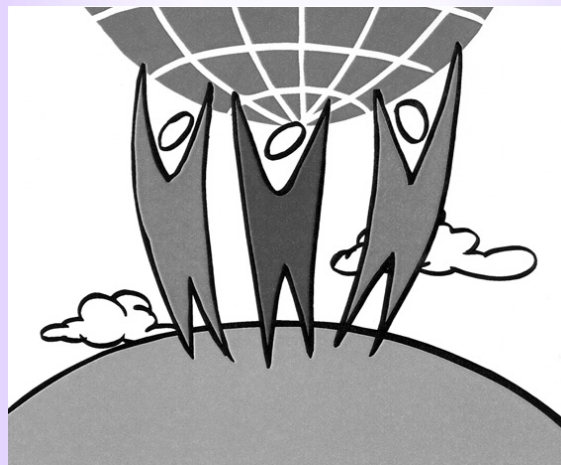


# POSSIBILITIES

**STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WITH  
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES  
WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY**

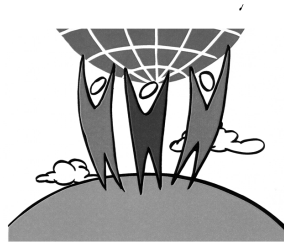


**VOLUME III**

**Of the *POSSIBILITIES* Series**

**2008**

# A PUBLICATION OF PEOPLE FIRST WISCONSIN



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the information about the lives of those people featured in this booklet.*

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# POSSIBILITIES

This is the third booklet in the *POSSIBILITIES* series. The goal of the *POSSIBILITIES* series is to highlight and celebrate the lives of people with significant disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, who are living, learning and working in Wisconsin. Our hope is that these stories will introduce the many possibilities that now exist for people with significant disabilities to become active and contributing members of their communities.

The first two booklets in the *POSSIBILITIES* series feature stories about people with significant disabilities who are building lives in the community outside of institutions. This third booklet along with a fourth, feature stories that reflect the growing trend of people with significant disabilities, like intellectual disabilities, working in integrated community employment.

The number of integrated community employment options can be as great as the number of people with significant disabilities seeking employment. The beauty of integrated community employment is that there is never a need to resort to a one-size-fits-all model. These stories are just a sample of the growing number of positive stories about integrated community employment that can be found in Wisconsin. The stories in this booklet reflect the diversity of jobs chosen, the range of work schedules available and the variations on support services needed to successfully employ people with significant disabilities in integrated community jobs.

In the past, support services have not always been available to assist people with intellectual disabilities to work in integrated community employment. But today Wisconsin is uniquely positioned to support integrated community employment for people with intellectual disabilities like never before. This is due to the expansion of Family Care, participation in the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), targeted resources from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the recommended reforms of the DHS (Department of Health Services) Managed Care Employment Task Force.

Whether you are a family member, guardian or caring friend; a staff person from a managed care organization, school or community services provider; or you are a person with an intellectual disability, we hope these stories will inspire your own exploration of integrated community employment possibilities. We also hope that you will recognize that neither the severity of disability nor the complexity of support needs should prevent a person with intellectual disabilities from successfully working in an integrated community job. We hope you will consider **employment first**.

# Melanie

Working has always been a part of Melanie's adult life. After she graduated from high school, she worked for over 7 years in various janitorial jobs. She was always a reliable and hard-working employee. But Melanie knew she wanted to do more and knew she could do more. Fortunately, her support provider knew that as well.

Knowing that she liked animals, the agency helped Melanie to get a job at the Chequamegon Humane Society in Ashland. Melanie works there four days a week. She helps care for the animals. She walks the dogs and cleans up the area where the animals stay. After working there awhile she proved that she could be trusted with additional responsibilities. She also now assists with pet adoptions and can administer the medications that the animals need. She is very proud of her work there. This is more than just another job to her. She knows she is making a difference. This is her career.



Melanie lives in her own apartment. She is very involved in Special Olympics. She enjoys going on the internet and playing different computer games. She bought a small scooter that she rides to and from work when the weather allows. Otherwise she gets a ride to work from the specialized transportation service for people with disabilities in her community.

