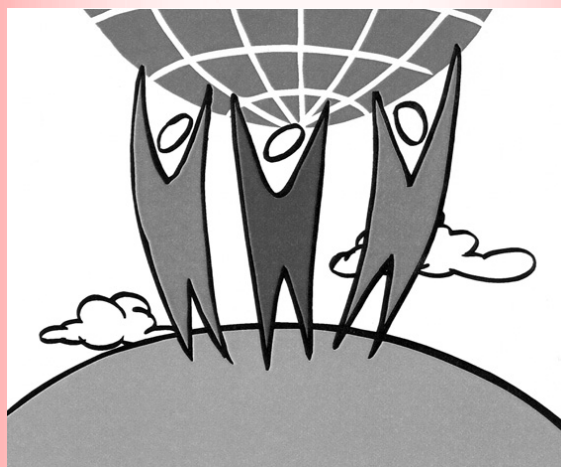


POSSIBILITIES

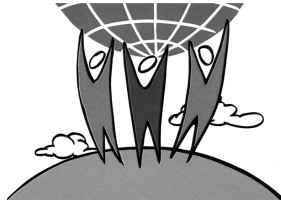
**STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WITH
SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES
WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY**



VOLUME IV
Of the *POSSIBILITIES* Series

2008

A PUBLICATION OF PEOPLE FIRST WISCONSIN



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POSSIBILITIES

This is the fourth booklet of the *POSSIBILITIES* series. The goal of the 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 you to 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. The third booklet and this fourth booklet feature stories that reflect the growing trend of people with significant 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 significant disabilities to work in integrated community employment. But today Wisconsin is uniquely positioned to support integrated community employment for people with significant 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 significant disabilities, 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 significant disabilities from successfully working in an integrated community job. We hope you will consider **employment first**.



Jimmy



Community integration really **does** pay off. That's how Jimmy found his job! When Jimmy was attending Wilmot Union High School, he used to go with other students from the special education department to Bodi's Bakery in the small town of Twin Lakes.

Bodi's is not only well known for their wonderful bakery but also for being a warm and welcoming community place. Jimmy really enjoyed chatting with the bakery owners and the other people who worked there. And they liked chatting with him. After Jimmy graduated, he didn't go there much anymore. The special education classes kept visiting the bakery though. And the folks at the bakery always asked about Jimmy and wanted to know how he was doing.

Jimmy's former teacher, Marsha kept up with him through Special Olympics. Jimmy's parents believed in their son and always saw him as someone who could work. Since there aren't many community service providers in this rural part of the state, Marsha

approached Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) about having them contract with her to help Jimmy find an integrated community job. When helping Jimmy look for work, she remembered all the times that the folks at Bodi's Bakery had asked about him. She asked the bakery owner, Jane about hiring Jimmy.

Jane hesitated. She liked Jimmy but she couldn't figure out how she could use him. Jimmy does have some challenges. He is blind in one eye and has autism. But Marsha was persistent. She kept going back to the bakery. Over time, Jane began seeing ways that Jimmy could be of help and Jimmy has now been working at Bodi's Bakery for two years!

Marsha did some job coaching with Jimmy in the beginning, but most of his training came from the bakery staff. If Jimmy had trouble learning a new task, Jane would figure out how he could practice and assign homework. Jimmy has a unique way of viewing the world such as remembering the days that he works at the bakery not as Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday but as Box day, Bread day and Bucket day (corresponding to the tasks performed). Jimmy is even making contributions to the workplace. He turned his infamous scribbling (in high school he drew smiley faces everywhere) into the '*Smiley Face Cookie*' that is now exclusively available at Bodi's Bakery.



Nate

Making a living as an artist is never an easy thing. But when you are an artist with significant disabilities (cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, severe hearing loss and limited speech) the challenge is even greater. Nate has taken on that challenge and is succeeding far beyond anyone's expectations.

Nate did very well in a high school ceramics class. It gave his father an idea. As an avid Redwing pottery collector, he had the radical idea that his son could earn a living by making pottery. Nate's father contacted his friend, Scott, who had a pottery studio in Madison to ask him about working with Nate.

Door Pottery enthusiastically welcomed Nate into their studio. With support from DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation), the studio bathroom was made handicapped accessible and a ramp was added to the building entrance. Scott gave advice to Nate about the best clay to use, allowed Nate to have access to exclusive pottery glazes needed to coat the pottery and gave advice to his father about developing a business plan.

