

## Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment

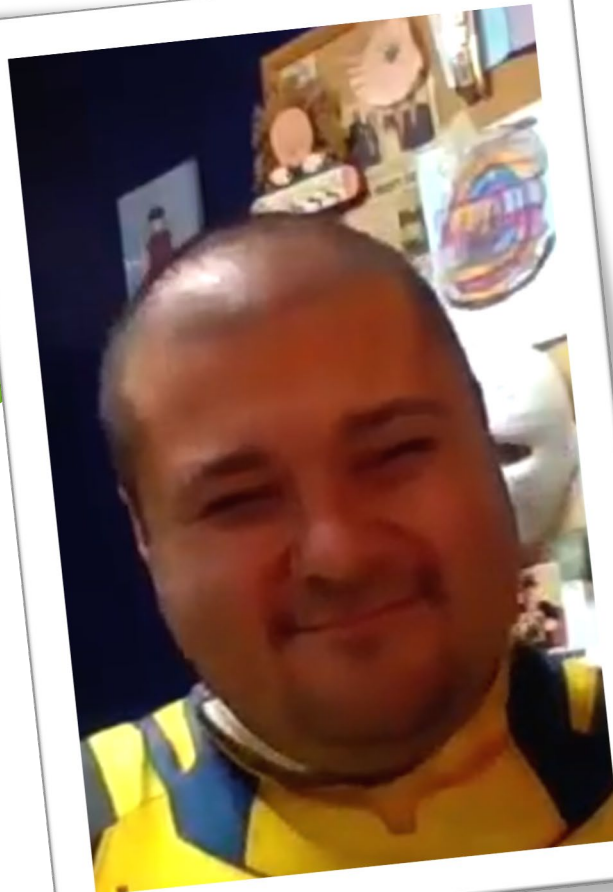
# Cruz's Story

Meet Cruz, an enthusiastic and committed individual who values meaningful employment. Cruz's journey starts in a sheltered workshop, he then moved into community jobs at a cookie factory and grocery store. Realizing the meat department was not his ideal role, he took initiative, communicated with his manager and job coach, and transitioned to bagging groceries. This successful shift highlights Cruz's self-awareness and the power of open communication in achieving job satisfaction.

### Background

Cruz is a dedicated worker who values the sense of pride and independence that comes from having a job. He spent time in a sheltered workshop but eventually landed a role at a local cookie factory, an opportunity he loved because it allowed him to be active in the community.

Unfortunately, when layoffs hit the factory, Cruz found himself searching for work once again. Determined not to give up, he partnered with a job coach who guided him through a series of job applications and interview preparations.



### Finding Purpose at Work

Despite the setback of losing his position at the cookie factory, Cruz remained upbeat. His job search led him to a grocery store, where he was initially hired to work in the meat department a couple of days a week. Though he managed the tasks, Cruz soon realized his skills and interests might be better suited elsewhere. By speaking honestly with both his job coach and his manager, he discovered a position as a bagger at a grocery store, a role he quickly found more fulfilling.

As a bagger, Cruz spends his shifts helping customers pack their groceries, gathering carts in the parking lot, and escorting shoppers to their cars when needed. Sometimes he receives tips from the customers, a gesture he appreciates. In his duties, Cruz finds a sense of purpose, appreciating how each

**For more information:** [Center on Community Living and Careers/Employment](#)

interaction gives him a chance to connect with people positively.

## Navigating Challenges

One of Cruz's biggest hurdles was the sudden loss of his cookie factory job. He was comfortable there and knew the routine of the job. Rather than becoming discouraged, he stayed engaged with his job coach, who helped him tackle job applications that were sometimes challenging.

A second obstacle arose when Cruz's initial placement at the grocery store, he didn't feel that working in the meat department was the right fit. With open communication, he was able to transition to the front of the store as a bagger. This move not only improved his day-to-day satisfaction on the job but also showcased Cruz's willingness to adapt and speak up about his preferences.

Another key challenge was navigating transportation. Cruz had previously learned to ride the bus when he worked at the cookie factory, an essential skill for Cruz's current job. He catches the bus to and from his current job and even uses public transit to visit his favorite shops. This has provided a source of newfound independence. His job coach

also supported him in learning the tasks required for the bagger role, checking in regularly until Cruz felt fully comfortable in his responsibilities.

## Ingredients for Success

- **Living Optimistically:** Several factors have helped Cruz thrive. One is his positive attitude. Even during a challenging job search, he never lost sight of his goal to work part-time in the community.  
  
Cruz also showed an openness to change when he left the meat department and learned new tasks that were crucial to his success as a bagger.
- **Seeking Support:** Cruz has received consistent support from his job coach, who not only guided him through the application process but also remained present during orientation. Through various stages, the job coach ensured Cruz had the assistance he needed.
- **Exercising Independence:** Learning how to ride the bus has given Cruz an added measure of independence and confidence, allowing him to manage his commute without relying on others for rides.

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## Words of Wisdom

Cruz is quick to say he prefers community employment over sheltered workshop experiences. When asked how he would advise a friend who wants a job, he says:

"I'd tell them to practice for the interview with a job coach so you're ready. I'd also let them know about Medicaid Waiver services because they really helped me find and keep my job."

Cruz admits to dreaming of a role at a bowling alley or a video game store one day, but for now, he's grateful for the stability and enjoyment he's found at the grocery store. Bagging groceries provides him with opportunities to assist customers, supplement his income through tips, and cultivate a sense of community, reinforcing his passion for working.



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