

Success in the Workplace

Advice and Strategies from Professionals who
have Developmental Disabilities



Supported Life Institute

College Students and Professionals with Disabilities Project



Introduction

*I just want to be a hard worker and be helpful.
-Sheree*

“College Students and Professionals with Disabilities” is a project designed to help people who have developmental disabilities and their families learn about resources, options, and strategies to help them succeed in college and employment. The project features videotaped interviews with individuals who have developmental disabilities discussing their experiences in college and at work.

This booklet contains advice and resources from people who have overcome obstacles to be successful in the workplace. A prior booklet focused on individuals’ experiences in college.

Having a job and earning a paycheck gives people purpose and dignity:

*I really loved it (working) because I felt a part of society. Working, dropping my kids off at school, and having extra money to do those little extra things.
-Maria*

For people who have developmental disabilities, enjoying success in the workplace often requires perseverance to obtain needed services and overcome outdated attitudes about their ability to work.

*Society will tell you that you cannot go to work. Do not listen to them. They are wrong. You can do anything with the right support.
-Rebecca*

The quotes in this booklet are the suggestions and insights of the individuals who were interviewed in the videos. You can watch their videos on the YouTube Channel “College Students and Professionals with Disabilities” and search by the individual’s name.

Throughout this booklet, look for text boxes for links to resources:

To see the videos, go to the YouTube Channel: “College Students and Professionals with Disabilities” which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmyYkP-t1xXY3WpQbL5Ju4A> Search for the person’s name to find their video.

The idea for this project originated with four self advocacy leaders. Zachary Miller, Dr. David Nisson, Amanda Parker, and Theodore Walker wanted to support and encourage other people who have developmental disabilities to pursue their goals.

What I hope people get out of the videos is that they feel encouraged, that they don’t feel like they have to be excluded and abandon their dreams. But also that they learn lessons about what could go wrong and what to anticipate.

-David, Introduction video

“College Students and Professionals with Disabilities” was coordinated by the Supported Life Institute and funded by a grant from the California State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Sacramento office.

Best wishes to find your dream job!

Cindy Ruder
Project Coordinator
College Students and Professionals with Disabilities

Why Work Matters

Several individuals who were interviewed talked about why work is important:

Not only does it (work) bring in the money, but it boosts your confidence level. People will see you in a whole new light. You could build friendships. And you could travel a whole other road in life. And making that paycheck and knowing that you earned that money is a great feeling.

-Rebecca

Work is important to people so they can earn a paycheck, to make new friends, to contribute to society, and to be part of our community.

-Robert L.

Employment is empowerment!

-Kecia

I like earning a paycheck to earn some money. I really like working around here to meet some new people, friends or co-workers.

-Igor

You want to feel good about yourself and when you get that first paycheck you say, "Look, I did this myself. I earned it." Let us enjoy the workforce out there because it makes us feel very important and useful.

-Regina

Getting a Job That's Right for You

'Discovery' is where your job coach will talk to you about what your likes are, dislikes are, and what you want out of a job. And then you go and shadow different places that you might be interested in working.

-Jackie

In the past, an individual's interests and strengths were not explored before starting the job search. People were typically placed into any job that could be found. There has been increasing recognition that people are more satisfied and more successful when they are supported to find jobs that match their unique strengths and interests.

A good job fit is important. See what you like and what you don't like. Volunteering helps you figure that out....You need to figure out the skills that you need so you can get your dream job.

-Desiree

I got involved with self advocacy thanks to my worker at Valley Mountain Regional Center. He came and interviewed me. He asked me what my interests were.

-Robert B.

Advocating for a Job

Many individuals encountered resistance when trying to get the kind of job they wanted.

I worked for a sheltered workshop forever and I've always wanted to work in the community. I asked people if they could help me get in the community, but it took forever.

-Kevin

I was at the sheltered workshop but it wasn't getting a real job, that it's permanent. It was contract work and then you were let go. They weren't paying me enough. It was subminimum wage. And then when I got Employee of the Month, why couldn't I get a competitive employment job? I asked and then they said, "Well you're not going to be ready for a job out in the community." So I said, "Bye."

-Robert L.

It was the recession of 2008 and I lost my job at the after-school center and so I didn't have a choice. It was either move back in with my parents or get a job at the workshop. I moved upwards and eventually got a job in their electronics manufacturing company. I worked really hard and I got minimum wage after 5 years I think. I was very excited about that. Suddenly it felt like I had hit my ceiling. Like I couldn't go any further. And so I got depressed. And I started missing work. And I just lost all that motivation and work ethic that I had had. And became very vocal about leaving.

-Jackie

Chen used to work at a workshop. He asked for help several times to get a job.

They didn't listen to me. A PowerPoint helps to lead my own meeting. I got a job coach and got a job at Walmart.

-Chen

Advice to Get a Job

The individuals who were interviewed shared advice and resources about how to get a job:

I would say start volunteering because volunteering is work experience. So just volunteering, and talking to people, and network with other people, that's the way to find a job.

-Wesley

I started this job by volunteering as an intern. It gave me the skills I needed.