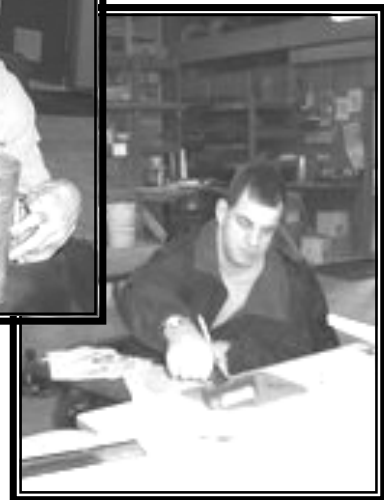
Nate uses a manual slab-making machine to roll the clay into a smooth slab with the thickness he desires. He then presses the various leaves, cones, vines and weeds that he collects on nature hikes with his father into the clay with a special hand roller. Then because of his limited mobility, he wraps the clay around a PVC plastic pipe to create the shape of his vases. Like many artists Nate has an assistant who works with

him. His just happens to be his job coach. The weeds, leaves and vines that cannot be removed without affecting their impression on the clay are burned off in the kiln leaving a fossil-like impression in the earthenware which gives Nate's pottery its distinctive rustic look. That is where the name of his business comes from – *Nature's Earthenware*.

DVR also helped Nate to develop his promotional materials including a professional display case that he can use at the art and craft



shows where he sells his pottery. His father's



support is crucial to the business as well.

Nate has been making and selling his pottery for eight years now. A major accomplishment this year was to be invited into his first juried art show (where judges determine which artists will show their work). *Nature's Earthenware* just continues to grow with endless possibilities.

Ryea

The state's Family Care program in LaCrosse is beginning to open up opportunities for people to explore creative new options for integrated community employment. A training sponsored by Pathways to Independence on micro enterprises did just that for Ryea.



Ryea is a young man in his early 30's with a winning smile. He is very outgoing and likes to be on the go. He remembers the names of everyone he meets. His autism does challenge him in numerous ways not the least of which is his difficulty with fine motor skills and limited language skills.

Ryea and his mother attended the training on micro enterprises about two years ago. Micro enterprise is simply a term used to refer to a small business where a person with a disability works for himself instead of someone else or some other business. Taking into consideration his personality and his likes and dislikes, Ryea created his own errand and delivery business in LaCrosse called, **RYE** (Run Your Errands), which

also happen to be the first three letters of his name.

Ryea has a team of people, led by his mother, who advise and help him with his business. He and his team spent about four months developing his promotional materials. To get customers, he advertises as well as sets up agreements with local grocery stores for home deliveries. He works five afternoons a week. Orders are placed by calls to his cell phone which are checked first thing every afternoon by his support staff. He already has some regular customers like one of the local T.V. stations in town. Transportation is provided by his support staff. Since his business is still quite young, he and his



team are always making adjustments to the business plan. Recently he got a debit card for his business to cover the cost of items that he picks up until he can get paid at the time of delivery.

As with many new small businesses, Ryea's is not yet making a profit. But he has been able to cover his costs. And he is greatly enjoying the opportunity to meet people and travel around town.

Esther

For some people adaptive technology can be the key to unlocking the door of integrated community employment. It certainly has been for Esther.

Esther works at United Cerebral Palsy of Southeastern Wisconsin (UCP) two days a week as a receptionist. She has worked there for 13 years. Esther has an ideal personality for such a position but due to her significant mobility and speech limitations she never dreamed that she would have a chance to work at such a great job.



The dream for Esther began to become reality when she started training with adaptive technology at Curative in Milwaukee. She learned how to use the technology to assist her in doing certain work tasks. When the job became available at UCP, she applied, interviewed and was hired.

When the phone rings at UCP, Esther answers it with the aid of a computer. This amazing phone system and software was designed by Phone Plus. On the middle bar of her eye glasses is

what appears to be a small shiny dot. This 'dot' activates a laser that replaces her need for a mouse. The laser allows her to move the cursor across the computer screen with just a move of her head. Since her speech is limited as well, the computer has a number of pre-recorded messages by a computerized voice system on file that can answer about 90% of the questions a caller would have. Esther listens to the caller and then opens the appropriate file and the computerized voice responds to the caller's question. She can put calls on hold, send them to the appropriate staff's voice mail or connect them directly to staff when they are available. She can even page staff when they are temporarily away from their desks. On the rare occasion when her phone system cannot answer a caller's question, Esther can alert a co-worker who can then assist with the call.

