

4-13-18

This story originally appeared as a DHS Director's Good Work! story on April 2, 2018.

Note: A photo slideshow of Claire is at: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmckk4bm>

Claire models for Portland boutique, where she also works



Claire's magazine ad

Claire Renfrow lights up when she is in front of a camera.

The Portland resident is a bit shy at first. But when asked to pose for a picture at boutique [Coco & Toulouse](#) in the Sellwood neighborhood of southeast Portland, she didn't hesitate.

Claire, 31, started working at Coco & Toulouse in July 2017. It is her first paid job. Claire has Down syndrome and was unsure what she wanted to do. When people with an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD) are seeking work, they often start by going to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

Claire's job developer Leigh Anne Kranz, with provider [On the Move Community Integration](#), worked closely with VR counselor Mark Foster.



Claire with VR counselor Mark Foster (left) and provider Leigh Anne Kranz (right)

“We had tried so many things that just didn’t ignite Claire,” Leigh Anne said. “Mark helped to keep the focus on Claire and what is right for her.”

For several years in a row, VR has increased the number of people with I/DD getting community jobs. In 2017, more than 700 Oregonians with I/DD got jobs in the community, a 24 percent increase from the previous year.

Through VR’s work experience services, Claire volunteered for several months at an interior design shop. Leigh Anne realized that the detailed work of preparing merchandise for display was the right fit for her client.

Leigh Anne stopped in with Claire to browse at Coco & Toulouse. The next time she came in, Leigh Anne approached store owner Jo Ellen Newton about hiring Claire.

“I remembered Claire right away because she was so stylish and sassy when she came in here wearing a beret,” Jo Ellen said.

Jo Ellen hired Claire. Her duties include unpacking inventory, hanging up and pricing clothes, and keeping the store’s large ribbon display orderly.

Claire said she enjoys earning a paycheck, which she saves to go out on dates with her boyfriend. She also enjoys shopping.

“I like to work with the clothes in the store,” she said, smiling.

Coworker Linda Holliman says of Claire, “She is an amazing young woman that I am proud to call my coworker and my friend.”



Claire with coworker Linda (left) and employer Jo Ellen (right).

Claire's first taste of modeling fame came before Christmas. Jo Ellen collaborated with handbag vendor Hobo International to do a full-page advertisement for the 2018 fashion issue of [Portland Interview](#) magazine. Other Coco employees had been featured in the past, and Jo Ellen wondered if Claire might want

to be the model for this advertisement.

Claire said she was nervous but proud of the final product.

"I took it to the staff (at On the Move) and showed everyone," she said. "I am a model now."

Mark Foster with VR said the magazine ad not only boosted Claire's confidence but also helps to educate the public.

"There are still a lot of stigmas and misconceptions about people with developmental disabilities," he said. "Seeing Claire model in a fashion ad helps break down those stigmas."