

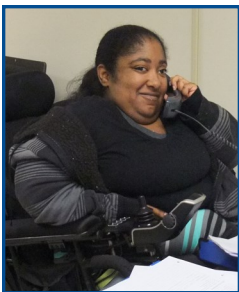
# RHODE ISLAND EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS STORIES



**Stephanie**  
Self-employed



**Seth**  
Grounds Crew



**Sofia**  
Administrative Assistant



**Becca**  
General Merchandiser



**Emily**  
Bus Monitor



**William**  
Sales Associate





# Stephanie, Cranston, RI

## Owner, favorABLEs



Stephanie is the owner of favorable, a small business that makes and sells handmade favors customized for all occasions! As the owner, Stephanie says she has many responsibilities. "It is my job to cut ribbon, make punches, and decorate the favors. I also paint "you rock" rocks. I work fifteen hours a week creating favorABLEs." While she is very involved with her job, Stephanie also receives some assistance with creating each favor. Along with her family, self-directed care staff are a part of the favorABLEs team. They work together to create each unique favor!

favorABLEs is based on the idea that kindness is contagious and that each one of us is able to make a difference by positively affecting someone else's day.

Stephanie came up with the idea for the business during a brainstorming session with her team. The local VR office, Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), helped by providing information on self-employment resources. favorABLEs started from personal funding, but Stephanie also applied for an ORS grant.

"At work, for me every day is different! I love being my own boss. I really like being able to make my own work schedule. In addition, I get to work right at home. This is great because I do not need to worry about transportation. When I need to make favorable deliveries, support staff and my family will help", reports Stephanie.

favorABLEs has been in business since 2016. Products created by favorABLEs travel all over RI, and as far as Boston and California. Stephanie particularly likes meeting and getting to know people at the craft shows where she sell favors. Her signature item is an "intentional act of kindness" favor filled with chocolate kisses. Learn more at [www.favorables.rocks](http://www.favorables.rocks).

"Great personalized service. The favors they create are beautiful and very affordable for a customized product. I highly recommend favorABLEs for any event you are planning!"

- Customer review

# Denise, Westerly, RI

## Laundry Associate, Uptown Salon and Spa

As a laundry associate at Uptown Salon and Spa, Denise washes, dries, and folds laundry. She restocks the bathrooms, hair and nail supplies, and snack and coffee stations, empties trash, removes old magazines from the lobby and sweeps the floor. She also assists Salon & Spa personnel as needed.

To find a job, Denise attended a weekly Job Readiness Vocational Class at Olean Center. She also met with a job developer to sharpen her interviewing skills and explore careers. Denise went to several informational interviews where she had a chance to talk about her skills and qualifications, and to learn about different businesses and jobs.

An informational interview at Uptown Salon and Spa led to a situational assessment — a two-week period where Denise performed a large list of tasks to find out her strengths. The situational assessment

provided the job developer with valuable information and brought to light the need for a new position at Uptown. The job developer and employer used the information to customize a new position that both built on Denise's strengths and met the employer's needs.

Uptown Salon and Spa hired Denise at minimum wage to work one 6-hour shift a week during the off-season (November-March) and up to three 6-hour shifts a week during the busy season (April-September).

The Office of Rehabilitation Services initially provided job development services for Denise. BHDDH funding paid for job coaching, check-ins, and transportation. Denise's job coach devised a system of color-coded stickers to help her decipher which magazines in the lobby area to discard. Denise takes RIPTA / Flex bus to get to work on weekdays, and her residential staff transport her on weekends.



