

*This is a project of the  
RI Cross Disability Coalition*

## Transformation Grant

RI WINS (Workforce Investment & New Solutions) is the name utilized by the RI Cross Disability Coalition for our DD Transformation Grant in collaboration with the RI Developmental Disabilities Council (RIDDC) and Skills for RI's Future. This newsletter provides information on the status of implementation of the goal areas within the project and efforts to educate and provide support to people with disabilities, staff from community agencies, and RI employers on creating sustainable change for meaningful and inclusive lives for individuals with disabilities.

### ***Tramell's Journey: A Sneaker Enthusiast Finds Fulfillment in Retail Employment***

In the heart of Rhode Island, a unique partnership between a youth transition service and the Salvation Army has paved the way for individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) to pursue their passion for work. One such inspiring story is that of Tramell, a young man whose love for sneakers led him to a fulfilling job at the Salvation Army Retail store.



*Tramell working the Bell Ringing Campaign*

## The Path to Success

Tramell's journey began with the youth transition services at the Fogarty Center, a program focused on one-on-one employment opportunities within the community. Within just six months of starting the program, Tramell realized his dream of working in retail, specifically at the Salvation Army's Pitman Street location in Providence. Despite potential challenges, he embraced a partially customized job, dedicating nearly 20 hours per week to his newfound role.

What makes Tramell's story even more remarkable is the organic connection that played a crucial role in his hire. Christopher Correa, a job coach with prior experience at the Salvation Army, leveraged his personal and professional network and social capital to facilitate a solid hire. This connection highlights the importance of networking in career development and underscores the positive impact that mentorship and support can have on individuals like Tramell.

## Weathering Challenges with Enthusiasm

Tramell's commitment to his work was evident when faced with challenges. His mother, concerned about the weather, contemplated whether he should go to work. However, Tramell's enthusiasm prevailed, showcasing his dedication to the job and his sense of belonging at the Salvation Army Retail store.

The partnership extended beyond regular employment, encompassing seasonal hiring opportunities like the Bell Ringing campaign. Collaborating with local businesses such as Stop and Shop, the program provides a chance for individuals with limited employment experience to gain valuable skills in customer service while contributing to the community. The money earned during these seasonal engagements directly supports local initiatives, creating a meaningful cycle of giving back. Major Steven Lopes agrees that "building relationships within the community is the most valuable way to raise awareness of the program and is built upon the strength of the people we serve and support".

David Reiss, CEO of The Fogarty Center fully supported the expansion of youth in transition services within the organization, "quoting the television show, the A Team, 'I love it when a plan comes together' is so similar to the relationship between the Salvation Army and the Fogarty Center. Mutually respectful of each other's missions

*Tramell's Journey (cont.)*

over the last 25 years, these two long standing non-profit agencies have formed an alliance that encourages and supports community participation and inclusion, aiding society as a whole. It is heartening to see people in need working hard for the benefit of all. Everyone has an opportunity to contribute their unique skills and gifts in this world! It is these types of business relationships that keep our community vibrant.”

### Exceeding Expectations

Tramell's success is a testament to the effectiveness of the youth transition services. The goal of the program is to have individuals employed within a year of starting the service, and Tramell not only met but exceeded this goal. His story reflects the positive impact of personalized employment support and the importance of community partnerships in creating opportunities for individuals with I/DD.

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### *Michael E's Journey to Success in the Office Environment*

In today's workforce, diversity and inclusion are essential components of a thriving workplace. Companies that embrace the unique strengths of individuals with different abilities contribute to a more vibrant and innovative work culture.

Michael E.'s journey began when he was referred to a job opportunity in office services. Michael, who is on the autism spectrum, had distinct needs and preferences, emphasizing his organizational skills and attention to detail. He was clear about his goals and wanted to work in a role different from typical positions for people with similar diagnoses, like bagging groceries.

### The Power of Networking

Networking played a pivotal role in Michael's employment journey. A colleague referred him to an administrative position at CareLink, an opportunity that perfectly aligned with his skill set. Despite initial reservations about his fit within the team, Michael's unique abilities and commitment to the job quickly dispelled any concerns.

