

Recovery Works

Improving Employment Opportunities for Adult Mental Health Consumers

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

The Tapestry of Preference

Anna, a woman in her mid-30's diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder II, Anxiety and Autism completed a "Need for change" scale (NFC) with her Case Manager. Anna indicated that she was "Very Dissatisfied" with being Unemployed and felt an "Urgent Need" to change. The Employment Specialist (ES) contacted Anna to schedule a meet and greet, during which Anna said she wanted to gain employment *for a sense of purpose and financial stability* to support herself and her partner.

Within a month of the NFC, the ES began intake with Anna utilizing the IPS Career Profile. During this process the ES learned about Anna's work history, and gained a better understanding of her strengths, interests, hobbies, preferences and skill set. Anna had worked in the past as a cashier and enjoyed working with the public and talking with customers. They discussed the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure of disability; Anna was afraid that employers may place judgment on her because she is working with an Employment Specialist but also recognized that the ES could help her find an employer that would be accepting of her. She decided to make the disclosure decision 'employer situation by employer situation.' Anna also had concerns about how her cultural preferences may be perceived. Due to her religion, Anna prefers to wear a long dress/skirt and headscarf. Upon completion of the intake another meeting was scheduled to discuss and develop her Job Search Plan (IEP). Anna's initial IEP was developed with a goal to obtain a part time Cashier position. She had her first contact with an employer about a competitive job soon after and had even more contacts after the initial one. After a time, due to unexpected circumstances, Anna had to relocate to another town-2.5 hours south. She requested some time to get herself acclimated to the new environment before restarting the job search. Anna

and the ES met after she became acclimated to the new area, and a new IEP was discussed and developed. Her goal was again identified as "Cashier," with a preference for a female supervisor, acceptance of her cultural background, not working alone, and preferably able to work the evening shifts. Anna and ES began the search for her ideal job. Her first in person contact with an employer after this was within three weeks.

After a couple months of seeking employment, the ES accompanied Anna while she followed up in person on her application with a local retail store. Anna spoke with the HR Specialist, who immediately reached out to the hiring manager, who in turn asked if Anna was available for an interview. Anna gladly accepted the interview offer. ES waited outside in her car during the interview. When Anna came out of the store, she was thrilled and exclaimed, *"I got the job!"* Anna reported that she had asked about the dress code during the interview and was told that it was ok if she wore her long dress/skirt and headscarf to work. Anna was indeed happy about that news.

Anna began working as a cashier at 32 hours per week and earning \$15.00 an hour. ES and Anna met to discuss and develop her Job Support Plan. A couple of the individualized objectives to help her succeed on the job were: highlighting natural supports readily available at worksite and establishing process to ensure she can receive feedback from her supervisor on her work performance. Anna recently reported that she enjoys working for her new employer,

"Everyone is really nice, and the atmosphere is cheerful and easy going."