

# Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project on CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

## Customized Employment Case Study #3

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### Betsy's Case Study

Discovery is the foundation of customized employment (CE). Discovery activities focus on learning about each job seeker's strengths rather than what a person cannot do. Activities take place in familiar settings where the person is comfortable as well as unfamiliar ones to discover the individual's interests, skills, and work preferences. Informational interviews can be a useful tool during the discovery process. Informational interviews are informal conversations with people who work in the area or career of interest that matches the job seeker's work preferences and interests. A job seeker who wants to learn more about a chosen field identifies people who are willing to talk about their careers or jobs. When used for customized employment, the focus is on getting to know a business in a similar way that discovery focuses on getting to know a job seeker. Informational interviews may help the job seeker and the employment specialist learn more about how the person's interests and skills may meet the needs of business. This case study describes how informational interviews were used during discovery for "Betsy".



### Informational Interviews

During an initial meeting at Betsy's school, she spoke with enthusiasm while talking about her many and varied interests. She takes piano, guitar, and voice lessons and has a strong interest in music. Betsy said that she loves cooking, specifically, baking. She shared her love for organization and watches YouTube videos related to strategies for organizing her bedroom. She talked about the clubs and organizations including Robotics, Best Buddies and the school dance team. Betsy also proudly told the employment specialist about being a teaching assistant job at her school in the high school Language Arts classroom. She keeps the room organized, sharpening pencils, making copies, and bringing items to and from the office. Based on the information from the initial school visit, it was evident that Betsy's main interests were baking, organizing, music, and technology.

One of Betsy's first discovery activities was canvassing her neighborhood for nearby businesses that matched her interests. After walking past a couple of different businesses, the employment specialist asked Betsy where she might like to go. Betsy immediately replied, "Fresh Thyme." She explained that her mom often shops there but had never been herself. When they arrived, Betsy was so excited that she stopped in the parking lot before entering

the store to look at the market. Walking into the grocery store, Betsy's face lit up. She instantly noticed the bakery department and headed that way!

Betsy looked all around and seemed in awe of the different baked goods. The employment specialist and Betsy looked for an employee to answer questions about the store and bakery department and met Katie, the bakery manager. The employment specialist began an informational interview by asking Katie what the requirements were to work in the bakery department; how long she had been working there; what Katie liked about her job; and what the most challenging part of the job was. During the discussion, Betsy kept her focus on Katie and began conducting an informational interview of her own! She asked questions about production and what the most popular item was and then asked Katie how many employees they had. Katie replied, "We currently have four employees." Betsy replied, "I think you guys should add a fifth, and it should be me." Everyone laughed, but Betsy's comment left a great impression on the bakery manager.

The employment specialist discussed with Fresh Thyme Farmers Market the possibility of providing a job shadow experience for Betsy. Katie was very supportive of this idea and called the store manager on his cell phone to ask if he would come down to discuss this opportunity. After speaking with the store manager and proposing the idea of a one hour job shadow, he agreed and stated that corporate would have to give the green light before they moved forward.

While waiting for the job shadow experience at Fresh Thyme Farmers Market, the employment specialist and Betsy continued to conduct informational interviews with other local businesses. Since Betsy was interested in baking, she suggested going to a local, family owned Italian bakery that she often visited. The employment specialist arranged a meeting and tour with the bakery owner. Once again, Betsy did a great job during the informational interview of selling herself and her organizational skills. She told the bakery owners about her passion for baking and asked how the bread was made and who cleaned and organized the dishes for the bakers.

The mother and sisters explained the bread baking process and even offered some homemade items to taste. They explained that they do all of the cleaning and organizing themselves, since it is a family-owned business. The possibility of having Betsy job shadow was discussed, but one of the owners wanted to wait until after Easter. Betsy and the employment specialist worked together on a hand written thank you note that Betsy personally hand-delivered to the owner. Betsy said that she would love to work at the Italian Bakery and would be thrilled to be able to job shadow. Although the bakery decided it was not the right time to support a job shadow for Betsy, the experience of talking with the shop had provided another opportunity to confirm culinary arts as an employment theme.

While waiting for permission from Fresh Thyme Framers Market corporate office to approve a job shadow, the employment specialist called or emailed the store manager weekly to stay on his radar. Betsy and the employment specialist continued to explore other options and visited a couple of different local businesses in Betsy's neighborhood for informational interviews. They visited a music store, a screen printing shop, a flower shop, and a creative art studio. At all of these locations, Betsy asked questions to learn more about each type of business. After these discovery activities, Betsy reported that while she enjoyed visiting the businesses she was still much more interested in the bakeries.

