

3-13-15

To: Employment First stakeholders
From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator
Re: Employment First: Mandi's Job Success
(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

Note: This story is also available [online](#).

Every school day, more than 300 students in the small town of Elgin are fed a hot breakfast and lunch thanks to a team that includes Mandi Durfee, who attended the school as a child.

The 31-year-old has worked at [Stella Mayfield Elementary and Middle School](#) for four years. She is a cook's assistant, working with a small team led by Food



Mandi Durfee (left) prepares the school salad bar with coworker Heidi Follett at Mayfield Elementary & Middle School. Photo: Cassy McCartney

Service Supervisor Stanna Rysdam.

Nancy Fields is Mandi's personal agent with [Eastern Oregon Support Services Brokerage](#). She helped Mandi secure the job through a natural connection: both Mandi's mother Patti Durfee, and her aunt Jacki Graves, work at

Mayfield. Patti is the school's front office assistant, and Jacki works in the kitchen as a dishwasher and kitchen assistant.

"Everyone at the school already knew and liked Mandi, so it made it very easy to get her hired," Nancy said. "But Mandi's hard work has ensured she has continued to thrive in the job."

Mandi works four days per week as a cook's assistant. She experiences Down syndrome and receives natural supports on the job from her coworkers, a close-knit team who describe their relationship as more like a family.

“When she's gone, I'm busting my butt to get everything done. I can't emphasize enough that I can't make it without her at work,” said Stanna Rysdam, Mandi's manager. “I've also grown so fond of her.”



Mandi (center) and her aunt Jacki Graves (left) and her mother Patti Durfee (right) all work at Mayfield Elementary & Middle School in Elgin.

Photo: Cassy McCartney

Heidi Follett is a cook's assistant who works side-by-side with Mandi and Stanna to get the prep work done in the morning. Mayfield may be in a small community, but the school does a heavy volume, feeding 300 children for breakfast and another 300

students for lunch, which includes the students from the nearby high school.

“Mandi sees something that needs to be done, and she just does it,” Heidi said. “She's a hard worker, and she has such a great sense of humor, which really helps around here during stressful times.”

Mandi smiles and laughs a lot, and has an easy rapport with her coworkers. Stanna, Heidi and Mandi joke around as they busily work to prepare lunch for hundreds of children that will soon walk through the doors.

Mandi's job includes setting up the salad bar, filling and putting out all the bottles for items such as ketchup, and doing general prep work. She also cleans and puts out silverware, and helps with food preparation.

“One of my favorite things about my job is the kids,” Mandi said. “I like talking to them and helping them.”

Mandi said she also likes the close-knit relationship with her coworkers.

“It’s our own small world, like a family,” she said.

Nancy Fields said Mandi is a natural entertainer and loves socializing.

“There are regular dances held here in Union County and Mandi doesn’t like to miss those,” Nancy said. “She loves to dance. She will be on the dance floor the entire time.”

Mandi dreams of someday going to Hollywood. She likes the idea of being a star in television or movies, and she loves to play it up for the camera.

For now, she said she is happy working at the school, and being near her aunt and mother, who has worked at Mayfield for more than 24 years.

Patti Durfee said she is happy to see her daughter working and successful.

“It makes me really proud,” Patti said. “She works really hard at everything she does. They have fun, but Mandi also takes the job very seriously.”

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to employment.first@state.or.us.

A slideshow of Mandi can be viewed at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dhsoregon/sets/72157651232287306/>