents and skills were Construction, Advocacy, and Sound. Going where the Construction and Sound Themes made sense led the team to Cabinet shops, Carpenters, and Hardware stores. These environments were a better fit; Kamal was more interested in the work. With focused Systematic Instruction, Kamal showed great ability and interest in carpentry tasks.

### The Results

Kamal began working two afternoons a week at the cabinet shop for two hours a day at minimum wage. He begins his shift as the shop is winding down for the day so there is less noise and activity allowing him to focus on his assigned responsibilities. Kamal sands, paints, and stacks doors for transport; wipes down cabinetry; vacuums sawdust; cleans bathrooms and oils squeaky door hinges. Depending upon the production schedule, he is flexible to increase his hours if needed. The cabinet company serves nine western states including Hawaii, with their Utah office employing twenty people that work in a close knit culture. Kamal is doing well on the job, says he likes his work and enjoys the people he works with. UWORK staff provide instructional support to assist Kamal to stay on task and mediate any questions or concerns between him and the employer. They also assist Kamal in learning new tasks and help him focus at the beginning of the shift if he needs it. Once Kamal has learned the routine, he works independently. Shari, Kamal's mother, talks about how beneficial it is for him to be a valued part of the work team. Kamal loves to interact with co-workers and is included as staff in company events like summer picnics or holiday celebrations.



*Kamal lives in Lehi, Utah*



# Hobby to Business



## The Challenge

Lawrence served in the United States Air Force for twenty years, flying over 3000 hours as a crewmember in reconnaissance and combat aircraft. He left the service at age 40 as a service-disabled veteran with physical and psychological disabilities which prevented him from continuing his career as an Arabic and Albanian linguist. Though Lawrence left the service with a modest retirement pension, he wanted to continue working. Lawrence often pondered self-employment as he is a long time hobbyist woodworker and finds satisfaction in crafting items that represent meaningful moments in the careers of his friends and coworkers. He attended a "Boots to Business" class offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration to educate exiting military members on opportunities for Veteran Entrepreneurship. In the class he learned about the Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV). He applied and was selected. Griffin-Hammis Associates staff serve as faculty to the EBV which is hosted by over a dozen leading business colleges across the U.S.

## The Path to Self-Employment

Lawrence attended the EBV program through the affiliate University of Connecticut School of Business. The program included a 30-day online entrepreneurship basics course, a nine-day university residency with accomplished entrepreneurship educators, and a year of support and mentoring through the EBV Technical Assistance Program. Lawrence received education, encouragement and guidance on the realities of how to turn his hobby into a successful business. Lawrence was an enthusiastic student, and accessed all strategies, tools and resources

that fit his business idea. Key to his progression was surrounding himself with other individuals working towards self-employment and entrepreneurship, as well as mentors in the business community which helped him plot a successful path to develop his company in an effective manner.

Many people who want to start businesses already have ideas and a variety of resources to support them in their venture.

A feasible business plan that clearly shows the potential for a small business to become a stable firm provides access to business start-up funds from government agencies.

Lawrence is currently finishing renovation of his business location to increase production.

## The Result

Lawrence developed a business plan to form Reflections of Service LLC as a sole proprietorship. Business feasibility research and his initial clients educated him to the market for high end, quality personalized memorabilia products for the military, first responders and corporations. The business niche is the ability to craft items which symbolize important moments in careers such as a larger-than-life wood replica of a first responder's badge or a personalized shadow box. Key to the operation of the business are computerized woodcutting machines which allow for customization of products with a reasonable amount of labor and a minimum production time. His product line includes set and customized pieces: carved shadow and flag boxes, signs, plaques and awards. While in the EBV program and through a presentation provided by Griffin-Hammis, Lawrence learned about Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) services through the Veterans Administration. The VR&E program not only provided resources for Lawrence to begin his small business, but also mentorship and counseling tailored specifically to service-disabled veterans re-entering the workforce. After presenting a solid business plan developed during his training and mentorship in the EBV program, Lawrence is in the final stages of approval for an equipment grant so that his production capability can meet customer demand.

Lawrence is currently finishing renovation of his business location to increase production. He is also pursuing the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Certification to provide an advantage when applying for set aside and sole source contracts through the Veterans Administration and Department of Defense. Market research indicated Lawrence's unique product line makes his company very competitive for contract bids. He is currently in contract negotiations with several agencies.



