

PIT – CASE STUDY 11

Against All Odds: Larry will have a job!

When Larry was 15 years old, his reading teacher told his mother “Larry will never have a job. He needs too much support.” Today Larry is 18 years old and thanks to the outcome of the Discovery process, he will have a job that aligns with his interests and skills and includes the supports he needs.

“Larry will graduate from high school with a real life...one that is happy, meaningful, productive, and joyful,” Joan, Larry’s mother, said. “This includes Larry being as independent as possible and having a job, friends, and community involvement.”

The Discovery process was initiated to gather more information to develop Larry’s educational curriculum and work experience opportunities as he continues his transition from high school to customized employment. The Partners in Transition Training and Technical Assistance Project facilitated a dedicated high school team which included Larry’s family through Discovery. They are all certain that Larry will have a job when he exits the school system.

To “discover” Larry’s interest and skill areas a variety of locations were explored including: museums, bookstores, public libraries, thrift stores, the mall, and Busch Gardens. Within the school environment, discovery occurred in the media center, Spanish club, Performing Arts Center, Front Office and Business Education class.

Larry’s interests were narrowed down to 4 areas: books, computers, shopping, and being in the water. He likes to organize misplaced books in a library, check out books, and read reference books. Larry likes searching for information on the computer and to shop for books, videos, and DVD/CDs. Swimming in the water is of high interest to Larry as well.

Larry’s employment skills include: a great memory, strong reading skills, accurate typist, can organize and sort, decent speller, strong navigating skills (able to learn new locations rapidly and navigate with ease), likes to deliver items, enjoys people, loves the internet, loud noises do not bother him, can carry items, alphabetizing, will shut down all unattended computers and turn off lights in vacant rooms. The team agreed that Larry is happy most of the time, a real people-pleaser, good at following directions and a schedule.

A critical outcome Discovery is the identification of a person’s “Ideal Working Conditions” for employment. For Larry, these include:

1. A job that incorporates his Larry’s interests.
2. Scheduled work between 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
3. A variety of tasks.
4. Opportunity for movement.
5. Change of scenery during the day.
6. Opportunities for a “relaxation break” provided.
7. Offer choices phrased as: “Larry, will you make a choice” rather than “Larry, make a choice.”
8. Daily written schedules - sometimes even schedules within tasks.

9. Positive reinforcement (gestures such as high-five or a thumbs-up; or enthusiastic comments such as “Good job!”, “You’re awesome!”, and “You’re the dude!”)
10. A work site that is accepting of Larry as he is. He tends to make loud noises when he is happy, and should be in an environment that embraces this.

“It’s important to note that Larry’s autism is complex,” said transition assistant Sean Braun. “He requires one on one supervision for his safety at all times.” In very familiar settings, this sometimes means, he will be shadowed from a safe distance behind. He is not aware of potentially dangerous situations which make him vulnerable to strangers.

“Larry has extensive and unwavering support from his immediate family. They are a critical and integral part of all aspects of his life,” said Braun. Although his family has the goal to support Larry to be as independent as possible, they also remain committed to ensuring that he receives the level of support necessary to live the life he desires. As a result, he receives personal care assistance (PCA) through the Medicaid-waiver who are typically available to provide support in the afternoons and sometimes on weekends.

Right now the Larry is moving into the stage of community customized work experiences. The plan is for him to have unpaid community work experiences two days a week. This will help provide more information about what job is the best fit for Larry.

He will initially participate in short-term unpaid community jobs where he will experience the following in familiar environments:

1. Sorting mail.
2. Straightening books in familiar libraries.
3. Shredding.
4. Delivering Items using a map.
5. Vending machines.
6. Typing in all caps

The high school team continues to work diligently and creatively to support Larry in the next phase of his journey toward customized employment, but the odds are against him.

Larry’s mom does not want her son to be a statistic in the ‘not employed’ column. “He is a person who will work and pay taxes just like other citizens,” she said. “Thanks to the commitment and support of Partners in Transition and the school team the dream of Larry having a real life will be a reality.”