



Supported Employment

Exceeding job expectations

Michellee Grogan succeeds with support from co-workers

At first Michellee Grogan of Salem was frightened about work, but was willing to try it. “I needed my job coach to show me what to do,” she says.

When she was still in her last year of high school, Grogan started working in the Department of Human Services Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS), with the help of a classroom aide/job coach. Her job coach initially helped her at the job site, and helped her learn to ride the bus to work.

By the time she graduated in June 2000, Michellee had learned the office assistant job and overcome her fears. And her co-workers had learned how to help Michellee be a part of their team without the need for an ongoing job coach.



Michellee Grogan filing documents at DHS

“I like my friends at work,” Grogan says. “I like learning new things, and I like to hear that I did a good job.”

“Her teachers and others thought that Michellee and her classmates would always need help from a job coach—paid for with public funds—to keep a job,” says Molly Holsapple, Adult Program Specialist of ODDS. “In fact it is possible to have workers already on the job help an employee with disabilities -- this is called natural support,” Holsapple says.

*“Keep trying and never give up!”
Michellee Grogan*

Michellee’s initial assignment was in the mail room for ODDS. Her co-worker Jane Patterson “carved out” pieces of the Office Assistant job description for her, including sorting and delivering mail, and filing and copying for ODDS staff.

Michellee's co-workers provide her with the same kind of support they would give to any team member, plus extra support when she is learning a new task or when things around her are changing -- such as the move to a new office building in 2004. Her co-workers found that Michellee could quickly learn a new job if they broke it down into clear steps for her. They paired her with a "buddy" when she was learning new tasks, and developed written checklists for her to refer to when needed.

Grogan has now gone far beyond initial expectations as more and more tasks were added to her job description. She handles large faxing and copying projects, and stuffs envelopes for mailings of up to 700 pieces. She also handles incoming paperwork sorting information with 20 or more items.

"It's quite a complex job," Patterson says. "I always felt that Michellee's capabilities far exceeded what we initially expected her to do."

She's a quick learner and a fast worker, Patterson adds. "I'll bring her some work and I have to tell her there's no hurry, but she'll do it right now anyway," she says with a laugh.

"Many employers think that people with disabilities won't fit into the work environment without special help from a job coach," Holsapple says. "Michellee's employers learned that she could make a big contribution and fit right in if they learned how to customize support and supervision for her."

Michellee works 40 hours a week, fully paid with benefits, and supports herself. She lives at home with her mom and her dog Sugar.

In addition to working, Michellee participates in Special Olympics and has an active social life with many friends. Michellee is beginning to dream about her next big goal: living more independently. Her advice to other people with disabilities? "Keep trying and never give up!"