

Stories and Testimonials

From Support Services Aides

“Securing a position through the Job Carve program has enriched my life in the following ways: bolstered my confidence in my professional skills; engaged my professional creativity; helped refine my interpersonal skills; increased stability and routine; exposed me to a more diverse workforce; taught me to employ greater flexibility and adapt to change; given me work appropriate friendships; increased my financial independence; and offered opportunities to use my different forms of intelligence.”

- Nicholas Sabatasso, Support Services Aide 2, Inventory Specialist, School of Dentistry

“Working as a Support Services Aide (SSA) at OHSU was an excellent way to start working again after a very difficult four-year period of adapting to my disability. The hours, pay and duties of the SSA are perfect for my unique needs, and OHSU continues to show incredible flexibility in structuring the position to meet my necessary accommodations. They are clearly invested in my success, and that of other people with disabilities.”

- Scott Schafer, Support Services Aide 1, Pillow Specialist, Patient Transportation

“The OHSU Job Carving Program has not only allowed me find gainful employment at a highly reputable institution, but has also given me the tools to excel in an environment where I always feel motivated to be productive and to be the best version of myself. I wouldn't be where I am today if not for the opportunity this program has provided me.”

- David Daigle, Transportation Aide 1, Previously Support Services Aide 1, Pillow Specialist, Patient Transportation

“I started working for a small, private dental practice right after I graduated from high school. It was my first job and I had no experience. I told them that I'm good at organizing and really like to do repetitive and routine tasks, so they were willing to train me to provide general support to the practice staff. For over 20 years, I ordered and stocked supplies, sorted and decontaminated surgical instruments, and cleaned and sanitized patient operatories. As the practice grew, it was decided that my job duties could be performed by the certified dental technicians, and I lost my position. It was very difficult for me to find work with an understanding employer that didn't require certifications. Now I work as a Support Services Aide 2 – Inventory Specialist at the OHSU School of Dentistry's Central Sterile Department as part of OHSU's Job Carve Program. I can use all of my training and experience, and I'm also learning to do many new tasks at my own pace and with help from my team members. My job feels secure and I know I can grow at OHSU.”

- Saretta Lunsford, Support Services Aide 2, Inventory Specialist, School of Dentistry

“The biggest impact this job has had on my life is enabling me to work and attend college for an advanced degree. The work environment is highly supportive, and I feel that the inclusiveness of peers makes it easy to feel like part of the team. Our supervisors are also willing to listen and

work with us to improve the workplace. I appreciate the opportunity I have been given by OHSU.”

- Lukas Fischer, Support Services Aide 1, Hovermatt Specialist, Patient Transportation

“I have been working for OHSU as part of the Job Carve Program since 2016. My job coach encouraged me to apply because the program helps people with disabilities train for good paying jobs, have support from their team, and to be able to advance. All of my jobs before working for OHSU paid low wages and there was no chance to grow. I was hired as a Support Services Aide (SSA) 1 in Environmental Services, and for more than two years I worked at the main hospital; keeping waiting areas, restrooms and common areas clean and helping people with questions and directions. I was interested in learning more about sterile processing, and was able to do two ‘job shadows’ in that department. In January 2019 I applied for an SSA2 - Inventory Specialist position at the School of Dentistry’s Central Sterile Department, and now I work as a member of that team. I scan, deliver, and pick up sterile instruments for different departments, stock supplies and help students with compliance at the dispensaries. I love my new job! And OHSU even helped me to get a scholarship that will pay for sterile processing classes. My job makes me feel like I’m doing work that is important and I feel really proud to work for OHSU.”

- Rachel Black, Support Services Aide 2, Inventory Specialist, School of Dentistry

“Before working at OHSU I was lost. I was not sure where to go with my life. I would play video games 24 hours and sleep for 18 hours. I was 215 pounds. Before I knew it, 6 years had gone by. I was given plenty of chances through job development agencies, but would never take them. In May 2017, my job coach Alex Staller brought up an opportunity which would change my life for the better forever. For the next month and a half I would prepare for that upcoming interview. I started sleeping better and I got off a medication which was heavily burdening my weight and lifestyle. When the time came for the interview I got a nice suite and had prepared for the questions with my job coach. I was hired to a job that would change my life into the right direction.