*Lawrence lives in Whidbey Island,  
Washington*

*His business website is:  
[www.reflectionsofservice.com](http://www.reflectionsofservice.com)*

After a multiple year process, self-employment created gratifying work that has empowered Lawrence to re-enter society as a positive contributor after a period of discouragement, depression and anxiety for the future. Lawrence commented that a favorite quote posted in his workshop illustrates his experience: "What I make may be for someone else, but why I make it is for me."

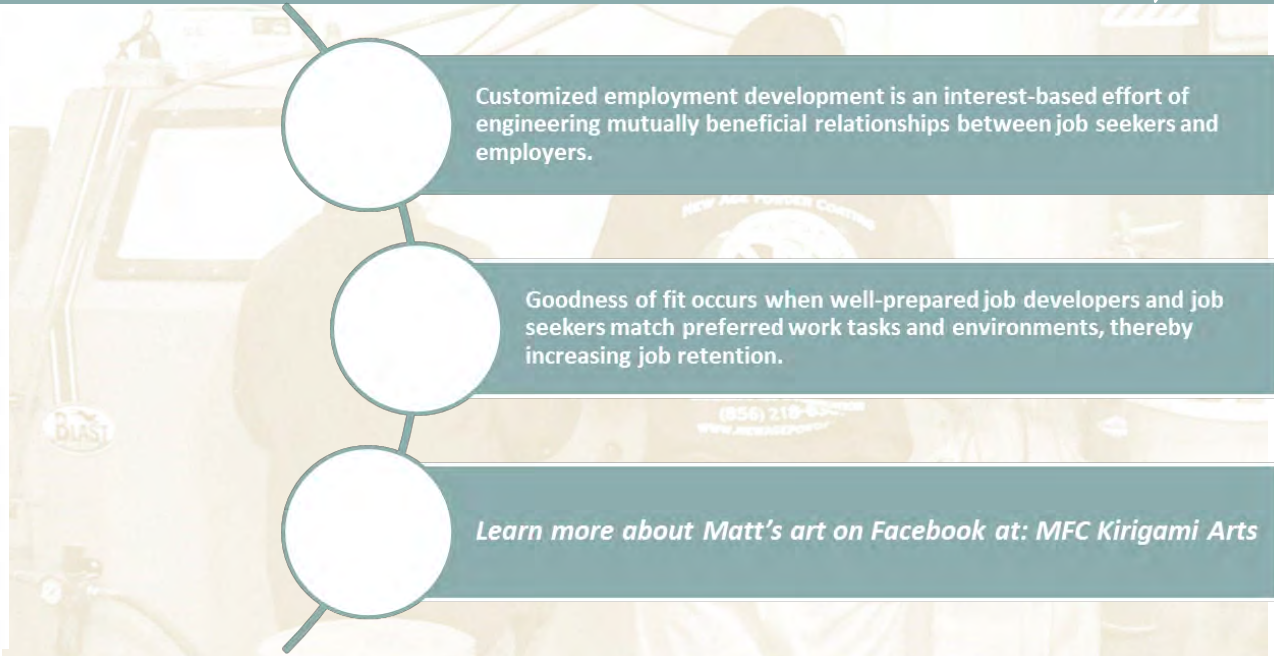


# The Value of Precision



## The Challenge

Kirigami is a variation of Japanese Origami that includes paper cutting. Matt learned kirigami through self study, starting at age 6 and has continued for 21 years. He sells custom creations framed and in jewelry at craft fairs and local retailers. He also designs and restores metal objects, like scissors for kirigami. Matt loves creating and selling kirigami, but sales were not regular enough for the steady income he needs. Matt is developmentally delayed, has Attention Deficit Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Asberger Syndrome. With this background he decided to go to the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for help finding a full time job. DVR accepted Matt as a client. His Counselor helped him find a psychiatrist with disability experience after a year-long search who assists him with medication management for depression. The DVR Counselor also referred Matt to employment services at The Arc of Camden County in New Jersey. Matt participated in traditional job development for a few months then was referred to the Arc's customized employment project. Griffin-Hammis Associates provides technical assistance for the project funded by the New Jersey State Council on Developmental Disabilities.



Customized employment development is an interest-based effort of engineering mutually beneficial relationships between job seekers and employers.

Goodness of fit occurs when well-prepared job developers and job seekers match preferred work tasks and environments, thereby increasing job retention.

