

Kirkland Courier

CITY UPDATE

Breaking the Barriers To Employment

Working as an Administrative Aide for the City of Kirkland brings Becky Sherertz much more than a paycheck. It brings her the simple riches of everyday life—experiences like riding Metro, getting praised for good work, laughing with co-workers and going out to lunch with friends. Employment and all that comes with it means a lot to Becky, as it does to all of us. But, as an adult with developmental disabilities, Becky's job at the City is also a gateway to increased independence and participation in society.

Becky is part of the City of Kirkland's Supported Employment Program, an initiative to broaden the diversity of the City's workforce by expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In creating a salaried position for Becky, the City worked with Puget Sound Personnel (PSP), a Bellevue-based supported employment company that trains and provides long-term workplace support for people with developmental disabilities.

"PSP showed us how making Becky a regular part of our work team would benefit everyone," commented Tracy Burrows, Senior Management Analyst and Becky's main supervisor. "They helped

identify and customize additional job tasks from seven City departments for her to perform. This enabled other employees to focus on jobs that were more suited to their abilities, allowing everyone to work up to their full potential."

Increasing the receptivity of the workplace to employing people with developmental disabilities is an ongoing process. There are misconceptions and barriers that only positive experiences and interactions can overcome. Puget Sound Personnel makes creating those experiences a central part of their work in partnering with employers such as the City of Kirkland.

"We worked with Becky to teach her what is expected of her in terms of job tasks and social behaviors," explained Laura Coutts, Becky's PSP Job Coach. "But time was also spent helping her managers and co-workers learn how to best communicate and work with an individual with disabilities. Building a climate where everyone feels comfortable allows relationships to build. That's when real progress can be made in changing attitudes about what people with disabilities are capable of contributing to the workplace and to society."



Becky accomplishes many things in her four-day work week. Her job takes her from cleaning and setting up the conference rooms, to putting paper in the copy machines, to watering plants in the office. "Becky is a valued and very capable contributor," shares City employee, Karen VanderHoek. "Her presence has positively impacted all of us. She's one of the reasons why I like coming to work every morning."

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