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*What Having a Job in the Community Meant to Me*

My name is Molly Waugh and I am 25 years old. I was born in Madison and I have lived here my whole life. I have an autism spectrum disorder. In 2019 and 2020, I participated in the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities program, Partners in Policy Making. It was a great experience, and I learned a lot. I was very interested in learning about inclusive employment for people with disabilities.

Before COVID-19, I had two paid jobs in the community. One job was washing, drying, and folding laundry for a restaurant. I would go with my job coach and one other person to a laundromat two mornings a week. I enjoyed the routine and the calm atmosphere of the job. I learned how to operate a washer and how to measure the right amount of detergent using a measuring cup. I learned how to load the dryer and fold the table linens in the precise way the restaurant wanted them folded.

My other job was bussing tables at a coffee shop. I would fill up coffee creamers and stock sugars and napkins, making sure everything was where it should be. I liked that I had the same hours each week. I liked the independence I gained by taking the bus home each day, except for Fridays, when I would get a ride home from my father.

Both my jobs helped me gain valuable skills that will stick with me for the rest of my life. I learned social skills in interacting with my coworkers and the customers at the coffee shop. I learned how to be punctual by showing up for my shifts on time each day. And I learned how to control my emotions in tense situations. I also learned how to ask for time off.

My jobs ended in March with the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, I have been adjusting to being unemployed. I have also been thinking about my future post-pandemic and if I will return to work in the community. I am exploring ways to work from home and what that might look like for me. I read the news every day and I like to write

stories. I like to cook meals for myself and have learned to make some special dishes. I also like to exercise. I'm learning Spanish and I like to watch TV in Spanish. I hope to learn how to create my own blog using WordPress. And of course, I like to sing and play the piano!

I have appreciated all the activities that LOV Inc has set up to keep people connected virtually during the pandemic. I've been able to attend my friend's concert via Zoom.

My ideal future job post-COVID-19 would include these interests. I'm looking forward to what the future may bring, but COVID-19 has also helped me stay focused on today and to make the most of what each day brings.

When the pandemic is over, I want to take the lessons I've learned from being employed and unemployed to find a new job where I can develop my skills and interests.