*Learn more about Matt's art on Facebook at: MFC Kirigami Arts*



### Matt's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

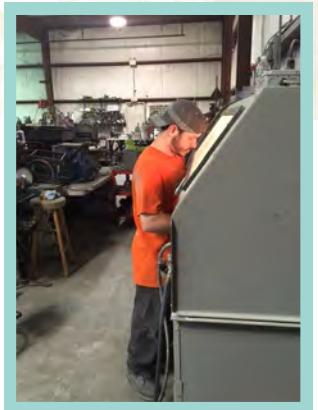
Matt worked with Brian, the Employment First Specialist, on a rigorous Discovery process. Brian learned about Matt's design skills and work with his father rehabilitating homes. Matt's skills match many industries, so he participated in formal Informational Interviews and Discovery activities in art, landscaping design, injection molding, and welding businesses. Matt articulated throughout the process which businesses and jobs were a fit for him. The Discovery path led to niche metal shops. Matt conducted an Informational Interview in a metal fabrication shop specializing in vintage cars, furniture, and heirloom and art pieces that require special care. He completed a Discovery activity in the powder coating paint booth and shared his detailed designs with the lead supervisor who immediately recognized Matt's skill in precision as an asset to the shop. Matt found there was a match for him with the company.



### The Results

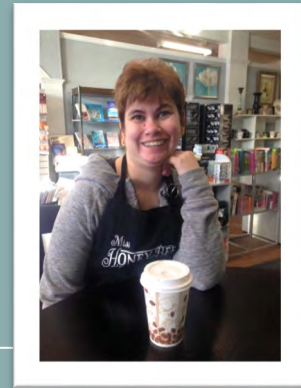
Brian negotiated with the fabrication business and DVR for a six month On-The-Job Training experience starting at fifteen hours weekly. DVR funded half of Matt's wages during the training period.

Brian also assisted Matt to schedule work transportation on the local accessible system for people with disabilities. Matt's abilities fit the work well. The precise job match leveraged natural workplace supports so job coaching was not necessary. Matt learned to sand blast during the training period. After training, the company hired Matt permanently making \$1.62 more than the hourly minimum wage. Matt continues to learn the trade, and will be powder coating metal and learning to weld. The addition of Matt's skills on the team assisted the company to win a large contract to refurbish parking meters for the city of Philadelphia. The supervisor remarked to Brian that Matt's natural skill, drive, and love of the work make him an invaluable employee. Matt's mother commented the customized job development process was intense but very much worth the effort.



*Matt lives in New Jersey, outside of Philadelphia*

# From Tea Entrepreneur to Coffee Shop Owner



## The Challenge

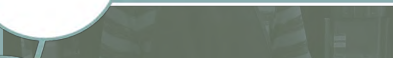
Melissa is a friendly, energetic, hard working 29 year old with a great sense of humor from a small town in Alberta, Canada. She loves to laugh. She has cerebral palsy and a visual impairment. Melissa reports her “hands and feet do not work so well.” Melissa has extensive volunteer experience and worked in three retail jobs. She also gardens herbs and harvests them for teas she sells at the local Farmer’s Market. She likes to work, but it is difficult for Melissa to find positions that accommodate her disabilities and offer interesting work. Past employers frequently required physical work and long hours. This lack of proper job fit caused Melissa’s hours at her last wage employment position to dwindle until she found herself unemployed. Melissa wanted to work badly, but struggled to find another position. The local economy is challenged due to major layoffs in the local oil production industry. She and her family were losing hope she might find a good job. Melissa was eventually referred to work services through EmployAbilities. EmployAbilities participates in the Employment First Initiative through Alberta Works. The Center for Social Capital (CSC), the non-profit arm of Griffin-Hammis Associates, provides the training and technical assistance for this initiative with Senior Consultant Russell Sickles. Melissa chose to participate in the Customized Employment process.



Self-employment is a tremendous job accommodation, customized to unique circumstances, location, abilities, resources and dreams.



Self-employment allows for the creation of a work opportunity designed specifically for someone who does not fit standard job description molds.



“We didn’t know that Melissa would start a business when we began the Customized Employment process.”



## Melissa’s Path to Discovering Personal Genius

Melissa participated in a full Discovery process with Tina at EmployAbilities. Melissa completed an Informational Interview with an herb gardener. She also interviewed at a food bank organization and completed an activity where she prepared food, showing her strengths in handling and preparing food safely while cleaning and sanitizing the work area.

