

# Shantrese Lee

**S**hantrese bubbles with enthusiasm talking about her sewing class through Milwaukee Recreation. “You know, I really like this class...it is helping me to learn how to sew on my own machine. That’s what I need to learn to do...learn how to thread my own machine and not depend on nobody else to do it for me.”

Shantrese is supported by Goodwill of Southeastern Wisconsin’s Beyond Work services. Goodwill started Beyond Work after participating in the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities’ Building Full Lives initiative. The Beyond Work concept recognizes there is more to life than just work. People with disabilities who work in competitive integrated employment may need support to continue to build skills, make connections, and find meaningful things to do in the community.

Shantrese’s transition from Goodwill’s facility-based prevocational services into a community job was rocky at first. Finding the right job match and the right type of support was essential. Through her early work experiences and first community job, she learned that she prefers job coaches who don’t hover too much “because I have to learn how to do my own stuff. I don’t like people over me.” After a couple of setbacks, she applied for a job at Planet Fitness. She interviewed, got the job, and has been there since 2015. This has been a great fit for Shantrese and the staff at Planet Fitness have really embraced her as a valued member.



Besides bringing a strong and focused work ethic to the business, Shantrese also positively impacts their culture.

“She perks everyone up,” said Jerrod Cruz her supervisor. “She’s high energy, super helpful, and wants to try new things.” Sometimes Shantrese will surprise people with random acts like writing a nice letter or bringing in treats. Little things that don’t get the attention they deserve but that have a big impact, according to her boss. Shantrese has earned Employee of the Month and now wears a name badge that says, “Superstar.” The team at Planet Fitness even surprised her with a party on her birthday.



Shantrese works 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. Outside of work, Shantrese has support through Beyond Work to continue building skills and connections in the community. The Beyond Work Community Connector, Emily Garcia, met with Shantrese at her home to learn about her interests, skills and goals. Shantrese shared she’d like to learn to sew with the ultimate goal of making clothes for her family and to sell or give away to people in need. Shantrese and Emily researched sewing classes in the area and discovered an entry level sewing class at the local high school through Milwaukee Recreation. Shantrese attends the class on Thursday evenings. She’s made a shopping bag, a pillowcase, and is working on some pajama pants. Besides enjoying learning how to sew, Shantrese likes the social aspect of “Making new friends... yeah, I made new friends.”



Shantrese's skills and confidence have grown significantly since leaving the Goodwill's facility-based program. "Shantrese has just grown so much. Her self-esteem is definitely stronger. She's just so proud of what she does. She acts as an ambassador at some of our open houses and talks about what services she participated in and what she's doing now. She really sees herself as a role model for other individuals we are working with. It's really cool she identifies herself that way," said her former Goodwill staff. "The sewing class is so cool to me. I didn't know she was interested in sewing. She's just glowing talking about it...She's just like a different person. She's really an adult now—through and through. She's making all these life decisions. She's really creating a life for herself."

Shantrese likes working in the community: "I like what I'm doing very well. Nobody bothers me. I do my work and nobody distracts me. I do not like when people distract me from my work. You need to wait until I'm done and then I can talk to you...if I'm in my zone and I'm busy, leave me alone."

What's next for Shantrese? She plans to take the sewing class again and has expressed interest in exploring singing. As for her job, she's quite content: "I love Planet Fitness. I never want to leave there. I found where I want to be."

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For more information about the Building Full Lives initiative, visit <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/building-full-lives/> or contact Molly Cooney at 608-266-0266.