## **Betsy's Job Shadow Experience**

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After a few weeks, the employment specialist received word that the corporate office had agreed to host a job shadow experience. Betsy met the bakery employees and quickly began working on her assigned tasks. She was excited to put the bread in bags and identify each type of baked goods based on drawings on a whiteboard. She danced to the music and sang along as she worked side-by-side with the bakery employee.



The employee modeled the task for Betsy and then she completed it independently with some assistance from the employee. Betsy was able to label and package the different types of bread into bags, twist-tie bun packages, stock the products onto the shelves, and rotate the products based on dates according to Fresh Thyme procedures. Betsy had a smile throughout the entire job shadow experience and quickly connected with the other employees.

## Employment Proposal

After the job shadow, the employment specialist developed an employment proposal for Fresh Thyme that outlined the tasks Betsy could complete based on the job shadow experience. She also summarized the benefits that Betsy would bring to the bakery department. The proposal outlined how Betsy would help increase productivity, increase diversity, and provide excellent customer service. She would stock supplies from inventory; prep bakery items; label, stock, and rotate product; and respond to customer inquiries. Hiring Betsy would ensure a reliable, dedicated, passionate employee while strengthening the mission of Fresh Thyme Farmers Market. The proposal also suggested the rate of pay and specific hours. Finally, the proposal included support to be provided to the coworkers and Betsy to assist with learning the job skills based upon the training provided by Fresh Thyme Farmers Market.



The employment specialist emailed the proposal to the store manager who responded stating that this was a great plan. He was not sure if there would be any hours to add someone to the bakery department at that time but agreed to talk with upper management. The employees who worked with Betsy during her job shadow expressed an interest in having Betsy to work in the bakery department. Several days later, the store manager, emailed the employment specialist and said he had received approval from corporate to hire on Betsy as a part-time bakery assistant. She would begin working four hours per week at \$8.50 an hour with the possibility of adding more hours. Everyone was very excited for Betsy, but not as much as Betsy herself! She finally had a chance to work in a job that she really wanted.

## Betsy's First Day on the Job!

Betsy's first day of work was June 23rd 2018. Katie introduced Betsy to Ben, the new bakery supervisor. Ben immediately got Betsy started and began by teaching her the importance of putting on gloves before touching anything. Immediately, this seemed like such a great fit. Ben showed Betsy how to separate frozen cookies and place them on a baking sheet. Betsy, happily, with a grin from ear to ear, took over and began to separate the cookies. Later, Ben showed Betsy how to package the various buns and make and print labels for each variety. Betsy picked up on this task immediately and began printing the labels and placing them on the packages of buns. Betsy had a little trouble ripping off the label from the printer, but with Ben's help was able to learn this too.





After her ten minute break, Betsy noticed Ben was at lunch along with another co-worker, Christina. Christina showed Betsy how to package crispy cookies and was very enthusiastic and helpful when interacting with Betsy. Betsy made labels for the cookies and printed them out. When Christina noticed her having difficulty, she told Betsy that she also had difficulties when she first started but she had a trick. She told Betsy to lift and tear to the right and it would be much easier. Betsy tried it and smiled when it worked. She came up with a chant, “up and to the right” which helped her remember. For the remainder of Betsy’s shift, she worked alongside Ben and Christina with minimal cues provided by job coach. Her first day on the job was a success!

## Betsy’s Progress

Betsy has been working six months, and has become a valued team member. During her breaks, she goes to the staff break room and talks with other coworkers from different departments. She has learned to independently return to work using her phone timer. During the holiday season, Betsy had a new customized task of using the machine to slice all the bread for stuffing. She recently passed two baking safety assessments and has added additional job tasks including using the industrial ovens and making corn bread. Because Becky is still in high school, she continues to only work a Saturday shift. The goal is to increase her hours during the summer when she is not in school.



## Background Information

Virginia Commonwealth University’s Disability Rehabilitation Research Project on Customized Employment (VCU-DRRP) is researching the impact of customized employment on the employment outcomes of individuals with autism and/or intellectual disabilities. The random control trial study is in partnership with TransCen Inc., and transition-age youth are being assisted in finding customized jobs of choice. The study is being conducted by two teams: one at VCU in Richmond, Virginia and one in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at Creative Employment Opportunities (CEO). Youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are being recruited to participate and are being randomly assigned to either the customized employment intervention or a control group. The control group are continuing their services as usual. At the close of the study, the employment outcomes achieved by the two groups of participants will be compared. This case study presents one of the customized employment participants from CEO in Milwaukee. The VCU-DRRP would like to thank “Betsy” for sharing her story.

## Acknowledgements

This case study presents one of the customized employment participants from Richmond, Virginia. The VCU-DRRP would like to thank “Sarah” for sharing her story and for the support of the Performance Food Group. If you have questions about this case study or about the VCU DRRP on Customized Employment, please contact: **DR. KATHERINE INGE KINGE@VCU.EDU OR 804-828-5956**

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