

Recovery Works

Improving Employment Opportunities for Adult Mental Health Consumers

Sponsored by the Maine Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health

Children Make Me Happy

Rebekah, a woman in her mid-20's diagnosed with anxiety and depression, had been "very satisfied with her job" and no need to change it from 2021 – 2023. In 2024, her Need for Change Scale answers shifted toward dissatisfaction until in November she had been unemployed for one month and had an urgent need to find a job.

The Employment Specialist (ES) began meeting with Rebekah to develop her IPS Career Profile and a plan to work together. During this time, she explained that she "just wanted to find a job to pay the bills." However, she also expressed a strong personal interest in working with children or animals, noting, "children make me happy." Her Job Search Plan (IEP) focused on securing immediate income, while also incorporating her long-term goal of working with children or pets.

Due to her anxiety, Rebekah preferred not to work in large retail environments but was open to working in smaller settings, such as a bookstore. The ES discussed disability disclosure with Rebekah, and she chose to make disclosure decisions on a case-by-case basis depending on the employer and situation.

On the day her Job Search Plan (IEP) was activated in January, the ES assisted Rebekah in submitting multiple job applications, including one for a Substitute School-Based Behavioral Health Professional (BHP). The ES had a professional relationship with the hiring manager at that organization, and with Rebekah's consent, a Release of Information was signed. The ES contacted the manager, who then alerted the HR department to flag Rebekah's application for priority review.

three days later, Rebekah called the ES to report that she had interviewed for a delivery driver position at a local pizza restaurant and was offered a job on the spot. She was successfully employed within three days of becoming active, a meaningful first step toward financial stability. That same day, Rebekah met with the ES to complete her

online new hire paperwork and also completed a phone screening for the BHP position. She was informed that a follow-up interview would be scheduled.

Looking ahead, Rebekah took proactive steps to support her long-term goals. She negotiated a later start time at the pizza restaurant, 4:00 PM instead of 3:00 PM, so she would remain available for daytime work with children. She and the ES also developed a Job Support Plan IEP, with a focus on maintaining her current position and advancing toward employment in a child-focused role.

Rebekah has been performing well in her delivery job, earning positive feedback from customers. Although she interviewed for the initial BHP role and was not offered the position, she remained focused on her goal. The ES continued to support her by identifying additional opportunities and assisting with applications in childcare and behavioral health.

One potential employer informed the ES that, due to budget cuts, hiring was on hold for most positions, aside from substitute roles. Rebekah applied for a substitute BHP position and, while waiting to hear back, interviewed for another part-time BHP role. Soon after, Rebekah received and accepted a job offer for that position.

She will begin at \$14.16 per hour while working toward her BHP Certification, with an increase to \$23 per hour upon certification. Rebekah is currently progressing through the onboarding process and is on track to begin working in her dream job—helping children.

Rebekah's journey highlights the power of persistence, planning, and active engagement. Her commitment to both her immediate needs and long-term aspirations is a testament to the impact of thoughtful support and individualized planning.