-Robert L.

It (an internship) gives them a chance to get to know you because a disability tends to mess up the interview process sometimes because they have preconceived notions and an internship obliterates the preconceived notions that people may have about you, that they may have had when you just had that 5-minute, 10-minute interview. It also teaches you the job, so that way you know the skills and what to do by the time you're hired.

-Jackie

I did do mock interviews. It is really handy. You need to practice one-on-one with another person. Just don't goof around. It is professional.

-Sheree

I went to one of the workforce centers. They told me to apply for a job. So I sent my resume, I got my interview. I practiced my interview skills. Then I practiced my interview skills again. I talked to people that I knew and they helped me find a job.

-Wesley

Workforce centers are also known as America's Job Centers. They can assist job seekers in obtaining employment, and strengthening their skill set. Job seekers can post resumes, search and apply for job openings, receive career guidance, and participate in training classes, such as interview techniques. For more information go to www.americasjobcenter.ca.gov

There's a 'LEAP' program through the State of California. They can help you get your foot in the door.... Working for the State of California - that's a huge accomplishment for me.

-Cindy

LEAP (Limited Examination and Appointment Program) is a program through the State of California that helps people who have disabilities get state jobs. Instead of going through the traditional state hiring process, people who are certified to have a disability can show their knowledge, skills, and abilities on the job during a "Job Examination Period". For more information go to www.dor.ca.gov/LEAP

You could try Project Search. There are many, many resources for people who want to get employed.

-Kecia

Project Search helps prepare young people with significant disabilities for success in integrated, competitive employment.

www.projectsearch.us

On the Job Support

Many individuals receive job support that is funded through their regional center. For people who do not receive services from a regional center, job support is also available through the Department of Rehabilitation and from the Social Security Administration.

Ask your regional center to help you get a job coach.

-Chen

They help you find jobs, help you talk to the chefs. She just comes in and watched what I do, helps me with stress.

-Charles

She sat next to me and shadowed me the whole time I was doing the internship. And when I got hired on, she started to fade back more and more and more. And now she comes over just on Mondays to ask me how my work week was. Sometimes, like once or twice a month, she'll stop by at the office, because my boss has the cubicle next to me, and ask how I'm doing.

-Jackie

I have a facilitator. She helps me out with putting my reports together and doing my presentations. So we have meetings, we talk about what's going on, I bring up suggestions, and we come up with a good way to improve my presentations and improve my reports. It feels good to get that support because we all need support. Everybody needs support. I don't think my work would be as good if I didn't have that support.

-Wesley

I do the website. I do need a little support. He helps me to make sure it's done right. So we do it together to make it professional. If you're capable of doing it yourself, there's no reason why you need to have help.

-Robert L.

Never be afraid to share your disability. Don't let that be the barrier of the things that you need to do for your life to better yourself....I think the worst thing you can do for yourself is not ask for support when you need support.

-David L.

So I applied and I got the job. And I was so happy. And I even had my own office and my own computer. And at the time I had asked for a job coach. But I used that with my Ticket to Work. So the Ticket to Work paid for my job coach.

-Maria

Social Security's Ticket to Work Program can pay for training, career counseling, job placement, and ongoing support services to help find and keep a job. Ticket to Work is available to people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). For more information go to www.ssa.gov/work

(My support facilitator) helps me with that phone (app). Help me bank, money and my check.

-Andrew

Andrew's phone app is called "My Pictures Talk – Video Modeling Tool". The app can be used on iPhones and iPads. The current price is \$2.99

I got support using DragonDictate, where I could actually dictate to a program. I got assistance on writing my timecard because there was a new system. So I got a chance to learn it and get familiar with it. Because my job kept evolving, the job coach stuck with me. So I think having a job coach helps me do my job better.

-Daniel

DragonDictate is speech recognition software. You can record your voice and turn it into text. You can also control your computer with DragonDictate. It is also available as an app for smart phones.

Some people use visual supports to help them do their job well:

Reading is really hard for me. This (personal cookbook) is when I worked at Safeway learning how to do the bagels, donuts.

-Charles

Why My Job Fits Me

I love giving out resources. I love working with people with all kinds of disabilities and seeing how they live. And like most people, I like to help other people.

-Rebecca

I like working with the students because I am able to set an example for them to see that they can do whatever their heart desires in life.

-Steven B.

I actually love that I can go into the community and talk to People First groups. There's nothing like seeing someone speak up for themselves for the first time.

-Daniel

I enjoy what I do because of the customers I see. And I've made Employee of the Year where I work at Nifty.

-Regina

What I like about my job is seeing the residents coming in and helping them to the best that I can. And my staff too. I enjoy coming in in the morning and saying 'hi' to the staff and answering the phones, and making friends.

-Cindy

My job fits me because I'm good with helping out others here at the MIND Institute, and I like to be a self-advocate.

-Robert L.

It gives me something to do, and gets me out of the house and I can be around my friends. The office environment is wonderful. And our boss is really nice.

