



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

September 2024

Being an Artist is my passion- and my JOB!



My name is Kelsey McNamara. I have lived in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin for two years but I am from Wausau, Wisconsin. I have Autism and PTSD and a developmental disability. I am a working artist, and I have spent the last two years building my art business called “Obviously Kelsey”. I care a lot about making my dreams come true but also helping other people with disabilities can have as a career option.

I knew I wanted to be an artist since I took my first real art class in high school. I picked up a watercolor paint brush and I could tell I would paint for the rest of my life. I like to paint for people- when someone wants a painting from me, I have a conversation with them so I know who they are. If it’s someone I know and they have a big life event coming up, I make them a painting. It takes a lot of physical effort for me to paint but I love to do it. My art has been in art exhibits all over the country and I have won several awards for my art!

When I decided to start a business selling my art, I knew that I couldn’t make a lot of original paintings, but I could make cards and prints from my originals and sell those. I found a really amazing printer; her name is Nicole and she works at PostNet in Grafton, Wisconsin. We work together to test new

products and make my art come alive on cards and bookmarks and now we are working on other things too, like journals. With her help and the help of my mom, I can sell my art at stores and at conferences and events.

I have the art part down, but I needed help with the business stuff. I started working with Opportunity Development Centers (ODC) on something called Self-Employment. I am working with them and with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to get the supports and services I need to do my job as a self-employed artist. Not a lot of people in Wisconsin have done this and it is not an easy process. It is taking a long time, and it has a lot of steps I don't always understand. I want more people with disabilities to know that if they have a good business idea, being self-employed can be a job and that you can get support to do it. I also want people to know that the process is hard and that we should make it easier for business owners with disabilities to get support.

One place that has helped me grow my confidence and skills in my business is the Wisconsin Self-Determination Conference. I was a micro-business vendor at the conference last year and I was able to connect with more micro-business owners who also have disabilities like me. I also met a lot of new people and got to connect with my peers. This year, I will be back to sell my cards, prints and bookmarks but I will also be doing a 30-minute talk about my journey to being a business owner! I hope to see you there!

