

Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment

Jack's Story

Meet Jack, a 49-year-old man living in eastern Indiana. Jack likes being independent and would someday like to work with machinery in a factory.

While he's working at a fast-food restaurant to gain some job experience and work skills, he's also working toward earning his GED so he can someday be hired at his dream job.

Background

After his time in sheltered work, Jack began working with Benchmark and other service providers at some summer jobs. Although these jobs gave him some job experience in the community, Jack has a drive to be as independent as he can be. As a result, he began working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Benchmark in 2023 to obtain competitive integrated employment in his local community.

Jack lives with his brother and another roommate with Benchmark Service assistance in a supported living situation. He likes this because he has more independence. So, when he began working with VR



and a job coach from Benchmark, he emphasized that he wanted a job where he could also work as independently as possible.

Making New Discoveries

During the Discovery process with VR, he told his counselor that he was interested in working in a factory with machinery. Benchmark and VR helped him get involved with a service that helps people earn their GED, since that's often a requirement to work in a machinery job. Through this service, he toured a local Ivy Tech Community College campus, which includes a training program specializing in training on machines that make medical parts. Jack discovered he has a deep interest in becoming trained in that area of machinery. As a result, he attends the service helping him to get his GED a couple nights a week and is working hard to attain his dream.

For more information: [Center on Community Living and Careers/Employment](#)

But, while working toward his dream job, Jack still wants to have a job in the community. His VR counselor asked if he might be interested in a job at a fast-food restaurant. This kind of job can help him work on soft job skills and help him gain some job experience, both of which are important for obtaining his future goals. Jack said yes and interviewed at two fast-food restaurants after filling out their applications online with VR and his job coach's help.

Jack got a job at Rally's restaurant after a short interview. He began working there right away and now works 2-4 days a week. His staff from supported living or his job coach usually provide transportation, which unfortunately means Jack can't work in the evenings because he would not easily have transportation.

Jack's been working at Rally's since the fall of 2023. He enjoys his job, especially because it helps him keep busy and he can learn new things. Jack does many different jobs at Rally's including working the frying machine, making sandwiches, cooking the hamburgers, cleaning up, running the dishwasher, freezer stocking, handing orders out through the drive through, and running orders out to waiting customers. The only job Jack does not feel comfortable doing is working the registers. Luckily, there are many other jobs he can do.

The Right Supports

Jack's coworkers joke around a lot and seem to interact well together. His boss uses natural supports to help Jack learn the job. These include providing sheets with step-by-step instructions and pictures of how to do jobs like working the fryer and building sandwiches. These sheets are provided to all workers in training, and Jack has been able to use his for as long as he needs to.

Jack also received assistance from VR and his job coach from Benchmark. They helped him complete the W2, tax, and other paperwork through Rally's online work system, which was initially

overwhelming for Jack. VR also helped buy some clothing for the uniforms required at Rally's.

Jack's job coach initially went with Jack for nearly every shift as Jack was first learning the job. He assisted Jack in remembering different steps, referring to the natural supports he was provided, and helping him communicate if he had questions or needed assistance. Once his job coach saw that Jack needed less help and was learning his job successfully, he started to come less often to Rally's so Jack could become more and more independent. Now Jack's job coach usually visits about once a week unless Jack is learning a new skill or if there is a situation where he needs extra support.

Finding Purpose in a Part-Time Job

Jack wants to work in the community to stay busy and active. He wants to earn his own money and be as independent as he can be. He's willing to put in the work to learn his job at Rally's, while also continuing his education and training so he can pursue his future job interests.

When asked what the best thing about his current employment is, Jack says, "Just working is the best thing for me."

He also mentioned that this job is better than other jobs he has tried in the past, because it's not boring and keeps him busy. Jack seems to enjoy working in an environment where there are different people and diverse things going on.

He also speaks positively about his boss and coworkers and being able to work in the community so that he can meet and get to know different people. He says that his coworkers "help me understand stuff."

Navigating Challenges

Jack is excited to begin building sandwiches and is working hard to learn how, but that means his job coaches have had to increase their time with Jack for

a while, as he learns this new responsibility. Sandwiches need to be made in a specific amount of time, and although Jack has been doing great at learning how to build them, it still takes more time for him. His job coaches are working with Jack to communicate with others when he is learning a new skill and needs more help. They've also worked with his boss to schedule Jack so he can make sandwiches at off-peak times, which will allow him to take more time to build them while he is learning the skills.

Ingredients for Success

Jack's personal determination and desire to learn and work have been key to his successful transition

to work in the community. Jack very much wants to be as independent as possible, and his support team have embraced this same expectation.

Using both job coaching and natural supports has been an important ingredient in Jack's success because his boss and co-workers can provide the natural supports, and his job coach only has to step in when specifically needed.

Another part of Jack's success is the support he is receiving through his Medicaid waiver services to help him obtain his GED so he can move on to participate in the Ivy Tech machinist program.

Words of Wisdom

When asked what advice Jack may have for someone who wants to move from sheltered work to competitive integrated employment, he said:

"They might want to go to VR, and VR can help them out and give them a trial period. They can help them out with whatever they need. They got different areas they can help them out with, like uniforms and transportation. They'll come in and be there when they need help with the job."

When asked about his future employment goals, he excitedly said:

"Now I am going to school, and if I finish school, I might work this job for five years and then I can go to another job. I want to work on machines and stuff. I am getting my GED and have been working on it for 1.5 years. I go to Literacy Alliance connected to Benchmark, and I get one-on-one tutoring. I hope to go to Ivy Tech later on. I took a tour at Ivy Tech. I want to learn machining CNC machining at Ivy Tech. I'm real interested in machines."

Jack also told us about how he took an inclusive career class in high school where he learned to fix machines like lawn mower engines. He said it took him some time, but eventually he learned how to use the tools and fix the machines. He talked about how much he liked that class and how excited he is to continue to build those skills in his future.



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