-Teresa

Clean, dust, and mop, and mirrors. That's my job. I like it.

-Andrew

We have our regular customers and it's always nice to see them when they come in, meeting different people, helping people, and going out in the community, something to do, paychecks nice.

-Steven S.

It's cool. I met some people there at Walmart. I met my girlfriend. I met other people. I save some money to pay my rent.

-Chen

I like my job because they knew that I'm a really good fit for the job.

-Sheree

Small Business Owners

For some people, the right job for them is having their own business.

I am the owner and operator of a small business called Taketa Shredding.

I like having my own business because I like making my own career and doing my hobby for a job. I like working for myself.

I have support staff who help me with my business. They help me pick up boxes of shredding, drive me to the recycle center to drop off bags of paper. They help me talk to my customers and deposit money from my business.

-Janice, Owner of Taketa Shredding

We create buttons and magnets of various sizes.....We also sell adorable teddy bears.

Our support facilitators help us with daily tasks such as checking emails, inventory, profit and loss, and setting up the machines.

Don't be afraid to try. Also come visit us and put in your order today.

-Jackson and Anna, Co-owners of Buttons 'n Bears, Oh My!

I sell a whole variety of snacks.

It brings all sorts of different people in here. It's good to socialize with people and make good friends.

We're working on putting my snack cart in elsewhere and trying to sell candy...so I can make more money.

-Rick, Owner of Rick's Snack Shop

Able Carts is a grocery delivery service. People with disabilities work in the grocery store. We get the grocery list from the app that customers will order off of. We will go grab the item and make sure that we got everything and then we will check it and give it to Tyler and he will go through the checkout line then we will deliver it to the customer.

-Kevin, Co-Owner of Able Carts

We make assistive devices for children with severe to moderate motor planning issues.

I 3D-print assistive devices for kids and adults who have poor hand dexterity, or physical impairments, or visual impairments.

We've met with Department of Rehabilitation to talk about hopefully having them fund us to get our own 3D printers, laser cutters, and different machines...

Hacker Lab is this place, it's a hub, where you could do projects, like sewing, electronics, 3D printing, wood working, metal working, laser cutting.

-Jacob and David, Co-owners of Beckett and Diab Assistive Devices

Hacker Lab is an all-in-one makerspace, coworking facility, and startup incubator. Makers can use tools and equipment to cut, weld, and print.

For more information go to www.hackerlab.org

The California Department of Rehabilitation provides services that may include:

- Career assessment and counseling
- Job search and interview skills
- Independent living skills
- Career education and training, and
- Assistive technology

For more information go to www.dor.ca.gov

Career Goals

Several people who were interviewed have plans to advance in their careers:

My dream job is, I would like to be a counselor for people with disabilities who are trying to get through college because I can relate because I've been through what they are going through.

-Alexa

For the radio, I want to try to see how they run the board and the telephone system. And over at the TV side, I want to see how they do more of the directing and camera work. Because I want to try to be on the other side for a change. But I still want to commit to my on-air involvement.

-Loren

I looked in my office and I go, "You know what? This is nice but I'm going to move up. One day, I don't know when, but I'm going to get a bigger job.".... I want to go higher. I want to go back to school and get my B.A. (Bachelor of Arts degree).

-Maria

For me, for my future job, I want to work at an office. Because I am a very good, organized, and neat person. And I could answer the phone.

-Sheree

Advocating for Others

Several individuals who were interviewed work as advocates and are dedicated to improving opportunities for people who have developmental disabilities.

I've been on a lot of committees lending not only my support but my outlook on life....life as a disabled individual. It's important that we drive these services because we're the ones receiving these services.

-Robert B.

There's an old adage, "Nothing about me without us." Because it's very, very important for people with developmental disabilities or people with disabilities should be at the table.

-Kecia

If we don't get out there and get our voices heard on what we need, no matter what kind of disability we have, it's not going to get done. There's so many of us, people in general not just disabled people, who don't know their rights, who don't know what they're entitled to, or they're not able to get out. So those of us who can have to do so.

-Julie

Encouragement

I want to say to all the people out there, just hang in there. Don't feel discouraged when things get hard.

-Wesley

Don't stop fighting for what you want.

-Julie

Don't assume, just because a person is high functioning or low functioning that they can do this or cannot do this. People have a tendency to surprise you. Don't limit a person by their "functioning".

-Jackie

I don't think there is very much understood about how valuable lives are that are disabled lives. I am fine. I don't feel bad that I am someone who has always had to use a wheelchair. It's just who I am. I would like youth with disabilities to know that they are so beautiful just as they are. And that there was no mistake in how they have come to be in this world and that the way that they are in this world that they are capable of contributing in many different ways. And that's going to look different for everybody. But that they deserve to be heard and respected and not patronized.

-Rebekah

Don't ever stop believing in yourself. Just because you have a disability doesn't mean that you can't accomplish what you want in your life, your goals. It may take you a little bit longer. It may take everybody a little bit longer...But don't let that stop you. Don't let that scare you. Set dreams.

-David L.

Thank you to the individuals who graciously participated in this project.