"Denise is a perfect fit for Uptown. Her sunny smile, work ethic, and positive attitude makes her an instant hit with our team and clients"

- Denise's Employer, Uptown  
Salon & Spa

# Emily, Kingston, RI

## Self-Employed, Love Letters by Emily

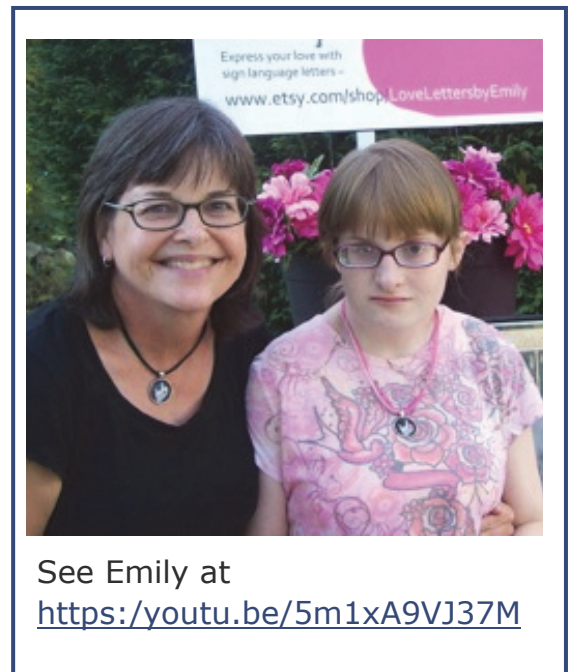
*Love Letters by Emily* is a line of hand-made greeting cards and other items based on American Sign Language. Emily and her mom created the home-based business while Emily was still in high school. They thought the business would be the perfect person-centered plan for Emily when she turned 21, since no other existing program seemed to be a fit.

Emily is the ASL signer for all the photographs used to create *Love Letters by Emily* designs. Emily helps as much as possible in the production of the ASL prints and cards. She enjoys shopping for ink and paper, picture frames, and all the craft supplies. Emily helps package and price all their stock, writes thank you notes for each Etsy purchase, and sends out orders. Emily also enjoys visiting local points-of-sale locations to restock and arrange displays.

Emily's hours vary depending on what needs to happen each day. She may work as little as one hour a day or up to six hours at a craft fair. Her family and support staff offer a great deal of help. An iPad and computer are necessities to keep photos and designs at her fingertips, track inventory, and take payments.

Direct service workers, employed through Emily's BHDDH-DDD self-directed supports plan, serve as job coaches and provide personal assistance services, language facilitation / interpretation, and transportation. Emily used some of her SSI monthly income to buy supplies. Profits from sales often go back into the business for craft fair fees and other expenses. Family or direct support staff drive and accompany Emily to all business-related activities.

Emily and her mom met with an Office of Rehabilitation Services consultant to arrange support for Emily's assistive technology needs. Emily has significant developmental delays and intellectual disabilities - along with multiple chronic medical conditions. Emily has vision in only one eye and no depth perception. She also has bilateral hearing loss, has no spoken language, and communicates in sign language.





## Andrew, Providence, RI Associate Sparkler, Marshalls

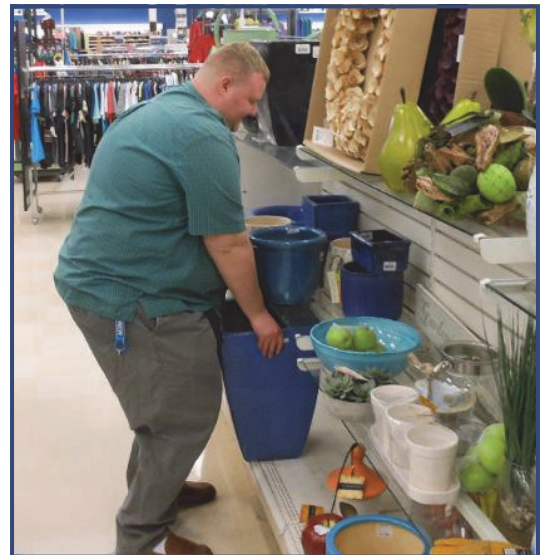
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Andrew is a graduate of South Kingstown High School. Upon graduation, he enrolled with a DDD-funded agency to find full-time work in the community. Andrew attended the agency for three years, working low-paying contract jobs: counting transparencies in the agency itself, dog walking, landscaping, and cleaning bathrooms in a local police station. When the economy tanked, Andrew gradually worked less hours.