I have high functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome. As the days went by working I kept practicing communication in this new job setting. I became friends with an OHSU colleague who lived next door to me in Beaverton. I was 55 pounds down from my beginning weight at that moment when I met my new supervisor. That man was going to change my life. He was the kind of guy that would make me smile and bring the best out of me. When I first started, I wanted the same routine daily with no change. I thought change would only be overbearing and cause anxiety. My new supervisor gave me different things to do, and I found that I was capable of more. I learned how to be a leader by joining the Labor Management Committee. I wanted to grow the happiness of others in the workplace. And I continued working out after work. Before I knew it, I was down to 146.

OHSU has been a great experience and life changing place for me. The people here are amazing and super easy to talk to if you need help or even a second look on life. Everyone here supports each other. I am so grateful for the support and constant feedback over here. I also appreciate that I am given these opportunities to speak for the program and help others improve their lives just as OHSU has helped with mine.”

- Bryan Mendes Da Costa, Support Services Aide 1, Imaging Specialist, Environmental Services

From OHSU Leadership

“The OHSU Job Carving Program has impacted my life and those around me in the Environmental Services Department. I have seen tremendous positive change within several of the Support Services Aides (SSA) as the program has matured, both professionally and personally. We have had promotions into SSA2, active engagement within their community, and engaged participation in our committees such as Labor Management Committee and Research and Development Committees.”

- Amanda Macy, Director, OHSU Environmental Services

“Developing impactful employment opportunities for people with a variety of skills and abilities is not only possible, it positively impacts workplace diversity and celebrates the value that people living with disabilities offer. There is a strong commitment across OHSU and the broader community to make this program a successful reality.”

- Rhonda Eppelsheimer, co-director of the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at OHSU

From Community Partners

“It has been such an exciting journey to be a part of the OHSU Job Carve Program. The experience of working with Riikka Salonen and the team at OHSU has been exceptional from the inception of the program, creating the vision and goals, to the actual implementation of the recruitment, hiring and on-boarding of people with disabilities. Opportunities were created based out of specific business needs at OHSU and were fulfilled by people who had previously been unable to navigate the typical application, interviewing and hiring process. People who were willing to work, had specific skills and talents and who wanted to be a part of the team at OHSU. Because of this program, over 30 people, 3 of which were our direct clients, are now working in meaningful employment, contributing to society and to the culture at OHSU. OHSU is truly a leader in the healthcare industry and a great example to other employers.”

- Cindy Bahl, Director of Business Development & Amplify! Events, Dirkse Counseling & Consulting, Inc.

“OHSU is an organization Vocational Rehabilitation participants have long wanted to be employed with. Thanks to Riikka Salonen and Ian Jaquiss who took it on themselves to start a program that would open doors for our candidates with intellectual and developmental disabilities. OHSU has now more than 30 of our VR Employment First clients working in professional roles. Riikka and Ian fought through the stigmas, doubts and challenges and created real career opportunities for people with amazing skills that just needed to be seen. This job carve program is opening doors for businesses that now sees this success story and are learning from it. You and this program have truly made a difference in the lives of those now employed in a career with OHSU and an impact on our community and its employers exploring ways they too can diversify their workforce.”

- Lynne T. Carter, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Vocational Rehabilitation, Oregon Department of Human Services

“It has been a joyful experience helping people reach their employment goals. One individual had a strong desire to work in a place where they could “learn, grow, and achieve.” They wanted more than a job, they wanted a career. Through OHSU’s Job Carving Program I was able to help them obtain a position at OHSU with opportunities for growth and advancement. They recently received a promotion and are looking forward to enjoying many more years learning, growing and achieving with OHSU.”

- Karen Lyman, Job Developer

“The biggest challenge in job carving has been explaining the need for maximizing potential while giving adequate time and training to adjust. OHSU and Riikka Salonen’s commitment to maximizing potential shows in every detail from on the job training to communication and paying a wage that is dignified.”

- Rachel Weber, Employment Specialist, Weber Employment

“Since OHSU has implemented the job carving program, Advantage Working Solutions has been fortunate enough to place a few people into this program. We have seen a tremendous positive change in not only our client’s outlooks but an overall change on their part and desire to move forward with their life goals. Being an employee at OHSU impacts not only vocational identity but also inspires moving forward into expanding education and other positive paths which help with overall self-identity.”

- Joe Maxey, Executive Director, Advantage Working Solutions