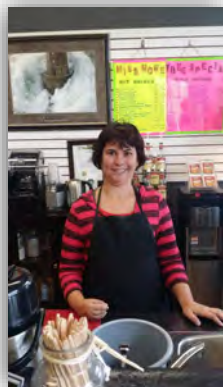


Con't

She educated Tina on how she plants, harvests, and dries herbs, then packages as teas. As part of the Discovery process, Tina observed Melissa selling her teas at the Farmers Market, and documented her engaging personality and excellent customer service. Tina also learned of Melissa's love of herbal teas and their aromas. She likes to serve hot tasty drinks to family and friends. Two of Melissa's dominant Vocational Themes were Hospitality and Horticulture/Agriculture. Because of Melissa's experience as a tea entrepreneur, she was very interested in pursuing self-employment. Self-employment also offered Melissa the option to create work that fit her strengths and competencies. There is a Christian book store next to her cousin's flower shop. Melissa met the book store owner through one of her staff, and learned he had interest in offering coffee to his customers.

*Melissa lives in St.  
Paul, Alberta,  
Canada.*

*See Miss Honey-  
bee Specialty on  
Facebook.*



*The Griffin-Hammis Alberta sites rely  
on self-employment training through  
the project  
and the book  
Making Self-Employment Work for  
People with Disabilities  
available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).*

## The Results

With support from the Employment First Initiative, Melissa developed a solid business plan for a coffee kiosk in the bookstore that included a rental space agreement with the owner. Through Alberta Works, she successfully accessed Fast Start Funds for an equipment start-up grant. Melissa's business, Miss Honeybee Specialty, opened nine months ago. The business name is based on the Greek meaning of Melissa which is "honeybee." Melissa is well known, and customers often go out of their way to frequent her coffee shop. The frappes she offers are a favorite. Melissa is on track with her financials. She is paying her expenses and has made a little profit. She operates the coffee kiosk Tuesday – Friday 10am - 4pm. Melissa's two staff are funded through self-directed supports her family manages. Staff are flexible and capable, assisting Melissa with business operations like keeping the food and drink inventory stocked. Tina, from EmployAbilities, provides regular monitoring checks to assure the business is running smoothly. Tina assisted Melissa to enroll with a business mentor through a local rural economic development organization. The mentor helps Melissa to account and plan financially for the business, build her customer base and make decisions about future business investments. When asked how Melissa likes working in her business, she remarked she is having fun and is "so happy."

CSC Consultant Russell reflected on Melissa's process to develop her business. "We didn't know that Melissa would start a business when we began the Customized Employment process. Self-Employment is not often offered as a possible option for individuals who experience disability. But we tell employment seekers that there are three potential work outcomes: wage-employment, self-employment, and a combination of both wage and self-employment. The act of considering self-employment as a potential outcome often gets the team thinking more creatively and leads to places, people, and conversations that may otherwise be overlooked. By skillfully reframing personal and professional supports and also building relationships based on mutual benefit and meeting business needs, we can uncover work possibilities that were previously unknown."



# Rural Work



Robert is a young man living in rural Florida where finding a job can be a challenge due to limited opportunities. Robert has a label of Down Syndrome. His mother, a school teacher, developed some school-based work experiences for him that included rolling silverware, running office errands and assisting in the after school program.

Robert benefits from collaborative work processes developed by the local disability service providers. These changes were facilitated through the Rural Routes to Employment Project funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council with technical assistance provided by the Center for Social Capital (the non-profit arm affiliate of Griffin-Hammis Associates). Robert participated in the customized employment process with his staff, starting with Discovery. During the initial home visit, staff observed that Robert's room was decorated with a variety of sports items, but he didn't give much feedback about sports. When discussing this information with his parents, staff learned Robert's parents decorated his room when they moved into the house many years ago and had not changed it to match his interests. This was a good reminder that the Discovery process sometimes reveals information that requires verification. Had staff not inquired further about Robert's room decorations, an incorrect Vocational Theme may have been assumed.

The Discovery approach allows human service professionals to get beyond the surface level responses to provide an essential picture of the strengths, needs and interests within the complex life of the job seeker.

Discovery allows human service professionals to know their customers before job development efforts begin.

Robert considers this job his first career step, and is pondering what may be next.



Two of Robert's key Ideal Conditions of Employment are working in a team based culture and accommodation for his reactions to temperature. He needs work breaks in a quiet space with good air circulation where he can drink water, especially in hot summer months. Bobby's strongest Vocational Themes are Advocacy and Helping Others, demonstrated by his consistent offers of assistance. These Themes provided a broad base for Informational Interviews. Advocacy and Helping Others take many career forms, including such work as Environmentalist, Attorney, Teacher, Nurse, Doctor, and Firefighter. Following other clues and Vocational Themes, the Advocacy theme is honed for a more precise fit.