The inability or unwillingness to help Andrew obtain work in the community became too much for Andrew and his family. So, three years after graduating high school, they moved toward Self-Directed Supports. Upon approval of his Self-Directed Supports plan, they advertised for staff through the Swearer Center at Brown University.

Using Self-Directed Supports, they were able to offer a decent wage, with a slightly higher pay scale for job development services. Andrew and his mother interviewed and hired staff that October. By May, the Mt. Hope Learning Center had agreed to hire Andrew on a trial basis to clean. A staff member who had an inside track at the Center facilitated this offer. After one year, they gave him a pay raise and praised him for his work.

Not long after Mt. Hope Learning Center hired Andrew, his job developer arranged for and supported Andrew to interview at Marshalls. Through discussing the needs of the store and Andrew's strengths, the manager at Marshalls created a part-time job for Andrew. He would be in charge of cleaning all mirrored areas, including dressing rooms, and the various departments in the home goods section. It would be his job to make the store sparkle! At his one-year evaluation, Andrew's employer praised him for consistent good work and gave him a raise. When he first took the job, he lived not far from the store, and his job coach was able to drive him. Since then, he moved to live independently. He gets up every workday morning, regardless of weather, to catch the 4:30 a.m. bus to Kennedy Plaza and a second bus to Marshalls in Narragansett. He is the embodiment of a good work ethic and one of the most reliable workers an employer will find.



## **Christopher, Providence, RI**

### Barista, Starbucks

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Christopher is a graduate of the Option Program at Bishop Hendricken High School. Through the Office of Rehabilitation Services, he was able to learn about his work strengths and needs, learn to drive a car, and get a job coach. After graduation, Christopher attended Project SEARCH at Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI where he completed two internships.

Starbucks hired Christopher as a Barista, working 12 to 15 hours per week at minimum wage with tips. He also receives an employee discount and paid vacation time after 12 months. Christopher is saving his money to attend the USA Special Olympics Games in Seattle, Washington. Although he can drive, Christopher prefers not to given the traffic near Starbucks. Christopher gets to work by RIPTA or a personal ride.

Christopher attends Compass through West Bay Collaborative on some of his days off. As part of that program, he goes to different places to socialize and learns skills to help with his job. Attending Compass also helps him to stay in touch with his friends and teammates from Special Olympics.

## **Becca, Warwick, RI**

### General Merchandiser, Bed Bath & Beyond

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Becca has worked at Bed Bath & Beyond for more than 8 years. She cleans and restock shelves, checks for expiration dates, helps customers, fills online orders, and helps with filing. Becca works six hours a week. Bed Bath & Beyond hired Becca at minimum wage and has given her several raises over the years.

Becca was still in high school when she was hired. Her mom helped Becca to apply for the job. On the job, if she needs help, her managers have always been there to provide support. Becca's family drove her to work in the beginning, but now most days her self-directed supports staff provide transportation.

Becca has some severe health problems, and her supervisors at Bed Bath & Beyond are always supportive and "keep my job for me when I need to be in the hospital." Becca likes working because it gives her extra money to do some of the things she enjoys.



# Emily, West Warwick, RI

## Prep Associate, Buffalo Wild Wings

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At Buffalo Wild Wings, Emily works in the kitchen in the “southwest station” portioning food items before they are cooked. Emily uses a digital scale to weigh the portions – cheese, chicken, and salad greens. She weighs the proper amounts and puts them into bags. She also labels the bags with her initials, date and time, and stores them in a refrigerator.

Emily attended a 12-week culinary program at the Trudeau Center funded by the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS). Through this program, Emily became “food safe certified.”

The culinary job developer at Trudeau assisted Emily in finding her job at Buffalo Wild Wings. The company hired Emily to work 12 hours a week at minimum wage. She receives the natural support of a co-worker who works right alongside Emily, sometimes on the same task, sometimes on different tasks. The co-worker helps in deciding tasks to do each day, depending on supply and demand.