Support staff members believe that Melanie has really grown, both personally and professionally, since she began working at the Chequamegon Humane Society. Melanie is also proud of all her personal and professional accomplishments. She hopes that she can be an inspiration to other young people with disabilities who are thinking about working in the community. Her advice to them; "Never let your disability hold you back."

# Chris

Chris can't remember exactly when and how she got her job at DMC Mail Company. That is understandable since she has been there 17 years now. She does remember that she started working there sometime when she was still in the special education program at Nicolet



High School. Chris just knows that she likes her job and that she is very good at it. Her employer knows that too.

Chris answers the phone and enters orders into the computer. She also finds



the items for the order in the warehouse, packs them and then puts them in the mail. After 17 years, there is not much

at DMC Mail Company that Chris hasn't learned how to do.



Chris began working part-time. But it wasn't long before she was working full-time, five days a week. Her job keeps her very busy. But she still finds time to spend with her nephews and to participate in Special Olympics. She snowshoes, bowls and swims. She plays on the basketball, volleyball and softball teams.

Chris lives at home with her parents and her grandmother. She gets a ride to work each day from one of her parents. She did get her drivers license and is able to drive herself to work if one of the two family cars is available.

One of the things that Chris is most proud of is that she supports herself with her own income and does not need to receive any public benefits. She works full-time and gets health benefits through her employer. She is the only athlete on her Special Olympic team who can say that. Because she knows how good this feels, she is hopeful that someday, more of her fellow athletes will have the opportunity to join her in this accomplishment.



# Sarah

Sarah is a quiet and unassuming woman. She lives in a simple apartment that she keeps neat and orderly. Sarah's Mom helps her with money management. She enjoys shopping at the local malls and working on word search puzzle books. She attends a number of social programs. And Sarah works in the community.



Sarah works at the Medical College of Wisconsin. She has been working there now for more than 10 years. Sarah works three days a week assisting with a number of mailing tasks. Sarah is supported by an agency in Southeastern Wisconsin with an enthusiastic job coach.

During her first few weeks of employment at the Medical College of Wisconsin, her job coach was with her every day, teaching her the tasks she would need to know for her job. But

after that initial training period, Sarah was able to master the skills needed to do her job on her own. Her job coach's role changed. The job coach no longer meets with Sarah on the job. Instead she checks in with Sarah once a week to see how things are going for her. Sarah is proud of her achievements and the independence she has acquired.

Sarah had other integrated community jobs before the one at the Medical College of Wisconsin. As a young adult, she did dishwashing and cleaning at a restaurant for about three years. She also worked for about five years at a local nursing home doing similar tasks. These jobs earned Sarah income but were not as satisfying as the job she accepted and learned how to do with the Medical College.

As a young adult, Sarah realized that working and earning money would be the path to her independence. Her work with the Medical College is giving her that independence. She is good at her job and takes pride in her work.

Sarah lives in a relatively small apartment. Very few things hang on the walls there. But one thing is prominent. Hanging in a place of honor is Sarah's certificate of appreciation received from the Medical College of Wisconsin recognizing Sarah for ten years of employment. As Sarah knows, this is a significant accomplishment for anyone who achieves it.

# Zoey

Zoey's parents are not the kind of people willing to put their son's life on hold while he remains on a waiting list for a program that could help him reach his goals. So

when he was 16 years old and his high school special education program was unable to provide him

with assistance in exploring integrated community employment experiences, Zoey's parents decided they could do this themselves. They helped him apply for a job at a local grocery store where he was hired. His parents provided his transportation to and from work and provided him with on-the-job coaching.

Once Zoey started working he was eager to leave high school. He felt his school had little left to offer him. So at 18 he graduated, even though he was eligible to remain in school until he was 21. Zoey also made his own decision about the type of career he hopes to have. In fact Zoey feels he has a calling which is to be actively involved in the entertainment field. During an advocacy class at People First Wisconsin, Zoey expressed his desire to write children's books because he is unable to find any



children's books where the heroes look like him (e.g. with Downs Syndrome). Zoey has thoughts and feelings that he believes can contribute to bettering the world if he can just find the right avenues to express them. His desires simply do not conform to any conventional career path that the social service system is prepared to support.