One of Robert's Informational Interviews was conducted at the large national chain store in his town as they are known to have a team culture. The store's team culture works by employees depending on one another and completing assigned tasks they are uniquely skilled to complete. This fit one of Robert's Ideal Conditions and his key Themes. Contacting large chain stores is an atypical customized employment strategy as experience has found management is usually less able and willing to customize jobs. The manager of the store in Robert's town regularly uses unique methods to hire and develop staff with diverse backgrounds as the hiring pool is limited due to the rural location. The manager was very open to the customized approach, including negotiating for Bobby's specific break requests.

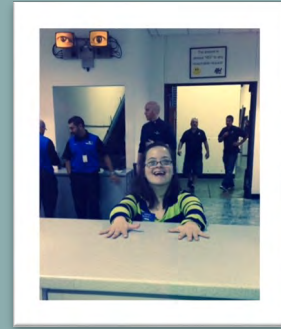
The Interview resulted in a negotiation for a three month paid internship with job coaching provided by an adult service agency funded by the Florida developmental disabilities service system. During the internship Robert learned the job tasks, skills and equipment necessary to unload and unpack nested boxes of delivered stock, place security tags on merchandise and stock the items in a variety of departments. At the end of the paid internship, Robert was hired part-time starting at minimum wage. Robert is now in his third year of employment, still part-time but with increased job responsibilities of a variety of merchandising tasks. Robert is a typical member of the work team, receiving natural supports from his supervisor and co-workers. The service provider checks in with Robert and the store manager periodically to assure he maintains a good work status. Robert considers this job his first career step, and is pondering what may be next.

*Robert lives in Florida*

*The Rural Routes to Employment Replication Manual can be accessed at:*

<http://www.leadcenter.org/resources/tools-manuals/florida-rural-routes-employment-replication-manual>

# Discovery at the Center



## The Challenge

Sarah's mom, Janice, started TotalLink2Community (TL2C) in the northern Chicago suburbs in 2008 with five other mothers. After each family separately faced their own challenges navigating the school systems and state community services, they created an agency to help their children with developmental disabilities achieve individualized goals through self-directed services. TL2C established the Everyone Works! project so that employment is the first and preferred option for people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The agency received grant support from the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities to build the service. Griffin Hammis Associates provided technical assistance for organizational and employment staff development.

Use your network. People tend to help out when asked. Let people know you are looking for information, contacts and resources.

Job carving is the process of sectioning out a portion of an existing job and creating a new one that allows the worker to contribute his or her strengths to the workplace and perform a job he or she likes and desires.

Sarah invited friends, community connections, and business leaders she and her family knew to brainstorm options.

Sarah had been working in a good position at McDonald's for a year, keeping the front of the restaurant stocked and cleaned. The store was sold, and most employees lost their jobs including Sarah. Janice worried how Sarah would spend her days and be happy and fulfilled without a good job. Then the Everyone Works! service started, and Sarah participated in the customized employment process.

## Sarah's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

A lot was already known about Sarah's skills and interests, so TL2C staff set about documenting this information on the Discovery Staging Record (DSR). Sarah has a lot of volunteer experience in temple classrooms, a soup kitchen and a service club. Staff set up Discovery activities, gathering information about her customer service skills. Sarah's clear Vocational Theme was Customer Service. Staff assisted Sarah to organize a Community Action Team to leverage her social capital in seeking employment in companies where she would be an economic asset. Sarah invited friends, community connections, and business leaders she and her family knew to brainstorm options. They presented Sarah's Vocational Profile. Two of Sarah's key assets are that she is a creature of habit and puts people at ease. One idea was to approach a friend of staff who works at a large local family owned electronics store as the work and culture seemed a fit with Sarah's Profile. The company's motto is: The answer to any reasonable request is always yes.