ORS funded an employment coach to help teach Emily her job. The employment coach devised a chart system that helps Emily remember the portion amounts. Emily uses her phone as a clock (She has to label the bags with the date and time). She uses the digital scale. She also uses a system of color-coding for the various size bags she uses as well as for labeling the bags with the day of the week. With these accommodations and her natural supports, the employment coach’s time with Emily faded to just periodic site checks. BHDDH-DDD funds these supports ongoing.

Emily sometimes uses the RIDE para transit as well as the RIPTA Flex bus to get to work. Sometimes Trudeau support staff transport her.





# Shirelle, Newport, RI

## Housekeeper, Boys and Girls Club

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Shirelle has worked at the Boys and Girls Club of Newport County for more than three years. Shirelle worked at the Newport naval base as a housekeeper previously. Shirelle's job developer was familiar with her past work experiences and helped her to get the new job when it became available.

The Boys and Girls Club hired Shirelle for 20 hours a week at minimum wage. Her work week is Monday-Friday from 7:30 - 11:30 am. In the beginning, her job coach provided transportation; however, Shirelle now receives transportation to and from work by RIDE.

At the Boys and Girls Club, Shirelle's responsibilities include cleaning bathrooms, washing windows and doors, cleaning the locker rooms, vacuuming floors, and keeping inventory of cleaning supplies. If she needs help on the job, her direct supervisor is always there to offer support! Not only is her direct supervisor there to help, but all the employees at the Boys and Girls Club and even the executive director have helped when needed.



The Boys and Girls Club staff accepted Shirelle into their "family". She attends holiday parties and Boys and Girl Club events; and her co-workers have taken her out to lunch for her birthday! It is Shirelle's goal to stay at the Boys and Girls Club for as long as possible.

"Shirelle is very organized, works without direction, and is very conscientious about all she does. She also has the ability to put a smile on everyone at the Boys and Girls Club. She is loved by all!"

- Christopher Perrotti, Director of Operations

# Nancy, Central Falls, RI

## Clerical Assistant, Alcor Scientific

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While in high school, Nancy had the opportunity to complete an internship at Alcor Scientific. The idea of the internship developed during a transition IEP meeting. The team, which included a bi-lingual family support navigator, took the time to brainstorm potential employment opportunities. Her teacher successfully explored the possibility of Nancy working at Alcor Scientific, a family company of the teacher.

After graduation from high school, and following a hiatus for medical reasons, Nancy applied and interviewed for a paid job at Alcor Scientific. She did this with the support of her family, former teacher, and navigator. The company had moved locations since Nancy worked as an intern. They realized that working on the second floor

would be difficult for Nancy, so the company made the accommodation of arranging for a first-floor workspace. Alcor Scientific hired Nancy at minimum wage for six hours a week to shred documents, file alphabetically, and prepare and weigh mail.

Although Nancy enjoyed her new job, she expressed interest in taking on more responsibilities and challenges. With the support of her staff, Nancy negotiated with her employer to add light assembly to her job responsibilities. Her company supervisor and co-workers provide the natural supports on the job. Nancy attends company office parties, and the company one time named her "Most Valuable Employee." Alcor Scientific is not on a bus line, so Nancy receives a ride to work from her mother.



# Jesse, Westerly, RI

## Salon Assistant, Bella Vita Salon

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Jesse works as a salon assistant at Bella Vita Salon. Jesse dusts all surface areas and is responsible for general cleaning of the entire salon. She sweeps around the hair styling areas, washes, dries, and puts away hair dye bowls, operates the washer and dryer to wash and dry towels, folds/stocks towels, and gathers products from the storage room to restock the displays. Jess also makes coffee for staff and customers using the k-cup coffee machine. Bella Vita Salon hired Jesse at minimum wage. Jesse works as few as four hours per week during the slow season (November-March) and as much as eight hours per week during busy season (April-October).



