

CAC members, Cailin Thompson, Jim Clark, Rusty Hawkins, and Dayna Davis sat down over Zoom to interview Supported Employment Services, Inc. owner, Kelly Graves, and her staff members, Ryan Southworth, Placement Services Manager, and Heather Newman, Job Developer. Chad Kennard, who is the Job Developer for one CAC member, brought us all together.

### **Please tell us about SES.**

We opened in 1991 because we wanted to provide employment services that are customized to match the preferences, interests, skills, abilities, and choices of people with disabilities. We still do that every day.

### **What's the best way to apply for a job?**

Get to know the employer first. Let them know you like their business and might like to work there. The key is finding out what the employer needs and thinking about how you can meet that need. A job developer can help.

### **How do you get help finding a job?**

You have to ask for it. Tell your Services Coordinator or Personal Agent that you're interested in working. They will refer you to Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Once there's a plan, your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor will arrange meetings so you can interview different supported employment agencies and talk about services. Once you decide you want to work with us, we do an intake and start job development services.

### **What does a job developer do?**

Our primary role is creating relationships with employers. We are the buffer, between you and the employer. We're out there talking to employers to find out if a business is going to be a supportive environment. Job developers focus on lots of communication with businesses in the community. We meet regularly with you to provide updates and learn about your needed accommodations. We want everyone to have meaningful work that's satisfying, whatever their abilities.

### **How do you get a job coach?**

A job coach is a reasonable accommodation. If you need one and can back that up with documentation if requested, then you can have a coach. Vocational Rehabilitation funds job coaching. We spend a lot of time getting the job, and we want it to last. We want you, our customer, to learn the job well and be successful. A job coach can help with that. The job coach fades support as you get comfortable. If you need a job coach for an extended time, you can get funding through your brokerage or county DD Services.

Careful consideration goes into matching the customer with a job coach, finding a good fit. We're always thinking about personalities. It's a

partnership. If the coach isn't working out, it's OK to tell your job developer. We can't all get along with everyone.

### **What if I want more responsibility at work?**

You need to ask for it. Talk to your job coach and job developer. We can outgrow tasks and duties so it's reasonable to ask for more. Go for it!

### **What are the advantages and disadvantages of telling an employer you have a disability?**

Disclosing your disability lets the employer know exactly where you're at. If you struggle with communication or need more time to learn a new task, they can help facilitate support. It's advantageous to be forthright about who you are and what you need to do your job well. You need to be clear during job development about what you need. We can't help if we don't know. Barriers will come out. It's best to all be on same page.

### **What do you do if you think an employer has discriminated against you because of your disabilities?**

Discrimination is rare when you have a job developer because those employers already appreciate having people with disabilities on their team. So much of what job developers do is build relationships with employers and show them the value of a diverse workforce. They can help the employer figure out how to make accommodations when they are needed. If discrimination does happen, talk to your job developer and/or report the problem to Disability Rights Oregon. Discrimination is illegal and unethical. It needs to be addressed and eradicated. You should also think about whether or not you really want to work there.

Discrimination from coworkers may come up. Supported Employment Services is about getting everyone accepted for who they are and valued for the contribution they make. We educate about who you are and how your disabilities contribute to your strengths and weaknesses - because everyone has them. If you are being discriminated against by coworkers, don't pretend it's not happening. Communicate with your team. Your job developer can help. We empower people individually to live their lives despite barriers they face. We would help with educating the coworker, but we support you to work it out.

### **Do you work with businesses that provide job training specifically to people with disabilities?**

We don't because we have a different model. We want to place people in competitive integrated jobs right away. The place you're going to learn to work is at work. Some expectations only exist in the real-world work environment.

**How has the pandemic affected work for people with disabilities?**

Last March and April we were worried that our customers were going to get laid off and not hired back. There were a few weeks when businesses shut down and lots of people couldn't work. Almost all have been hired back. Right now, with the labor market as it is, there are so many opportunities whether you experience a disability or not. It's a great time to look for work. Now that there are more jobs than workers, lots of employers are willing to think about hiring differently and to pursue supported employment or a customized job to fulfill their needs.

**When looking for work, what do people with disabilities need to think about during the pandemic?**

Think about "Am I vaccinated or willing to get vaccinated? Can I go out in the community and be safe?" Some jobs have limited interaction with the public; some have a lot. Think about what you're comfortable with. Now that the COVID vaccine is FDA approved, we're likely going to see more employers requiring it.

**I heard President Biden talk about how employers should pay for training and education. Do you think that will happen?**

If the employer is willing in general, then they would have to do it for people with disabilities too. We focus on matching the skills that you have now with a job that suits you. Some jobs will have different levels of training once you're there like learning to operate a forklift.

**Do you work with people with college degrees or other people who might want a desk job? Is that outside your network?**

We don't have a network. We are constantly meeting new employers and building new relationships. Our approach is individualized. If you say you want to work somewhere, we will approach that employer. We aren't boxed into any area of the economy. The jobs we place are skewed to entry level, but the employers aren't skewed. There are lots of roles in every business. So, for any business, we can think of a diverse set of job seekers to match. We might find a job at a grocery store for someone at the check-out stands and another job for someone else in that store's office. We pay a lot more attention to your strengths than limitations. That's what we're going to lead with in a conversation with an employer. We want to find the job that plays to your strengths in first place, whatever job you want.