

Andrew's Profile

Andrew used an agency for his services for his first three years after turning 21. He enjoyed his time there, made some friends (although he was never able to see them outside of the agency), and was given some opportunity to work, which netted him anywhere from \$80/monthly to the occasional \$200 monthly, depending on how much work was available.

Although the fact that Andrew was quite capable of having a job in the community was discussed at every ISP, most of his job coaches were inexperienced, and were paid somewhere around \$10.00/hour. When the opportunity for the rare job interview arose, the inexperienced job coaches were unable to provide Andrew the kind of support he needed to get through these interviews. Andrew has autism, and although he is quite verbal, he is still very literal, and when asked open-ended questions such as "What hours do you want to work?" provided a very limited number of hours, not realizing he was jeopardizing his job chances. The always-asked interview question, "Why would you be good at this job?" resulted in an inappropriate answer such as "I want to earn a paycheck," or "My mom thinks I'd be good at it."



Three years went by with little growth or progress. In the meantime, I had been hearing about self-directed supports, but it is sometimes too easy for inertia to contain us in a situation. I confess that is what kept us three years with an agency.

Finally, a situation arose at the agency which angered both me and Andrew enough to move out of our comfort zone, and to pursue self-directed supports. I contacted a Fiscal Intermediary, chose a venue for advertising for support staff, offered a living wage, and received responses from many qualified applicants. Together, Andrew and I interviewed a number of people, and he made the final choices for his staff.

Within six months of having his plan approved (the approval process took about two months), Andrew had two part-time jobs in the community, made friends he is able to connect with on his own and plan outings with independently. Since Andrew is able to use public transportation proficiently, he is able to have a great deal of freedom. He occasionally needs staff support to get to places where the buses don't run, or for an event may ending late at night, such as dances, volunteer activities, etc.

Staff is also helpful when he wants to attend an activity that requires a great deal of listening, so they can support Andrew by taking notes, and helping him to process the information he has received. Otherwise, in Andrew's words, "There are too many words flying at me!" Finally, staff is preparing Andrew to reach his goal of living independently—to cook, to budget, and to do laundry, and to plan how he wants his apartment to look.

I don't believe we would ever return to an agency.

Celest Martin, Andrew's mom (with Andrew's permission)