Jesse was attending the day program at the Olean Center when she told the Olean job developer that she wanted a job in the community. Jess started attending the Olean Center Vocational Job Readiness class and meeting with a job developer weekly.

Jesse has great people skills and was very excited about the idea of working in a salon, where she could interact with many people. Working in a salon would allow her to talk with co-workers and clients. She would also be able to use her cleaning and organizational skills to help the business run smoothly and to provide good customer service. To meet her goal, one of the first steps was to complete some informational interviews at salons. The interviews helped Jesse to work on her interviewing skills and to learn more about what it would be like to work in a salon. By the end of an informational interview at Bella Vita Salon, the employer was so impressed with Jesse that he decided to offer her a job.

The staff at Bella Vita Salon quickly accepted Jesse as a valued co-worker. It is a family-like workplace. Jesse attends work gatherings and joins her team in employee photos. Jesse and the Olean Center received funding from the Office of Rehabilitation Services for initial job supports and received long-term funding from BHDDH for transportation and job coaching.

# William, North Kingstown, RI

## Sales Associate, Walmart

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William has worked at Walmart as a Lawn and Garden Sales Associate for almost three years. William's job developer at Perspectives helped him to find his job.

At the beginning of his employment, William worked alongside a job coach for support while he learned his new job responsibilities. William and his job coach talked about ways to build in natural supports to help long-term. A fading plan was in place shortly after he began working at Walmart. William's team created note cards with reminders of each task and the proper ways to complete them. William's department manager, Jamie, was a great support. William was soon working independently!

Walmart hired William to work 15-20 hours a week at minimum wage. He takes the bus independently to and from work. William is in charge of the pool chemicals, pool supplies, flowers, plants, patio furniture, lawn furniture, bird seeds, bird feeders, BBQ supplies, grill supplies, garden tools, garden supplies, basically anything that is outdoors! He also works as a cashier, waters the plants, and helps customers load things into their cars.

When he is not at work, William enjoys hanging out with friends, bowling, golfing, and fishing. William and his brother get together every Thursday. Because of his job, William has been able to treat himself to a new television, plan nights out with his brother, and most importantly to pay his bills!

"The most important part of my job is listening to my supervisors and customers. I believe that trumps all other areas of my position. My favorite part about my job is the work environment. Everyone is friendly and is always positive!"

- William



## Renaldy, Providence, RI

### Repairs/Builds Computers, Federal Hill House

Renaldy attended the Providence Transition Academy in high school. While at the Transition Academy, Renaldy had several unpaid internships. His first internship was at the RI Food Bank packing boxes, followed by a second internship cleaning and straightening shelves in the electronics section of Walmart. Although he did well at both internships, his skills shined at his third



internship at Federal Hill House where he repaired computers. Federal Hill House offered Renaldy a paid position upon graduation. The Office of Rehabilitation Services paid for on-the-job training and provided benefits counseling to Renaldy and his family. Federal Hill House hired Renaldy for 20 hours a week at minimum wage. Renaldy's autism requires that those around him understand and support him socially. His co-workers, who share his passion for computers, learned to provide the supports he needed to be successful.

## Nicolis, Providence, RI

### Transport, Miriam Hospital



I like working like my brother and other family members. I feel good about going to work every day!"

- Nicolis

Nicolis works in the Transport Department at Miriam Hospital. He delivers specimens to the labs, makes welcome packets, and sometimes delivers the mail.

In his last year of school, Nicolis attended Project SEARCH at Miriam Hospital. Through Project SEARCH, Nicolis tried different jobs at Miriam Hospital. His favorite was transport.

Upon completing Project SEARCH, Miriam Hospital offered Nicolis a paid job in the Transport Department for twenty hours a week at above minimum wage. The Office of Rehabilitation Services helped Nicolis once he finished the

Project SEARCH program. They connected Nicolis to a Benefits Counselor that talked to him and his parents about how earnings could work together with his benefits. Nicolis' family helps him to get to work on time and that his uniforms are ready for the week.



