

Recovery Works

Improving Employment Opportunities for Adult Mental Health Consumers

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

Determined Dad

Joe, a man in his early 50's, indicated being out of work 4 months and is dissatisfied with his unemployment on the Need for Change Scale, requesting to work with the ES within the next 3 months and to talk with someone about working and benefits. His Case Manager (CM) talked with the ES about Joe; he is diagnosed with schizophrenia and is on medications that can make him appear dissociated, looking into space during conversations.

In completing the Career Profile, Joe shared a desire to return to work, driven by a need for routine, providing for his daughter, social connection, and to alleviate worsening depression due to isolation, stating the desire to “get out of his room.” He told the ES that he had worked in cleaning and maintenance at a large retailer but left due to health issues related to the job. Before that, he had been a stay-at-home dad, which he enjoyed tremendously. It was clear to the ES that this was a source of pride for him and motivated him to do better for himself. His work preferences involve labor, cleaning, and production tasks, and while he initially expressed interest in part-time work, he later set a goal to return to full-time employment.

During their work together, the ES recognized that Joe's symptoms and medication side effects impacted his ability to effectively communicate, stay engaged, and maintain structure. He could appear groggy, disengaged, or restless, with demonstrable facial tension, and repetitive jaw movements. The ES was concerned about how employers would react to Joe's presentation and expressed this concern to his CM. Together they discussed these barriers and brainstormed ideas and ways to talk with Joe about it in a mindful and respectful manner.

Weekly sessions focused on personal motivation, routine development, and motivational interviewing. The ES asked questions of Joe, e.g., “Would you hire yourself?” and “Can you show up ready for an 8 AM shift?” to help him build insight and prepare. The ES and CM spent time looking at

job descriptions and schedules, finding roles that suited his strengths and avoided past triggers (e.g., bathroom cleaning). The ES and client both built his first resume—an empowering step that allowed him to see his skills on paper. Over time, he became more engaged, consistent, motivated and a sense of pride was starting to show.

Joe initially wanted to work as a night stocker at a local grocery store. When that pursuit did not result in a job, the ES and client discovered a custodial opening at a local fast-food restaurant. The ES contacted the General Manager and had a productive conversation about disability inclusion and the company's inclusive hiring practices, ultimately securing an interview for Joe..

On interview day, Joe arrived early, clean-shaven, well-dressed, and prepared with copies of his resume and the job description. Joe waited calmly with the ES, who was invited to sit in during the interview. Joe answered questions honestly and with composure, impressing the district manager. He was offered the position on the spot and accepted.

Joe is now working full-time in a custodial role during early morning hours—a routine that suits his needs for structure and a low-stimulation environment. He has reported improved mood, increased motivation, and a renewed sense of purpose.

“I feel like I'm finally doing something again. It's not just about the job—it's getting up, being somewhere, and not stuck in my room all day.”