



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



Kristina's New Adventures- Don't settle for low level jobs.

My name is Kristina Harris, I have Cerebral Palsy and I use a power wheelchair. I am my own guardian and don't have much of a family support network, but I manage all aspects of my life. I live in Madison, and I work for a software company named Widen which I love very much. When I started at Widen, my job was janitorial work. I showed Widen how hard I worked in Janitorial and how great an employee I was. I really wanted to be a part of Widen so I asked the CEO of the company if they would consider having me move into more hours. They created an Office Assistant position for me to do but discovered that my reading skills were quite low compared to my capabilities. When I went to school, it was the start of disability inclusion and teachers didn't believe I could learn much. They did most of my schoolwork for me and didn't give me the chance to succeed or fail on my own.



When I moved to the Office Assistant position, my manager was concerned about how these skills were holding me back from much greater things. They have programs and funding set aside to support all their other employee's continuous improvement. They found me some support too! For the last 2 years, Widen has brought me a tutor to teach me to read. This has opened many more opportunities for me both personally and professionally. I can now pay my own bills, read menus, read emails, manage my own health care, interview and hire my own home care staff. Through this tutoring, I have been able to get into speech therapy which has helped me a ton with my communication skills. I now love entertaining the people on my bus by reading stories. I can't believe how this simple 2-year process has improved so many other areas of my life.

I was recently asked by Widen to go out to the community to discuss disability advocacy and disability rights. I have been looking into opportunities and even joining some advocacy groups in my area. I look forward to talking to other businesses to help them think about hiring people with disabilities for jobs other than janitorial or lower-level jobs.