As adaptive technologies improve and become even more accessible to people with significant disabilities we can only imagine how many more doors to employment will be opened.



Art

Art is all about integration and community. He is very friendly and is known by many people in his Northern Wisconsin community. It's hard to find anyone at the Black Cat coffee shop in Ashland who *doesn't* know him. Art travels with his own coffee mug and takes his coffee with cream and sugar, thank you. His parents have always included Art in their family activities. Art's mother says that everywhere they go people seem to know her son. He volunteers at numerous community events with the help of his support agency and participates in the advocacy group, People First of the Northwoods. He also attends movies, plays and concerts around town. Art works in his community too.

Art has worked at the M&I Bank in Ashland for almost 10 years. His job responsibility is to shred the bank's confidential papers. When Art's support worker approached the bank about hiring Art, he did not describe any of his significant intellectual or physical disabilities as limitations to his employment at the bank. In fact, he took the novel approach of describing Art's disabilities as assets to any bank that was looking to provide customers with assurances of confidentiality when handling their private information. Art's ten year history of working at the bank is testimony to the fact that hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense.

With Art's bank experience, he was able to privately contract to do shredding for a few other businesses in town thereby

adding an additional day to his work week.



Art has what is known as a Vanguard communication board. His job coach, John, says he rarely uses it when he is working. At work, Art prefers to use his eyes, gestures and keen sense of humor to communicate. Those who know Art well, say it is amazing how much he can communicate with just a look. And by using his physical humor, Art loves playing jokes on his job coach. There are a lot of smiles and laughs when working with Art.

Art and his job coach, John, have developed a ritual that they share after finishing a day's work. They go out for coffee, talk about the Green Bay Packers and other topics of interest. But they always conclude their meeting by offering a toast. The toast can be about most anything, but it almost always includes a salute to life, community and the satisfaction of a job well done.



Mattie

Mattie's guardian and friend, Alice, says that Mattie is 'profoundly inspiring.' What a difference from the time when the only thing perceived as 'profound' about Mattie was her disability! Due to congenital rubella, Mattie was born blind and deaf with intellectual disabilities. She lived with her family until she was 13 years old. She then moved to Central Wisconsin Center.

It wasn't until Mattie was 15 years old that she had the opportunity to attend a community high school in Madison. This opportunity changed Mattie's life dramatically. Her high school teachers began teaching her tactile sign language. They were able to develop a communication board with 24 different textures representing 24 items that allowed Mattie to initiate communication for the first time in her life. Many of Mattie's challenging behaviors decreased as her communication options increased. One of her teachers, Alice, not only became her advocate but her guardian as well.

While in high school, Mattie received job training at a variety of Madison businesses. She worked at a hotel, three hospitals and the University of Wisconsin. Her duties in these jobs ranged from washing and folding towels, collating, stamping and stuffing envelopes, to counting and bagging medical supplies.

As a young adult, Mattie moved to a group home in Milwaukee. A few years



after that she began working with a support agency that assists individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining integrated community employment. They convinced a **Pizza Hut** in South Milwaukee that it would be good for business to hire Mattie to come in before they opened to fold the pizza delivery boxes. Since they would not have to take the time to fold the pizza delivery boxes, Pizza Hut's other employees could make their pizza deliveries even quicker. This job development technique is called customized employment. Since Mattie is blind and deaf, she learns with her hands, so her job coach taught her by using hand-over-hand demonstration. Job coaches still check in on Mattie every week, but most of her job support comes from her co-workers. Mattie has worked at Pizza Hut for 16 years now.

A former co-worker of hers commented, 'Mattie makes me smile from the inside out.' Mattie is profoundly inspiring.



Dan

A little over ten years ago, Dan was living at home and spending his days during the work week at a sheltered workshop. Some people at the workshop felt Dan's disabilities were too significant and challenging for him to continue receiving services there. Some other people, including Dan's family felt differently. As it happened, this disagreement brought about an opportunity for Dan to try supported employment. That was the first of a number of opportunities that would help change Dan's life.



The agency providing employment services helped Dan get a job working two days a week making lamps at Brass

Light Gallery, Inc. (He continues to attend the sheltered workshop the other three days of the week.) Dan grew up helping his father fix things around their house. He likes being around tools so he quickly took to the use of the electric drills and screwdrivers necessary to assemble the lamps at Brass Light Gallery. Dan has been working for Brass Light

Gallery for 10 years. Dan loves his work and he is also very good at it.