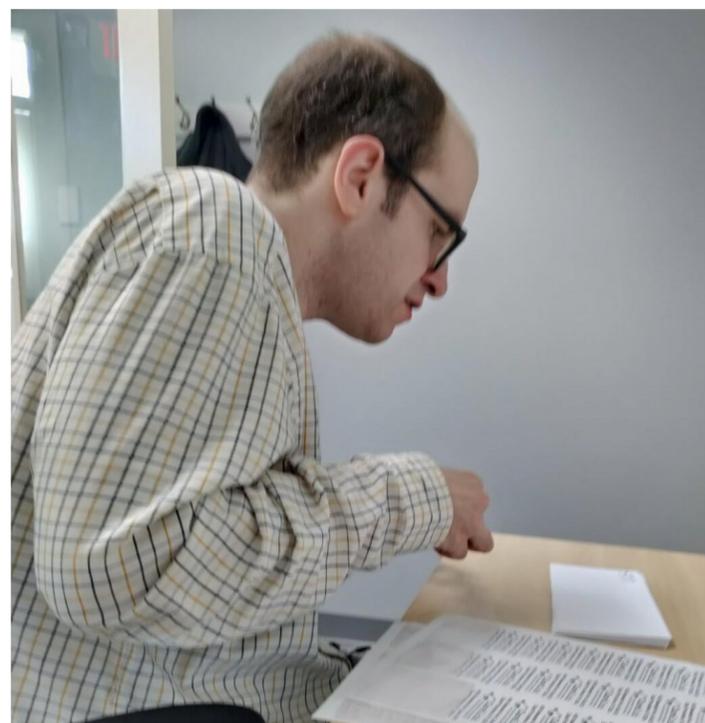
### Overcoming Initial Hesitations

During the hiring process, Michael's potential employer expressed concerns about effectively communicating tasks to him, given his placement on the autism spectrum. However, the supportive approach the hiring team took, guided by a commitment to treat him like any other employee, proved to be the key to Michael's success.

Jennifer Fraser, Associate Director, Workforce Development, AccessPoint RI, was crucial in preparing Michael for his new role to ensure a smooth transition. They worked on various aspects, from refining communication skills to addressing potential challenges that might arise in a professional setting. Michael's preparation for the interview showcased his eagerness and aptitude for the job.

Since his hire in September, Jennifer checks in bi-weekly to ensure his success. "He has strong tech skills, using Excel, but also YouTube videos of his photography," notes Jennifer. He is responsible for taking inventory of office and kitchen supplies for multiple locations. He fills in the excel sheet and forwards it to his supervisor to order products. The HR department enlists his help to make folders for new hires, gathering binders for training, printing each curriculum as he's advised of upcoming projects.

Working together, Michael and Jennifer planned a daily



*Michael Working at CareLink*

*Michael E's Journey (cont.)*

visual checklist, the best system of tasks to keep him focused. Of course, he typed it out and laminated the document. At work, he has his own laptop, desk, and shares office space. He also coordinates his own transportation, including the sporadic changes that come along with his work schedule. He also adapted nicely to his very active physical routine as his work required.

His social growth has been noticeable. Greeting his co-workers in the hallways and cordially asking visitors who they're coming to see are among his soft skills now. Not surprisingly, there is also a boost in his self-confidence. "He bought new clothes, comes in with his shirt tucked, and looks great. He completely dresses the part." "He's fantastic," according to Jen. That says it all.

### A Positive Workplace Environment

Michael's responsibilities at CareLink include answering phones, interacting with representatives, redirecting visitors, handling mail, and managing calendars. His role as an office assistant underscores the versatility of employment opportunities for individuals with diverse abilities.

The support and understanding provided by his colleagues, especially the Operations Coordinator, have been instrumental in his success. His manager, Brooke Huemann, said, "Michael brings such positivity to the office, it's been a wonderful experience. He greets everyone when he walks by and wishes them a great day."

### Championing Diversity in the Workplace

Michael's story challenges preconceived notions about the types of roles individuals with disabilities can excel in. His success serves as a testament to the importance of workplace diversity and inclusion, demonstrating that with the right support and understanding, individuals with unique abilities can contribute significantly to any organization.

Michael's journey to success in an office setting highlights the significance of creating inclusive workplaces where individuals with diverse abilities can thrive. As we celebrate stories like his, we move closer to a future where everyone, regardless of their background or abilities, has the opportunity to pursue fulfilling and meaningful careers.

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