

Before coming to supported employment I was unsure of myself and my abilities. Because of my physical and mental health problems, I hadn't worked for years and had been in an abusive situation that left me pretty hopeless, depressed and withdrawn. The past jobs I had I knew I could not do and I didn't think I was capable of doing much else. My self-worth was in the toilet and I was afraid to fail but, I wanted something more, I couldn't see myself going on the way I was. My therapist recommended me to the Abacus Program. I thought this was something different I hadn't done in the county I came from and kept an open mind. I found it to be a wonderful place that encouraged me supported me, and I started to feel safe there. I began the work crew program and I subsequently felt like my life was starting to have purpose. After this I was introduced to my Employment Specialist. She has helped me in more ways than I would have ever thought. She's teaching me its ok to ask for help from vocational rehab and others and that there is still a lot out there for an older person like myself with disabilities.

Supported Employment advisor showed me my strengths and that my life has value. She didn't talk down to me; she has encouraged and supported me through all my fears and decisions. I shared that I would like to reinvent myself workwise and help others. She asked me questions and suggested things, but ultimately it was my choice. Her energy and excitement for me was contagious and I was enjoying the process instead of being fearful. I was feeling empowered. She showed me that my life experiences can be a way to help others. And, for the first time in years, I actually started to become excited that my life might have a purpose again. I realized I didn't have to rely on my family or the system for everything. Supported Employment has given me a purpose in life. It's gotten me out of my head and every day struggles and given me hope and empowerment to better my life and hopefully pay it forward to others.

Since being in Supported employment I have earned many educational certificates. I have been a home care worker and a personal care assistant and a certificate as a community health worker and at this time, I am a peer support specialist, With the David Romprey Warm line which I love. I get along with the people I work with and look forward to seeing and talking to the callers. I now can contribute money for my living expenses; I can afford a car which gets me places I couldn't go before. I'm happier and feel better about myself in ways I never thought I would. Talking to people and creating relationships, learning different views and life experiences is teaching me to keep an open mind and to listen nonjudgmentally. It has truly taught me that everyone can contribute something if given the opportunity.

Patti C