Zoey's parents assisted him in getting a job with the Marcus movie theatre in Saukville. Zoey loves it. He knows this is just the first step toward building his chosen career. With the state's Family Care program expanding into Zoey's community, he may yet find the kind of employment services that will support

his unique employment goals.

Zoey is now learning how to play the guitar. He also writes



every chance he gets and has developed a passion for poetry. An excerpt follows from one of his poems:

## ***Broken Man***

***"...Feels like no one wants me like I am nothing but sand to them. You never know what I feel about myself – like a totally broken man – the way I feel about my disability - my heart is shattered glass broken on the floor."***





# Heather

When Heather was a child, her mother signed her up for horseback riding lessons. Heather quickly came to love the horses that she rode; a love that grew as Heather grew. Riding became one of her favorite past times. But even Heather could never have imagined that someday her beloved hobby would develop into paid employment!

After high school, Heather began receiving support from an agency that she credits with teaching her many life skills including how to get along with other people. Soon they began helping Heather to look for a job in the community. Heather worked at a few different jobs over the years. She worked hard. But she wasn't really happy.

Her job coach at the support services agency listened to her. He saw an ad in the newspaper for a job at a horse farm in Grafton. He asked Heather if she was interested. It was hard for her to believe that anyone would pay her for doing something that she loved so much. But they would and they did.

Heather has been working at the horse farm for 9 years. She goes there in the morning and lets the horses out into the



field while she cleans the stalls and puts down new bedding. Then she brings the horses back in and feeds them their lunch. She works there four days a week. Heather loves her job and she is very good at it.



Heather lives at home with her mother who is also her representative payee. Since Heather likes to stay busy she has taken on a second job at Concordia University in food service where she is a dishwasher. She also volunteers back at her

support services agency when she has time. She is a woman on the move.

Heather likes to say that you may not like every job that you have but you still need to work hard to get skills and practice working. She also believes that if you're not happy with your job, you should keep looking for some kind of work that would make you happy. She knows this is possible since it happened to her.



# Anna

**‘Be prepared’** may be the motto of the Boy Scouts but it is also a good motto for the transition process from school to integrated community employment. Anna is a good example.

Anna is a 19 year old woman with a winning smile who enjoys belly dancing, singing and participating in Special Olympics. She is a very social person who enjoys talking and laughing with people. Like her classmates, when she graduated from high school, she wanted to get a job in the community.

Fortunately for Anna, her parents had been preparing her for this step for many years. They advocated for job experiences in her high school special education program. They attended trainings with Anna through YIPPEE (Youth in Partnership with Parents for Empowerment). They helped her attend advocacy and career planning classes through People First Wisconsin. So



when the time came for Anna to work with her job developer and coach on a job search, she was ready. And her coach was ready to listen to her. Since Anna had expressed interest in working as a waitress and she clearly had a personality for interacting with customers, her job developer and coach helped her get a job at the **Noodles** restaurant in Grafton.



Anna’s job began as a work experience through DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation). A work experience is when DVR pays the salary of a person with a disability for a short amount of time while they work for a business until the employer and the employee are confident that the job match will be successful. Anna’s work experience was so successful that when it ended, the restaurant increased her hours. She went from working three days a week to four. Anna is successful and happy with her job. In her case, it certainly did pay to be prepared.



# Ben

Ben lives in the small town of Friesland. Total population is around 300. There are many advantages to living in such a small community. Not only does everyone in town know Ben but they seem to appreciate him as well. He has even become the 'self-appointed' director of the community band during summer concerts. But finding a job in such a rural area can be a challenge for anyone. Ben has met that challenge!



Ben had volunteer work experiences when he was in high school. He and his family thought they had arranged for one of his volunteer jobs to become a paid position after he graduated. But as happens with many of the best laid plans, the arrangement fell apart shortly after Ben's graduation. That put Ben and his family back at square one.

However, in the county where Ben resides, the state's Family Care program was expanding which meant Ben would not have to go on a waiting list for assistance. Ben's mother credits the expansion of Family Care in Wisconsin and the work of Ben's service provider

agency for turning things around on his behalf.

