



American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Success Story

Nothing About Me Without Me: The Introduction to Supported Employment Pilot at Treasure Valley Community College

Video: [Supported Employment Curriculum at Treasure Valley Community College](#)

People in Oregon’s intellectual and developmental (I/DD) system have been developing creative ways to address the workforce shortage. Employment First and the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) have championed this effort by creating an Introduction to Supported Employment curriculum.

Treasure Valley Community College (TVCC), in Ontario, took the lead as Oregon’s first college to offer this curriculum during a pilot in spring 2024. Dr. Jessica Breidinger, TVCC social science faculty, taught the Introduction to Supported Employment course.

“I’m excited to be the first college to pilot this,” she said. “I just see a lot of good that comes out of this curriculum that’s very rich in being person-centered, person-focused, and inclusive.”

ODDS Regional Employment Specialists Erica Drake and Shelby Myers provided support to instructors on the TVCC campus. The pilot course had a mix of traditional college students, non-traditional students and people working in the I/DD system who wanted to further their knowledge of supported employment.

“We wanted this course to be piloted and continue to be available specifically in rural eastern Oregon to ensure our workforce has the training and resources to continue the important work they do,” Myers said. “We also wanted this to be available to spread the word of a job and career path that many young adults are unaware of.”

“Supporting the first pilot with TVCC was an honor,” Drake said. “I learned more from the students than I expected to. They were engaged, thoughtful and stepped away with a better understanding of supported employment. I am looking forward to other colleges utilizing the curriculum. This curriculum is groundbreaking and will support communities to be inspired to explore a career option they may have never known existed.”

Introduction to Supported Employment explores the history and basic knowledge needed by job coaches and others who support individuals with I/DD. It focuses on how to support others to find, effectively perform and maintain their jobs in the community. Other topics include person-centered practice, including dignity and respect, self-determination, and health and safety.

This pilot course was supported by ODDS’ American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. All students who took the course were able to enroll for free. ARPA has helped ODDS work to expand the reach of its supported employment curriculum in other ways as well. There was a funding opportunity for more colleges to teach the curriculum and an upcoming program to train people to teach the Introduction to Supported Employment (ISE) curriculum. ODDS hopes that these opportunities will help spread the curriculum throughout the state.

“This is a wonderful opportunity for students to get skills in the behavioral health field as paraprofessionals,” Breidinger said. “The things that are taught in this course, in working with populations with intellectual and developmental disabilities, all of those skills are transferrable to working with many other populations.”



Students and instructors from TVCC's Introduction to Supported Employment pilot

Adrean Salinas is one of the students who took what he learned in the class to help populations outside of I/DD. For the past year-and-a-half, Salinas has worked in supported employment at Lifeways in Malheur County. He specifically helps people with mental health experiences, and occasionally people with I/DD, find jobs.

“I didn’t realize until taking this course just how important having a job is and how much it affects people personally, socially and economically,” Salinas said. “I thought, I clock in, I help people find jobs and that’s it. I didn’t think I was as important as other members of the team, but I realized my role serves a very important purpose to our clients and I can make that difference.”

Salinas learned a lot of skills that he’s been able to bring back and use with his clients as well as in his personal life. One of the most impactful things he learned was about job carving, which is working with individuals and employers to create a job. The Introduction to Supported Employment

course taught him that job carving could be done at a level he hadn't previously realized.

Recently, he carved out a job for a mental health client at a local fabric store. "They couldn't do all the job requirements for that, but we found a way to create a position that would limit what they did a little bit but still be an asset to the team."

Another major theme of the course was "nothing about me without me." That was a concept that stuck with Salinas as it did with other students. "When I heard that for the first time, I was like 'oh my goodness, yes!' People need to have at least some form of informed consent to the decisions that are being made for them, about them." Since taking the course, Salinas has implemented more regular check-ins with his clients to make sure that what they're doing is what the clients want.

Skyler Glenn, a supported employment specialist, was another student in the course who was impacted by the same message. Initially Glenn didn't expect to get much new information from the course, but it really resonated that we serve a diverse population. "Taking this course, it definitely opened my eyes that I wasn't taking the time to be person-centered. I think that having this class, we just had amazing dialogue and kind of conversation about that. Nothing about me without me."

Another part of the curriculum that Salinas found beneficial was a deeper understanding of coordinated care and collaboration as tools to uplift the client. "I didn't realize how much you'd not only interact with members of the team, but with family members, employers, and even friends—just those natural supports." Now he's searching for more ways to use natural supports to encourage client success.

Most importantly, Salinas appreciated the human aspect of the curriculum. "These are all people that we're dealing with. People have emotions, people have feelings, and we need to take that into account when we're dealing with anybody."

Personally, Salinas said that this line of work has helped him be more confident in advocating for himself. The course was also a good reminder

for him to have an open mind, be willing to hear people out and not be so judgmental.

Several students shared their takeaways from the course [in this video](#) about the TVCC pilot. They expressed finding out about new career opportunities, discovering additional ways to support clients and learning tools they can bring back to share with their colleagues.

Salinas thinks this course is helpful for people outside of the supported employment field too. “We hear all these stories of how this group has been marginalized and how they have been wronged by society. Knowing the history can only make us better in not repeating those past mistakes.” He also believes this curriculum can help remove social and political barriers by removing some of the stigma behind people with I/DD. “I think it’s important to further educate people on this. It’s a great refresher on how to treat people in general.”

This course is a great opportunity for anyone who might interact with or support people with I/DD. That includes law enforcement, healthcare professionals, educators, and more.

“I felt like there was so much more to learn and I didn’t want to stop learning,” Salinas said. “I highly recommend this course to anybody and everybody willing to take it. I wouldn’t trade that experience for anything. I think it’s not only helped me in my job, but in my personal life in the way in which I interact with individuals.”

Fortunately for anyone in Eastern Oregon who is interested in the course, Treasure Valley Community College plans to offer it again. Students can reach out to Breidinger at jbreidinger@tvcc.cc for more information.

This curriculum is available for other colleges to use as well. Representatives from any interested colleges should reach out to employment.first@odhsosha.oregon.gov.