

**BUILDING
FULL
LIVES**

Wes Johnson



After finishing high school ten years ago, Wes began attending Opportunity Development Center's (ODC) Marshfield work center Monday through Friday for prevocational services. A few years later, he got a cleaning job at a local furniture and appliance store. Wes did not like the job and it wasn't a good match for him. After a short time, he left the job disappointed and resumed facility-based prevocational services with ODC. Over the next several years, it became clear Wes wasn't happy at ODC. Wanting to offer Wes something different, ODC staff began talking with him and his parents about trying another job in the community and finding other meaningful ways he could spend his day.

Over the course of two years, ODC staff held discussions with Wes and his parents about the positive aspects of community employment. They invited Wes to get involved in ODC's CommunityConnect services for a volunteer opportunity at Columbus school. He also joined a group of his peers who meet independently, without staff or parent support, for bowling every Tuesday. Both of these helped to introduce Wes to new ideas and options in the community.

As part of the small volunteer group, Wes began helping out in the school's library -shelving, checking-in, relabeling, and adding protective covers to books. Wes really enjoyed it and had positive things to say to his parents about being in the community. This helped convince his parents that he was ready to try working in the community again.

In December 2017, Wes was hired at a local bar in Marshfield, Nutz Deep, to wash dishes and prep silverware. He works fifteen hours per week, makes \$9 an hour and is supported by his coworkers. Wes loves his job.

Wes continues to go to ODC for facility-based services a few mornings per week because both of his parents work, and they are concerned about him being at the house alone. Since he lives several miles out of town, transportation is an issue and his only option at this point is to take the county bus into ODC in the mornings. ODC continues to help Wes and his family explore more options for transportation and meaningful activities in the community, such as taking the bus to the library near his work, so he can spend time there before work rather than the ODC facility.

The biggest change for Wes over the past year hasn't been to his schedule, it's been his outlook. Wes has found work that makes him happy. He feels appreciated. His team sees he is much more confident now. He loves bowling with his friends, taking his girlfriend on dates to the roller rink, and saving money for their wedding.

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