

Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment

Stacey's Story

Meet Stacey, a social and equine enthusiast who likes her part-time job and is happy that she can participate in other activities she loves.

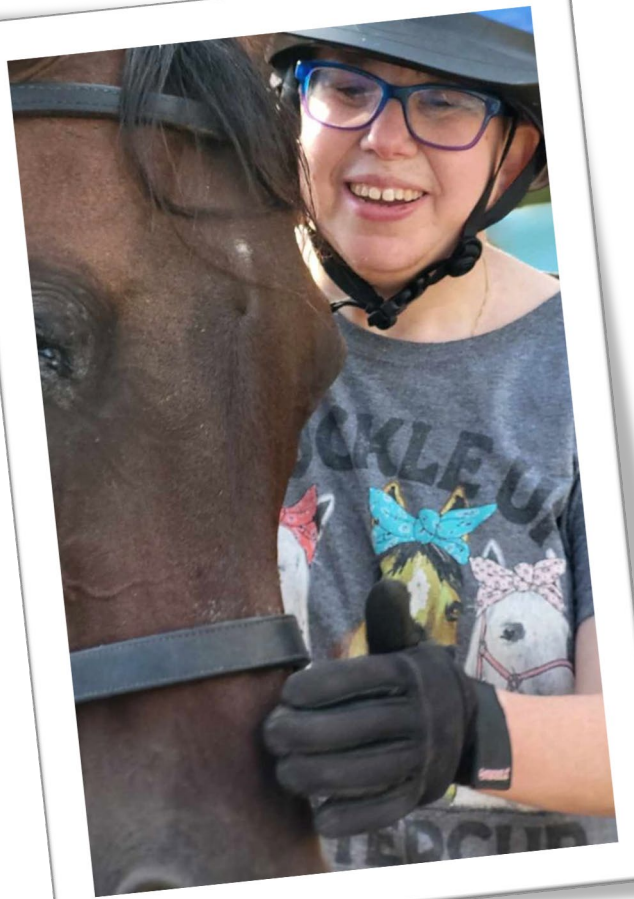
At one point, Stacey was tested for her aptitude to work on the floor at a sheltered workshop, but that option never quite resonated with her. She knew she would prefer a job in the community where she could earn at least minimum wage,

Stacey's story illustrates the importance of informed choice, individualized planning, and personal goals.

Background

Stacey, aged 45, lives with both parents and their four dogs Bella, Gus, Octavia and Max. She describes Max as a "daddy's boy." She has a sister living out of state that she also remains connected to.

Stacey opted to not attend a sheltered workshop before pursuing competitive employment, so she hit the ground running with the assistance of Paladin, a



northern Indiana employment service provider. She instinctively knew she wanted a job that would allow her to connect to others in her community, provide an outlet for her helping nature, and accommodate for weekly hours so that she could pursue her other passions and activities.

Finding Purpose at Al's Supermarket

Initially, Stacey found part-time employment at Jewel grocery in Michigan City. After working there for eight years, Stacey lost her job when the store closed. Fast forward, Stacey and the employment services staff at Paladin assisted her in securing a part-time job at Al's Supermarket. Eleven years later and working 10 hours per week, Stacey says of this job, "I love the customers. I love the co-workers."

As a relied-upon team member, Stacey pushes carts, builds to-go bags, completes price checks, bags

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groceries, retrieves products from shelving, and helps people find things. Regular customers at Al's know Stacey by name. If you ask her what the best thing about her job is, Stacey will say, "It's amazing and awesome." If you ask her what the worst thing is about her job, she will say, "Nothing. I think I like it all." Stacey describes her job as one she will remain in until she retires, because it makes her "happy."

Navigating Challenges

Stacey has had minor challenges throughout her employment history. These were primarily associated with finding work with a flexible schedule that allows Stacey to pursue other activities like cooking and horseback riding.

Stacey also experienced loss when one of her favorite supervisors, Jackie, passed away from Covid complications.

Both Stacey and her mother, though, say there were no other significant setbacks as she worked in the community, and they attribute this to goodness-of-fit with the job. Stacey's work-related challenges were mitigated through a collaborative effort between Paladin staff, the waiver case manager, and her parents.

Ingredients for Success

- **Honoring Personal Choice:** Stacey's thirst for social connectedness motivated her to look for community job opportunities. Moreover, that choice was further defined through preferences about the total number of hours worked. Stacey told her team what a meaningful routine would look like, and her provider staff honored, rather than criticized, those personal goals. Person-centered planning requires the ability to not only help a person identify life domain goals, but it also requires professional staff to remain judgment-free as they help their clients attain those goals. Stacey's contentment and future plans are a testament to this.

- **Creating a Meaningful Day:** Individuals themselves are the best people to identify what a meaningful routine would be to them. In the absence of full-time work, assisting an individual to identify and construct a full week or month is critical. Individuals do not have to work full-time to feel that they're contributing, accomplished, and satisfied.

Stacey likes to cook, go bowling, shop, organize her home spaces, have some alone time, go out to dinner, exercise, participate in other recreational activities, and ride horses. She spends one day a week attending to her horse-riding passion at a stable where she rides, grooms, and tends the horses there. "I have 29 horseback riding awards in my room, and five of them are blue," Stacey says proudly. Stacey inherits a pronounced love of animals (horses, dogs, and cats) from her mother, who once owned a horse named Cadet.

Stacey's mother notes it is important "for our children and our extended families" to have the opportunities to use their waiver funding to be able to get out of the home, to visit with people and places they want, or to work if they choose, and to build a life that is meaningful for them.

- **Support Integration:** Stacey receives provider services and supports through the Family Supports Medicaid waiver.

While grateful for the funding and support from the waiver, Stacey and her mom realize that funding is limited and may not pay for all the services they'd like. Adding one service may mean giving up another.

That said, coordinated efforts from all provider sources are a key element for Stacey's success. Integrating provider supports to make sure she can participate in non-work activities is key to Stacey. Clear communication, agreed upon roles, and intentional action provided by agency staff is a must-have ingredient for success.

- **Community Integration:** Stacey specifically notes the value of friendships resulting from employment and activities within the larger community. She has a sense of

belonging and fulfillment because of these friendships and her community integration. By participating in the broader community,

individuals can foster meaningful connections, develop valuable skills, and experience a greater sense of fulfillment.

Words of Wisdom

Stacey offers the following food for thought:

- Keep trucking and keep going at it. Stacey advises people to pursue their preferences, even if this means extra effort and extra help from others. She reminds people of her belief that the best benefit from competitive integrated employment is social connection.
- Make your own decisions. Pursue a job that aligns with your interests and preferences, even if that means part-time work.
- Seek support: Identify people who can help you with long-term planning. Stacey says it's important to think about a long-term plan, especially for people who rely on the primary support of their parents.



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