# **Jerry, Pawtucket, RI**

## Assistant Cook, Pawtucket Day Child Development Center

Jerry works as an assistant cook with the chef of a day care program. Jerry initially worked with the Fogarty Center making money by doing piecework. Jerry said, "At first I thought I would be making a lot of money by doing piecework every day. However, there were times when there was no piece work, and I couldn't get paid, which made my paycheck amount small." Eventually, Jerry received a position running the snack bar in the cafeteria a few days a week, but he still wanted to make more. Finally, he got an opportunity to try various jobs in the community. Some of those jobs were working at a laundromat, working in a cafeteria, working in a kitchen, and working at a Kiosk in the statehouse.

A job training opportunity for food service came up. Working with his employment specialist at the Fogarty Center and Office of Rehabilitation Services Counselor, Jerry was able to secure a paid job training opportunity called, "The Cook's Connection". He attended the program for 6 weeks and learned various things about food safety and preparation. After the training ended, Jerry was ready to take it to the next level and find a permanent job.

A few months later, the Pawtucket Day Child Development Center hired Jerry as an assistant cook two days a week. Jerry is responsible for keeping the dishes and equipment clean, taking and delivering orders from the students in the classrooms, and helping the cook prepare meals for the classes.



" Since I started this job, I'm having the time of my life. I feel more independent than ever, and I want to share some advice to everyone that it is OK to challenge yourself; because you never know how it will improve your life. I am proud of the work that I do and even more proud in the accomplishments I have achieved."

- Jerry

# Emily, West Warwick, RI

## Bus Monitor, West Warwick School Department

After graduating from West Warwick High School, Emily enrolled in the Rhode Island Transition Academy where she participated in several work trials including a childcare center, a clothing store, and a nursery greenhouse. Later, Emily began working with a service provider to identify job opportunities corresponding to her passions and interests. Emily loves working with kids, and her dream is to work with children who have special needs.

Emily— also known as, "Emily Red Sox" due to her love of sports — has worked as a bus monitor for more than three years. Emily initially worked for the Johnston School Department. After a year, Emily left Johnston for a bus monitor position in West Warwick, closer to home.

Emily's duties include conducting safety checks for the bus driver, making sure it is safe for children to cross the road, and checking for sleeping children inside the bus at the end of a ride. Emily has excelled at the job and at one point received the "Highest Achievement in Employment". Emily likes working to gain experience and to have money in her pocket; but what she says she likes most about her job are "the kids who love me to death."

Sue, Emily's vocational specialist, describes her as a peer mentor and an advocate for people with disabilities. Emily has become more outspoken as she has engaged more with the community. Emily volunteers with Best Buddies, a peer mentoring program, and attended a leadership-training program at Johnson & Wales to develop communication skills. In her free time, Emily enjoys visiting Six Flags and participating in track and field events. Emily is also a member of a local softball team and recently won tickets to Fenway Park through her participation in Special Olympics.



"I love my job, and my mother is proud of me for working."

- Emily

## Jasmine, Providence, RI

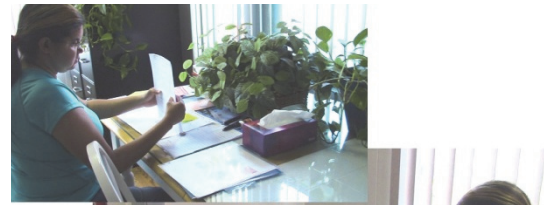
### Secretary/Housekeeper, Women's Psychotherapy and Counseling Center & Merchandise Associate, TJ Maxx

Jasmine works part-time at the Women's Psychotherapy and Counseling Center. Jasmine does housekeeping, sorts documents and business materials, collates and copies documents, transmits facsimiles, addresses mailings, assists with billing, and compiles information packets while complying with a confidentiality agreement.

