

A Little “New” in Your Newsletter

Welcome to the newly designed *IRIS Connections* newsletter from TMG, Wisconsin’s exclusive IRIS Consultant Agency.

TMG has administered the IRIS program on behalf of the state since the program’s inception 6 years ago. IRIS program participants work with over 400 TMG professionals in 57 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties. In 2015, that coverage is expected to expand even further!

The newsletter reflects a freshening of TMG’s look, and coincides with the launch of our new website at www.tmgwisconsin.com. We invite you to take a look at the new site and browse through the information and resources available there. In the coming months, the website will expand further, giving partners like you an opportunity to customize your experience with TMG and stay up-to-date on the latest news about IRIS between quarterly newsletters. *(Continued Inside)*



IRIS CONNECTIONS



www.tmgwisconsin.com



“New” (Continued From Cover)

Those of you already familiar with TMG will notice not just a new logo, but five important words accompanying it: Let’s Clear the Path Ahead. That simple mantra reminds us everyday of our important responsibility to people in IRIS. By assembling ideas and resources specific to participants’ goals, we work hard to remove obstacles and roadblocks that may be standing in the way of a truly self-determined life.

As always, we welcome your feedback and ideas. Feel free to email us at IRISinfo@tmgwisconsin.com if we can make IRIS Connections an even better resource for you.

CLEARING THE PATH TO EMPLOYMENT

TMG believes that with individualized services and the right support, all working-aged adults can achieve integrated employment or have their own business that matches their goals and interests. Everyone faces their own obstacles to employment; some people don’t know where to start, and other people may encounter roadblocks along the way. The important thing to remember is that there is always a way to clear your path to employment and find the job that’s right for you. Employment evolves over a lifetime, and the path to employment looks different for everyone.

Did you know that most job opportunities are never advertised? Many people find jobs by networking and tapping into the “hidden” job market. Seeking employment by connecting with the people you know, like friends, neighbors, and other community members, can be more effective than looking for “Help Wanted” ads or submitting job applications.

Another possible path to finding employment is to begin with volunteer work. Some people start their job search by volunteering or getting involved in their local TimeBank. Building your network of community connections can help you polish or gain new skills, explore work interests, get positive references, and grow important relationships with people who can give you ideas and job leads. Research has shown that both employment and volunteering have positive health and social benefits.

Maybe you already have a job, or are looking for your first job. Wherever you are today, you can find help to make sure employment is possible in the way that works best for you. This issue of *IRIS Connections* features stories about multiple people who were facing barriers, but found ways around them. By using support from their friends, neighbors, and other community resources, these people cleared their own paths to employment.

A Business Owner Who Supports Self-Determination



Jeremy Brenner, the owner of Generation's Lanes in El Dorado, Wisconsin, has known Klara Hokenson and her family for over 15 years. The whole family participates in bowling leagues and enjoys watching Packer games at the local bowling alley. When Klara began to search for jobs in the community, it was more difficult than she had expected. Klara searched high and low for around three years. One day while she and her family were at the bowling alley, Klara's mom, Michelle, shared her frustration with Jeremy. He chuckled, and offered Klara a job on the spot. Jeremy said, "It didn't take three years to find a job, it took two minutes. All you had to do

was ask!" Klara has been happily employed at the bowling alley since January of 2014.

As a business owner who supports self-determination, Jeremy believes that, "every business has four hours of work a week that could benefit that business and the worker. It amazes me that more business owners aren't willing to go down that road."

Jeremy appreciates what Klara has to offer the bowling alley. "We have a lot of jobs... and if she has the ambition to work, I'm going to let her work," he said. Klara's ambition to work makes her job fun and rewarding. Klara and her job coach usually go to work in the mornings for a few hours a few days a week, and she also works Monday nights and every other weekend. Of all of Klara's job tasks, her favorites are organizing the bowling balls and portioning the onion petals, which are her favorite food at the bowling alley. She continues to learn new things and enjoys her time on and off the clock at Generation's Lanes.

Jeremy and Klara

Meet Will Anderson: The Busiest Person in All of Barron County



Will Anderson is a quiet, strong man from Rice Lake, Wisconsin with a long resume! He meets his goal of being active in his community every day. Because Will began searching for jobs during high school, he has gained a lot of work experience and established many volunteer relationships in his community. Many businesses count on Will to help them throughout the week. Though volunteering isn't paid work, he still enjoys his jobs, as they make it possible to learn new skills and gain valuable experience that will make him a great candidate for paying jobs in the future.

While he held many volunteer positions around town, Will worked with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to begin his own cider press business in July of 2013. The inspiration for his business plan came from his love for being outside and his prior knowledge of growing apples, as he and his mother have a small orchard. As a business owner, Will provides the containers, the press itself, and the muscle it takes to run the apples through the grinder. This is Will's first autumn taking customers, who bring their own apples for him to press and package so the customer can then sell or keep the cider for themselves. Next year, he plans to expand his business, offering assistance to cover apple buds with plastic bags to keep the apples pesticide-free and safe from insects. He bagged over 900 apples at the beginning of this season in his family's orchard and the apples grew wonderfully. He also hopes to promote his business further through advertising at the farmer's market.

