

9-25-14

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Mike Maley**

**Re: Employment First: Bonnie's Story**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

I'd like to start this week's message by sharing a recent media story about Oregon's move towards more integrated, community-based employment opportunities: <http://www.pamplinmediagroup.com/pt/239-business/233899-97680-a-move-toward-integrated-employment>

Now I want to share a recent employment success story that came out of the [Employment First Seamless Transition Pilot](#). The goal of the pilot is to develop best practice guidelines for helping students with disabilities to obtain their job of choice by the time they exit from their high school transition program.

Bonnie Sibley, 21, graduated from the Lake Oswego Transition Program in June 2014 with a job.



Bonnie at work at LexiDog in Lake Oswego.

Photo: Lightflies

“As a participant in the pilot, Bonnie received a series of services to achieve her goal of a community job,” said Heidi Dirkse-Graw, owner of Portland-based Dirkse Counseling and Consulting. “A formal Discovery process provided an opportunity to identify where she shines the most – where her unique strengths, interests and preferences merge with vocational themes and job tasks. An individualized Employment Profile then identified potential companies in her geographic

area that might benefit from her contributions.”

Through the coordination of the Clackamas County Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office, Bonnie met with Glenn Bishop, an employment specialist with Dirkse Counseling and Consulting. Glenn met Bonnie in late March and began the process of Discovery. He met Bonnie and her family to discover her interests, passions and strengths. He also watched her routine, and got a sense of the types of chores and activities she did in her home.

During Glenn's visit to Bonnie's home, he found out Bonnie was attached to the family dog.

"As we went through the Discovery process, it became clearer that her passion for animals and as someone who deeply cares about animals was a big part of who she is," Glenn said. "It was a natural fit to explore this avenue for jobs."

Glenn contacted LexiDog in Lake Oswego, a bike ride away from Bonnie's home. After a short-term work assessment to make sure Bonnie liked the environment at LexiDog and that it was a good match, the company hired Bonnie in June 2014. She graduated from her transition program with a job already in place.

Visiting Bonnie at LexiDog on a recent Friday afternoon, it was clear that she loves her job. She was so excited to start working with the dogs that she kept glancing at them during our talk. In fact, LexiDog manager Stephanie Parkin said Bonnie sometimes shows up before her shift because she can't wait to start work.

"It's been really fun having her here," Stephanie said. "It is such a thrill to find someone who truly wants to be here and who loves the dogs so much."

LexiDog is a "boutique and social club" for dogs. The company has four locations in the Portland area. During busy times there can be up to 50 dogs of all shapes and sizes at the Lake Oswego location.

After being asked if she likes her job, Bonnie quickly corrects the question: "I would put that I 'love my job,' not 'like.'"

"I'm obsessed with animals," she added. "I told my parents I would love to live on a farm with a ton of animals, but they don't seem excited about that idea."

Bonnie's duties include helping the dogs play nicely with one another, taking them outside for fresh air, and cleaning up after the animals. Recently she started

occasionally bathing the dogs, a big responsibility that she has worked her way up to.

“I’ve started getting more responsibility, the longer I’ve been here,” she said. “Last time I bathed a dog really well, I got a tip from a customer!”

Bonnie experiences significant anxiety issues. She said she also struggles to stay focused and initially had to have a lot of instruction on tasks. She said the process of Discovery was really valuable to her.

“I actually learned things about myself I didn’t know!” she said. “In school, I volunteered at Kindercare. I wasn’t sure whether I wanted to work with kids or animals. I’ve definitely decided on animals now.”

Bonnie works closely with her co-workers to exercise the dogs and keep them busy. While she currently works two days a week, her manager said they want to increase her hours as the busy winter season arrives.

“Sometimes the rest of us get so busy managing the daily tasks, we forget we are here for the dogs,” Stephanie said. “Bonnie is our girl when it comes to loving the animals. And if we have a shy dog that kind of seems nervous, she is the first one to cuddle and work with that dog.”

In fact, Bonnie said she has been so happy working at LexiDog that recently she was able to stop taking some of her medications. She looks forward to continuing her work and learning new skills at her job.

“I’m very happy here,” she said. “I like everyone and I have all my doggy friends here.”

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).

~ Mike

- Additional photos of Bonnie at work can be found at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dhsoregon/15332926805>