## The Results

A meeting and tour was arranged with Sarah and the store owners. They had a lot in common and felt at ease together. At the end of the meeting Sarah said she would be happy to work at the store. The Human Resource Department reviewed Sarah's application comparing it with the company's needs. In this case, Discovery led to a good match, and then typical competitive hiring processes (i.e. interviewing) were used. Sarah was hired three years ago making more than minimum wage working 15 hours a week. Sarah works in several departments. Two days a week Sarah sorts call tickets for routing by 6 digit codes in the service department. The department has a huge volume of 800 calls a week. Sarah has her own work cubicle with computer that she decorates with pictures of family and community activities. She has great friends and natural support in the office. Three days a week Sarah works in the small merchandise department and secure warehouse. She answers directional questions, assists customers picking up in-store orders, and scans orders being shipped from the store. Recently, the company converted to a paperless system. Because of TL2C's strong relationship with the employer and Sarah's value as an employee, they were able to retrain her to the new work processes through photo adaptations to maintain her position. Sarah rides door-to-door paratransit to work, arriving earlier than her shift. She is very comfortable eating lunch and talking with co-workers in the cafeteria until her shift starts.

Janice notes that Discovery is at the center of all TL2C services. The process assists in building community for those they support outside of work as well. This has been particularly important for Transition students to stay connected to their communities if they do not pursue college or employment. Janice reflects the customized employment process led to work that is much more sustainable for Sarah and has greatly expanded her social circle.

Sarah says "I love my job so much, and I am so good at it!" Sarah is a worker at heart and is always open to her next step. Another favorite life experience for Sarah was summer camp that she may explore in the future.

*Sarah lives in Northbrook Illinois outside of Chicago  
Janice is the Executive Director of TL2C – see the agency  
website at [www.totallink2.org](http://www.totallink2.org)*

# Emergency Services was the Fit



## The Challenge

Wayne is a gentle, quiet, fun loving 31-year old gentleman with Down Syndrome. The syndrome is a genetic disorder that causes some health and intellectual challenges. Wayne has been receiving services from the Blue Heron Support Service Association in Alberta Canada for several years.

Getting an appointment for an Informational Interview is usually easy as most owners love to talk about their business.

Committing the time for a thorough Discovery process leads to Informational Interviews that find a fit with personal contributions and business needs.

Wayne has been employed as a Fire Fighter three days a week for a year with the goal of adding more hours as he learns and completes the steps of becoming a Fire Fighter.

## Wayne's Path to Discovering Personal Genius

Even though Blue Heron staff Sarah has worked with Wayne for a while, they completed a thorough Discovery process to explore his areas of interest she may have overlooked. Sarah learned Wayne has a large collection of movies. An example of a Discovery activity was for Wayne to pick ten favorite movies, and then describe what he liked best about each. Many of his favorites were action films that make him "feel excited." This led to a consideration of a Medical Theme. The information collected also indicated Wayne loves to help people, so Advocacy became a primary Theme.

The Discovery process led the team to explore local Medical Emergency Services by refining the emerging Medical and Advocacy Themes, and adding in the Conditions of Employment information of Wayne's desire to "get excited." One informational interview was with a local ambulance service. Wayne interviewed an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) who showed Wayne various aspects of the job and gave a tour of the facility and the ambulance. As part of a Discovery Activity, Wayne tried his hand at helping the EMT load the stretcher into the back of the ambulance. While the informational interview was very informative, it wasn't clear how Wayne's skills could benefit this organization.

The second informational interview was with the local fire department. A detailed conversation was held with the Chief. He described many tasks that frequently needed to get done like rolling up fire hoses, putting away materials after a call, and holding traffic signs at a fire. These requirements seemed a good fit with Wayne's skills. Wayne also learned that the fire company staff support one another in a way that feels like family, and volunteer their time to support the community. This fit well with Wayne's Support Theme.

## The Results

Wayne has been employed as a Fire Fighter three days a week for a year with the goal of adding more hours as he learns new tasks. His responsibility is to keep the Fire Hall maintained while he learns and completes the steps of becoming a Fire Fighter. Wayne recently finished his First Aid certification. He achieved the prerequisite for field call work by putting his fire suit on in less than 1 minute; he started at over 5 minutes but the Fire Chief mentored him to reach the 1 minute criteria. Learning to ride his bike to work, and losing forty pounds as a result, helped him meet this requirement. Next Wayne is learning how to get into the air pack over his fire suit. Blue Heron staff provide periodic support as Wayne is assigned new work tasks to complete.

Wayne was awarded “Volunteer of the Year” by the City for his involvement in community activities with the Fire Department. And his work is naturally carrying over after hours. He was recently out with friends when one started to choke in a public wash-room. Restaurant staff could not easily get to him behind the locked door. Wayne quickly crawled under the stall and opened the door so that his choking friend could get immediate help.



*Wayne lives in Barrhead, Alberta Canada*