Jasmine started with a goal of community paid employment. With the Fogarty Center, she initially worked on a janitorial team while participating on the employment-first team to enhance her skills. Jasmine and her family also participated in Person-Centered Career Planning to identify her interests and skills.

The Fogarty Center job developer met with the Counseling Center, which was in need of a part-time housekeeper. When the job developer met with the business owner, they identified other tasks that matched Jasmine's skills and designed a new position. Jasmine was hired as a housekeeper for two hours a week and to clean windows in the summer for an additional hour per week at above minimum wage.

Jasmine has a second position working for TJ Maxx as a Merchandise Associate. Jasmine completed an assessment of her retail skills funded through the Office of Rehabilitation Services. After the situational assessment, TJ Maxx hired her for 12 hours a week at minimum wage. In her position, Jasmine removes packaged items from the shipping dock, unpacks shipping boxes, identifies and separates damaged goods, separates clothing and items based on size and specifications, places appropriate sizing and security tags on store items, hangs tagged items on stocking racks, and stocks appropriate items in corresponding locations on store shelves and surfaces.



"Working has changed my life completely. It has given me the ability to do the things I want to do."

- Jasmine

## **Seth, Portsmouth, RI**

### Grounds Crew, Green Valley Country Club

### Front Desk Associate, Newport County YMCA

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As part of Seth's transition program, he received a vocational evaluation and a situational assessment. He left his high school experience with a paid job at Pizza Hut. His self-directed supports through the Division of Developmental Disabilities provided job coaching for this job, as well as support for his other community activities, such as volunteering at the Newport County YMCA.

After about a year, the Pizza Hut closed. This did not stop Seth from pursuing employment. His team looked to his family's network to identify other possible employment. He worked briefly at a small restaurant. The management did not want a job coach in the kitchen with him. It soon became clear that Seth really needed a job coach to complete his duties, and the opportunity did not last long. However, his team also set up a work trial with the grounds crew at the Green Valley Country Club where Seth had an opportunity to improve his skills. Before long, Green Valley Country Club hired Seth as part of the grounds crew for seven hours a week.



In the meantime, his job coach also approached the YMCA where he had been volunteering about the possibility of paid employment. There was an opening for three hours a week at the front desk – checking IDs in the membership database for patrons coming into the Y. The YMCA interviewed and hired Seth for three hours a week with the possibility of expansion to other duties in the future. He is successful in all of his jobs with the support of a job coach who helps him with appropriate and clear social interactions and helps him to stay on task. His job coach also provides transportation for Seth to his employment and other community activities. These supports are part of his DD self-directed plan. He was hired at minimum wage at both of his jobs.



# Sofia, Central Falls, RI

## Administrative Assistant

### Central Falls School District

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Sofia works in the main administrative offices at the Central Falls School District. She files, makes copies, sends faxes, and answers the phone. Sofia is bi-lingual, so she also interprets for Spanish-speaking

families who call or come to the office.

Sofia's person-centered transition team coordinated a situational assessment through the Office of Rehabilitation Services at the School District Central Offices. Sofia showed that she could be such a help to the office that they hired her upon graduation.



In addition to some intellectual disability, Sofia has spina bifida and some of the medical complications that go along with this condition. She uses a wheelchair. Her employer procured a desk large enough to accommodate her wheelchair. They installed an automatic door for her ease of entrance and set her up with a head set and phone system that connects to a computer.

Sofia's family assists her with medical care at home so that she is ready for work. She uses the RIDE program to get to and from work. She also uses the supports of a job coach through self-directed supports to assist her on the job. Central Falls School District hired Sofia for 12 hours a week at above minimum wage.

"I love my job. Being able to help in the special education office, especially with the families, makes me happy."

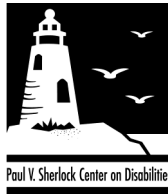
- Sofia





## **Thank you!**

*The Sherlock Center extends a special thank you to the individuals highlighted in this booklet for sharing their employment stories and photographs.*



### **Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities**

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