

Employment First

Success Story

Greg Johnson

Gregory enjoys his first community job at age 66

“Greg has found that he makes a difference. He is making a positive contribution to his community and is a valued member.”

Note: this story originally appeared as a ODHS Director’s Good Work! story.

Johnson was technically retired – and could enjoy his free time as any retired person does.

But Greg, 66, wanted to work. Over a year ago, during the Individual Support Plan (ISP) process with his developmental disabilities Services Coordinator Thomas Hussong-Christian, he said, “I want to work.”



“Greg gets a sense of purpose from working,” Thomas said. “He was working just one hour per month, but it wasn’t giving him the sense of accomplishment that he really wanted.”

Thomas made a referral for Greg to [Vocational Rehabilitation](#). VR counselor Kelly Noble said she was not intimidated by Greg’s age, or lack of community work experience. VR’s mission is to assist Oregonians with disabilities to achieve, maintain and

advance in employment and independence. VR is a partner with the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services in the Employment First initiative to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in community jobs.

March 21, 2019

“For me, it’s all about placing people with the right job developer,” Kelly said. “I knew if I could find the right job developer for him, that Greg was going to be successful.”

Job developers work for agencies contracted with VR. A job developer identifies a position in the workforce that meets a person’s skills and interests, and also matches the employer’s need. See this [YouTube Video to find out more](#).

Kelly spoke with Deb Smith, employment services coordinator at agency [Supported Employment Services, Inc.](#) and asked if Deb thought they could support Greg’s needs and help him find a job. She also worked closely with Greg’s Services Coordinator Thomas Hussong-Christian, who has known him for almost a decade.

“I really rely on the team, the SC and the people who know the person, who help me develop a good plan for employment that is going to help someone succeed,” Kelly said. “It’s a team effort.”

One year later, Greg is now employed two days per week at Burger King in Albany. Greg’s duties range from sweeping and wiping down tables to lining trays and filling kid’s meals with toys.

“I love my bosses here,” Greg said, smiling widely. “I like to come to work.”

Deb Smith said the placement took a while, but her agency wanted to make sure they had a right fit for Greg, and for the employer.



“SES strives to match the right employee with the right company,” she said. “Greg is very proud of himself and he takes his job seriously. Greg has found that he makes a difference. He is making a positive contribution to his community and is a valued member.”

Greg is a perfect example of someone who has made the transition from institutional settings into being fully integrated into his community. Oregon previously had two institutions: Fairview Training Center and Eastern Oregon Training Center. Oregon closed Fairview Training Center in 2000.

Greg was admitted into Fairview in 1961 at the age of 9. He left Fairview in the 1990s and lived independently for a while before going to live in a group home operated by Chamberlin House in Albany.

Stephanie Lieuallen, house manager at Mitchell Place where Greg lives, said employment has transformed Greg.

“It’s really made all the difference,” she said. “It’s changed his whole attitude. Work and that sense of accomplishment has made him so positive at home. It’s changed his life really.”

Greg's supervisor, Tracy Yon, said he is a model employee.

"I'm extremely happy with Greg's work," she said. "He does what he needs to do and we always notice the windows are cleanest on the days Greg is working."

Greg said he uses his paychecks to travel to Alaska to visit his brother. He loves traveling and also plans to visit Mexico soon.

"I love flying," he said, smiling broadly. "I love the airplane seats, everything."

Greg also enjoys getting out to get coffee and also participates in a local bowling league. He exemplifies the values of the DD Awareness Month campaign, which seeks to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all areas of community life. At age 66, Greg now lives, works and enjoys all his activities in his community, and feels a sense of pride in what he does.

"I really love it here," Greg said, smiling. "I am on time. I do a good job."

Gregory's employment team includes: Deb Smith, employment services coordinator with provider Supported Employment Services, Inc.; Services Coordinator Thomas Hussong-Christian with Linn County Developmental Disabilities Program; Kelly Noble, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; and Stephanie Lieuallen, house manager.

[View a photo slideshow of Greg at work.](#)