Dan's family members have always been his greatest support and strongest advocates. They've often been light years ahead of conventional thinking regarding the provision of services to people with disabilities. They've used their energy and passion to advocate not only for Dan but for changes in the disabilities service system

Their efforts have benefited many people with disabilities throughout the state, especially those with autism. Their progressive advocacy has resulted in big changes for Dan. He now shares a duplex with a roommate and has the employment supports necessary for him to work at an integrated community job.

When Dan began working at Brass Light Gallery he used very little verbal communication. Dan wanted to be able to speak and he let people know it. He is now attending speech therapy and can, on occasion, use two and three word sentences. Like many other people with significant disabilities, Dan's challenging and compulsive behaviors lessened or disappeared entirely after he began working in the community.

Even with all that Dan has already accomplished, he remains aware of barriers and challenges he has yet to conquer, not just for himself but for other people with disabilities as well.



Kris

Since Kris was adopted, she has had two fierce advocates: her mother and her father. They not only love Kris, they believe in her. Where some see deficits, they see capacities. Where some see limitations, they see opportunities. And sometimes it is that fierce and persistent advocacy fueled by a parent's love that is exactly what is needed to create possibilities for people with significant disabilities. This has been true for Kris.



Kris has been challenged in her lifetime by a number of disabilities including autism. But time and time again, she has surprised everyone with her accomplishments. When Kris reached adulthood, she and her parents just expected that getting a job and working in the community would simply be another one of her accomplishments.

Kris had a number of job opportunities but none seemed to be the right fit for her. What did seem to work well was when Kris was helping her mother with her home business doing a variety of

office tasks. Kris had also been doing a lot of volunteering at Cardinal Stritch University where her father was a professor. Her parents began advocating for the university to hire Kris for an office position. It took awhile, but in time she was given the chance to show what she could do.

Kris now works four days a week at the university helping with mailings, doing shredding, making copies and delivering mail. Her job began as a work experience through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). 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 agree that the job match is successful. Kris's employment support agency helped set up the work experience and did some initial job coaching. Now most of Kris's job support comes from her co-workers. They enjoy working with her and see her as a valuable member of their team. They also recognize Kris's individuality and allow for Kris to be....Kris.



Jacob

All parents have hopes and fears for their children as they are growing up.

This is no different for parents of children with disabilities. Will they be happy? Will they be healthy? Will they be surrounded by people who care about them? Will they be accepted and valued for who they are? Will they be seen as a contributing member of their community? At this moment in time, Jacob's mother can honestly answer yes to all of these questions.



After Jacob graduated from high school, one of his former teachers, Marsha, contracted with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to help him find a job. Knowing how much Jacob loved movies, she thought it would be worthwhile for him to apply at one of the large movie theatres in Kenosha called Tinseltown. Jacob got the job.

Marsha knew that being a job coach for Jacob was complicated and would also require a bit of creativity. In addition to having Downs Syndrome, Jacob has a significant hearing loss that has greatly affected his language and reading skills. Since Jacob would have to learn how and when to use the city bus to get to work, Marsha again turned to DVR to fund the purchase of a watch with adaptive technology features. Even with his limited language and reading skills,

the watch would help Jacob to know when to leave and arrive at home and at work. Additionally, the watch helped him know when and how long to take his break at work. Jacob has been working successfully at Tinseltown three days a week for the last two years.

Jacob has met many new people through his job at the theater. When they are out together,

his mother is continuously surprised at the number of people she doesn't know who greet her son by name and with a high-five.

The dispatchers for the bus company welcome her calls and are always willing to help locate Jacob when he doesn't arrive home on time. Jacob has even charmed a couple of bus drivers into dropping him off in front of his house instead of at the bus stop two blocks away. Jacob is a persuasive young man. In sharing his own accomplishments, he has been an inspiration to some of his friends from Special Olympics who now want to work in the community too.



Kelley

Kelley worked for 13 years at a Target store. But over time she felt that her job activities did not allow her to work as independently as she would have liked. The employment services staff who were supporting her with her job at Target also supported Kelley in her search for a new job. Staff understand that supported employment programs need to be able to be responsive to changes in a person's needs and changes in their career goals. All of us make employment choices, whether we move to a new job, seek a promotion, or choose to stay where we are. Kelley and others with disabilities are no different.

