

WHAT MATTERS?

New Experiences

Lorraine, 47, lived with her mother for the first 33 years of her life. Born with an intellectual disability, Lorraine now reflects, "My mother did everything for me and taught me all I knew." And when her mother died 14 years ago, Lorraine says, "I was lost." She experienced huge changes, including moving to Maryland to live with her sister, and looking for work with the support of a provider agency in Prince George's County.

Fortunately, her sister, who at the time had a 3-year-old daughter, soon gave birth to another baby girl, and Lorraine enjoyed taking care of the children. Lorraine had always loved children, and she was able to be helpful to her sister and nieces.

So when she was offered a volunteer position caring for toddlers in a childcare program, she was both nervous and excited. "Working with children was a dream come true," she explains, "but I wasn't sure a job would happen for me."

At first, her provider agency supported her with daily job coaching and transportation. After six months, she began earning a salary for her work. Now, 11 years later, Lorraine remains a trusted employee of the childcare center. She works 25 hours a week, and while she still depends on support for transportation each workday, her job coaching has faded to weekly.

Lorraine's employer raves: "She is an exceptionally committed, conscientious employee. She loves the children. She really works when she's here, giving the toddlers her complete attention. She is always engaged and looking out for them. And people love and value her."



Lorraine holds a child on her lap at the daycare where she works.

"I fell in love with my job," Lorraine says. "When I got my first paycheck, I was so proud I wanted to hang it on my wall."

Each weekday after work, Lorraine receives some personal supports to pursue her interests and try new experiences. She goes belly dancing and bowling, and taps into her creative side by making and selling her own flower arrangements and wreaths.

Lorraine notes that she learned to be brave after her mother's death. "I learned that being brave doesn't mean you always have to do well or win. But being brave means that you have to try."

What matters? That our days be spent with purpose. Services are changing to help people with disabilities lead the lives they want. Ensuring they have opportunities to work and spend their days in other meaningful ways, alongside people without disabilities, is one of the ways change is happening. Learn more at: www.md-council.org