

Finding Momentum Through Mentorship: Marcus and Donna's Employment

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A New Chapter After School

When Marcus finished his transition program, his mother Donna knew that finding employment would be challenging. Marcus, a young adult with intellectual disability and autism, wanted to work, but the family faced uncertainty about where to begin. Like many families, they found themselves navigating a complex service system while trying to identify meaningful employment opportunities. At the start of the Employment Pathways Projects, Donna described feeling overwhelmed by the process. She worried about Marcus's motivation to work, his need for ongoing support, and how to connect him with the services he needed to succeed.

Learning From Someone Who Had Been There



Through the mentoring program, Donna was matched with another parent whose son had successfully found employment. Together, they discussed employment goals, explored community resources, and identified next steps for Marcus. One of the biggest challenges was connecting Marcus to vocational rehabilitation services and understanding how employment supports worked.

Donna's mentor helped her prepare for upcoming steps, identify resources, and think creatively about opportunities in the community. Her mentor also encouraged Donna to draw on the strengths of her existing network. As Donna reflected later, this shift in thinking helped open doors that she had not previously considered.

Employment Success

Six months into the mentorship program, Marcus secured a position as a Porter Assistant at a local car dealership. In this role, he cleaned work areas and stocked the service center kitchenette while receiving support from vocational rehabilitation services.

"Because of the prep with my mentor, I was aware of what next steps were coming and able to be an advocate for my son."

Although finding employment took time, the mentoring relationship helped Donna remain focused on the goal and confident in her ability to advocate for her son.

"I came into it and I've always been a huge advocate for [Marcus], but you get tired. I was tired of fighting. I was tired of arguing with people about what to do for him."

More Than a Job

For Donna, one of the most valuable aspects of the program was having someone who understood the challenges families face.

The mentoring relationship provided practical guidance, encouragement, and a trusted source of support throughout the employment journey. Marcus and Donna's story illustrates how connecting families with experienced parent mentors can help families navigate the often-complex path toward employment.

About the Employment Pathways Project's Mentorship Program

The Employment Pathways Project connects parents of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who are seeking employment with experienced parent mentors whose family members have successfully obtained employment in the community. Mentors provide:

- Encouragement and emotional support
- Guidance on navigating employment and disability service systems
- Information about community resources
- Practical strategies for supporting employment goals

The program is designed to help families build confidence, expand their networks, and pursue meaningful employment opportunities for their family members with IDD.

Learn More

Marcus and Donna's story reflects findings from a larger research study examining the employment journeys of four adults with IDD and their families, as well as the role of parent mentorship in supporting employment outcomes. Key findings included:

- Employment is often a long and complex journey for families.
- Parent mentors provide valuable guidance, encouragement, and practical advice.
- Families benefit from having someone who understands their experiences and can help navigate employment systems and services.
- Mentorship can strengthen advocacy skills and confidence while pursuing employment goals.

More about research study 1: <https://idd.vcurrtec.org/research/rs1.cfm>

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