Beyond Will's many volunteer jobs and running his own business, he continues to look for paid, year-round work. This winter, he'll be paid for shoveling snow for neighbors to keep his muscles working after the cider press season is over. He is also talking with a department store to see if they can find a position for him stocking or unloading trucks. Will has made it clear that, through determination and commitment, job opportunities can be endless. He reminds us to, "not judge a book by its cover! I am smart even though I don't talk much."

Will Anderson

John Brown's Daily Commute

John Brown works around 25 hours a week at 3M in Prairie du Chien as a contracted janitor. His commute is 30 miles one way from his home in Boscobel to his work. He goes to work 5 days per week for about 5 hours each day.



Two years ago, John had just started his job when his old van began breaking down and wouldn't start during the winter months. The vehicle also cost a lot of money in gas. Despite his van troubles, John never missed a day of work, and caught a ride to work with his supervisor who lived in the area. Riding with his supervisor wasn't ideal for John, as he liked the alone time while he was driving to and from work.

John's determination to gain back the independence of having his own vehicle inspired him to ask his IRIS Consultant to help him learn more about a Work 'n Wheels Program that he had heard about. Work 'n Wheels is a program that helps qualified working people purchase a reliable vehicle by offering a 0% interest loan. John, with the help of his IRIS Consultant, reviewed the financial requirements and completed all of his applications. John sent in the application in March of 2014 and anxiously waited for a response. Work 'n Wheels accepted John's application and explained that he had to attend financial planning classes to prepare for receiving the loan. He attended all the classes, found a car, and followed through with the whole process from start to finish independently.

On June 18, John pulled up to his meeting with his IRIS Consultant in a 1998 Chevy Lumina. He bought it through the Work 'n Wheels Program, and makes monthly payments, which are directly withdrawn out of his bank account. Now, John has the freedom of his own car, which helps him continue to put paychecks in his pocket. Through this process, John has learned more about financial responsibility and maintained his incredible work ethic and wonderful spirit.

John Brown

A Familiar Face at The Brat Stop



Joseph (Austin) Pena, an artist from Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, has had many different jobs since high school. One of his favorite jobs throughout the years was the Brat Stop, a huge restaurant owned by family friends. Today, Austin works at the Brat Stop two days a week from about 4 p.m. - 11 p.m. washing dishes, bussing, and doing other assigned cleaning tasks. He even designed coasters for the restaurant! What he likes most about his job is, "Everybody knows me. I like it because I get paid. It is busy and time flies by." His co-workers are very supportive and enjoy Austin's company and sense

of humor during their shifts. Nick Klein, a longtime friend and co-worker, appreciates Austin's reliability. Nick shared, "because he's a friend, he shows up. He always texts ahead if he is not going to make it on time." Rita, another co-worker, said that, "his communication sets him apart," and likes that he takes his responsibilities seriously. He has an eye for detail and strong work ethic, which is why Austin is an asset to his work and his community.

Joseph (Austin) Pena

Employee's Corner: Megan Haderly Shares Her Employment Story

Hi, my name is Megan. I'm 24 years old and I live in Marengo, Wisconsin. I clean at the Medicine Shoppe in Ashland and have worked there for five years. I found my job through a friend at school. I really like my co-workers and visiting with them. My dream job is becoming an author and I hope to work at the nursing home or a day care. I enjoy elderly people and little kids. The best part of working is being able to help and be with people. Being positive and happy with a smile can be contagious.



Resources



Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR): <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov>

DVR is a state agency within the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development that helps people with disabilities obtain, maintain or improve employment. DVR can arrange for services such as benefits analysis, supports to develop and engage in internships or temporary work, job coaching, job preparation, development, training, and much more.

Employment Toolkit: www.tmgwisconsin.com/toolkit

The Employment Toolkit covers many resources people can use to support their success in creating goals and outcomes. The main goal of the Employment Toolkit is to provide information to consider when thinking about and planning employment.

Work Incentives Benefits Counseling (WIBC): www.wibsa.org

WIBC provides a written and verbal analysis of a person's benefits, work incentives available to them, and how they can maximize their earnings and keep the benefits they need (including maintaining eligibility for important services like Medicaid and IRIS).

VOLUNTEER

Volunteering is as fulfilling as employment.

A great resource for finding volunteer opportunities is VolunteerMatch, which lets you search for opportunities based on area, interest, and age group. Their main goal is to bring good people and good causes together, and everyone is welcome. Not to mention, volunteer opportunities help you gain experience and may lead to paid employment.



EVENTS

October 25:

Keys to Success Conference:
University of Wisconsin-Stout,
Menomonie, WI

November 10-12:

2014 Self-Determination
Conference: Kalahari Resort,
Wisconsin Dells, WI

March 17:

Disability Advocacy Day 2015:
Monona Terrace, Madison WI

November 13-14:

Across the Lifespan
Conference: Wilderness
Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI



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OCTOBER IS NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

National Disability Employment Awareness Month brings attention to employment issues that people with disabilities face and recognizes the integration of employees and employers. The contributions of people in IRIS and others around the nation to our workforce are great ones. For more information on the national campaign, please visit the Department of Labor's Website: www.dol.gov/odep/topics/hdeam/index-2014.htm

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