



Vocational Services Program

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Presented by Donna Gabriel: From Homelessness to Housing and a New Job

Sam is a 26-year-old African-American male who experienced homelessness in 2016 due to inadequate support for his mental health disability. During his two years of homelessness, he was referred for his own apartment through the Housing Initiative Program (HIP) with Interfaith Works (IW) providing ongoing case management support. He had also been connected to People Encouraging People (PEP). With steadfast support from N'Jeri, his case manager at Interfaith Works, and services from PEP, his mental and physical health became more stable. He could see that by having the support to manage his health, he would be more successful overall. Once settled in his home near Wheaton Plaza, he continued to work with his Interfaith Works HIP case manager N'Jeri on a monthly basis. Sam quickly expressed interest in working toward financial security through employment. N'Jeri completed a referral to Interfaith Works Vocational Services, which is experienced in working with individuals who are vulnerable and disabled to find employment and increase income. Sam immediately began to work with his new vocational counselor Donna in March 2019.

Sam expressed interest in finding a part-time job close to his apartment, and he and Donna got right to work on his resume. Although he had no employment history, Sam had completed two internships during his high school years, and had volunteered at Asbury Methodist Village for nine months as a patient transporter. His internships and volunteer experience allowed him to develop good customer service and problem-solving skills, and to understand the importance of teamwork.

Donna helped Sam apply to a few restaurants and some retail stores in Wheaton. Bar Louie asked him to come in for an interview. Since Sam had already practiced interviewing skills with a vocational volunteer, he felt confident and ready. The interview was for a part-time dishwasher position, and at the end of the interview, Sam was offered the job. His first day of work was April 2nd, and it has proved to be a stable position within walking distance of his home. Sam began earning \$12.50 per hour. Donna checked in with Sam recently and he is now earning \$13.00 an hour. He has been moved from the back of the house to the front of the house taking on different responsibilities. Furthermore, Sam has harnessed a strong relationship with his co-worker and supervisors, and with encouragement, dedication, and support he is flourishing in his new job.

The Interfaith Works Vocational Services Program provides services to some of Montgomery County's most vulnerable residents. In 2018, we placed 168 clients in good jobs. Collectively they earned more than \$2.8 million in increased wages in their full- and part-time jobs. One of the key components of the program's success is that clients receive ongoing support for at least twelve months after employment. This success story is an illustration of why Vocational Services are so important in helping those experiencing homelessness increase their income, which is both a Federal and County goal in the work to end homelessness.