Kelley was assisted in finding new employment at the Medical College of Wisconsin. Kelley has been working three days a week for the past 14 years. She uses para-transit services to get to and from work. Kelley's job requires her to use a computer where she verifies and records information concerning operations at the hospital. Because Kelley does not have a lot of mobility,



her job coach, Debra, helped design some accommodations to assist Kelley in her work. Kelley uses a stand to hold the papers that she needs to look at while she types at the computer. She also uses an accommodation called, 'sticky keys' that allows her to perform functions on the computer with one hand, that normally require a two handed operation. Her job coach now needs only to check in one day a week to see how Kelley is doing. She is proud of her independence and happy with her job.

Kelley does not let her disabilities limit her personal life either. She lives in an accessible apartment in South Milwaukee that she shares with her husband, both of whom need attendant services to provide their personal care. Kelley attends programs at the Eisenhower Center and is involved in a number of volunteer activities in the community. For Kelley, "community integration" is not simply a value held by people, nor a philosophy of service provision. It's how she lives her life!

Jeffery

Jeffery has made his mark on the self-advocacy and self-determination movements in Wisconsin. He works out



of the Waisman Center as the Self-Determination Advocate and Client Service Assistant Coordinator in Dane County. He has spoken at local, state and national conferences. He helped create People First Wisconsin. He has received awards for his advocacy work. Jeffery is living his dream. But the road to his dream has not always been an easy one.

Jeffery lived at Southern Wisconsin Center for almost eight years. He got into fights with his peers. And he also fought with a system that offered him little choice and little freedom. Jeffery is challenged with severe seizures that can not be completely controlled with medication. When the staff from a residential support agency, came to see Jeffery and offer him a chance to move into his own apartment in Madison and be a partner in his own support plan, Jeffery jumped at the chance.

When Jeffery moved, his new living situation offered him more choice and freedom but his new work situation did not. Working at a sheltered workshop for less than minimum wage did not go over very well with Jeffery. He lasted there only a year.

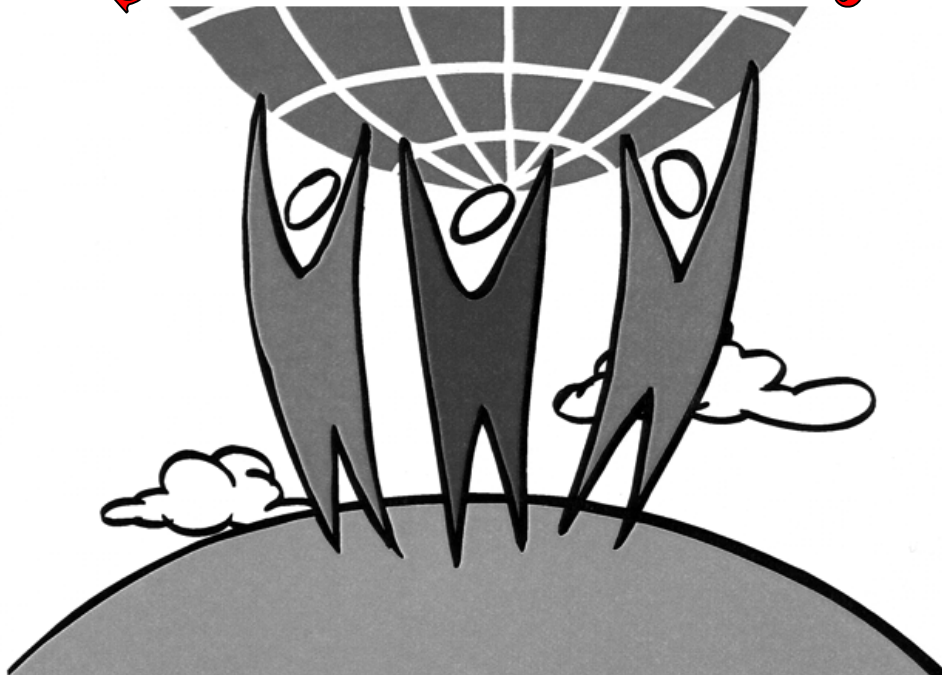
Figuring out how to support Jeffery in an integrated community job was complicated by his seizures. With severe seizures that cannot be completely controlled through medication, Jeffery was still in need of a constant support staff presence. Even when wearing a protective helmet, he is



at risk of significant injury. But another excellent employment support agency came through for Jeffery and has been providing him with the staff support he needs to do his advocacy work in the community.

When asked about the importance of his work, Jeffery said, **“Freedom means making choices, taking action, being responsible for my choices and myself and being a part of the community.”** Jeffery sees his work as helping all people with disabilities in Wisconsin to find freedom.

See Our ~~Dis~~Abilities



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