In no time at all, the agency helped Ben get a job at The Vineyard, a Christian book and coffee shop, in the nearby town of Beaver Dam. Ben works at The Vineyard five days a week, for three hours a day. He cleans and washes dishes. One of his 'unofficial' job duties is to make the customers feel welcome.



Ben truly excels in this area. His friendly nature has added value to The Vineyard as a community meeting place.

Ben is just 24 years old. This is his first paid employment but he is learning a great deal and there are many more things to learn. As is true for any other young adult, this job for Ben is a stepping stone and can be of benefit in helping him to think about what he wants to do with his life in the future.



# Robert

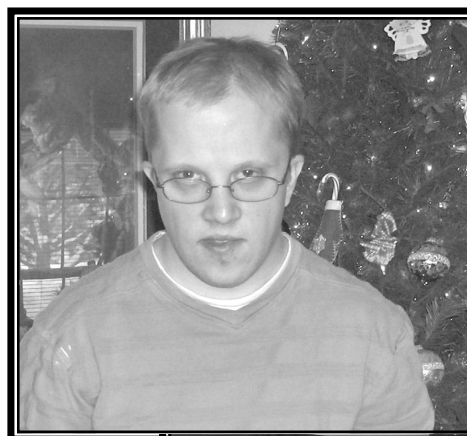
As the 'baby boomer' generation continues to age, the need for more caregivers of senior citizens grows. This is also occurring at the same time the pool of working age people is shrinking. Some supported employment agencies have seen this as a unique employment opportunity for people with intellectual disabilities. This has been true for Robert.

In high school, Robert had an opportunity to work as a volunteer helping senior citizens. He knew he liked the work and he knew he was good at it. After he graduated Robert's support agency helped him find a job, actually two jobs, that are helping him to build a career in care giving.

On Tuesdays Robert works at a CBRF (Community Based Residential Facility). About 15 seniors live there. Robert helps set up and serve lunch. He also helps clean-up after lunch. Then he is responsible for leading the seniors in an activity that helps them to move and to exercise. His job coach, Luann, often assists him with that activity. The seniors there like Robert so much that they have been known to refer to Tuesday simply as, 'Robert day'.

On three other days during the week Robert works at a different CBRF. There about 18 seniors reside. When Robert's support agency helped set up this job, they used a job development technique called customized employment. This is where the job developer helps the business to 'carve' out certain work

tasks from established job positions to create a new job position that is 'customized' to meet the skill set of a particular person with a disability. It is also intended to help the business run more effectively. This approach benefited Robert, giving him a job ideally suited to his interests and skills while also improving efficiencies at the CBRF.



When Robert was asked why he liked working with senior citizens, he simply replied, "I just like being



around them." He went on to say that he likes his work as much as he likes participating in Special Olympics!

# Cindy

Cindy was institutionalized at Southern Wisconsin Center for more than 25 years. When she first moved from the Center and into a group home in Milwaukee, the psychologist from the Center said that Cindy would always need to live and work in sheltered environments. Cindy is proud that in her lifetime, that psychologist is just one of a number of professionals that she has proven wrong.

Actually, it wasn't long before Cindy moved from the group home into her own apartment. It took longer for her to move from a sheltered workshop to integrated community employment. But in fact she did both. Still it took her more than a decade, but she found her "dream job," where she works now as the Advocacy Specialist for People First Wisconsin.

Cindy has been at People First for nine years. Prior to that, she worked at a rehab hospital, a day care center, a nursing home and a fast food restaurant. Her last job before coming to People First Wisconsin was as a clerk in a large department store. When Cindy speaks to others with intellectual disabilities about working in the community she is always encouraging them to try new things, to work hard and to not give up. She lets them know that their first job in the community doesn't have to be their only job in the community. When Cindy speaks about possibilities to other people with intellectual disabilities, she needs

only to talk about her own journey. With that she offers credibility that few other professionals can.

It is important to Cindy to help others. It is also important to her that other professionals see her as an equal and respect her work. She feels she is achieving this in her job at People First.

Cindy wonders what that psychologist would have to say about her now! She hopes he has grown over the years as much as she has.



See Our ~~Dis~~Abilities



People First Wisconsin

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