

**Tad's Employment Story
Or
Everyone Needs a Job!**

Hi, my name is Joe Carroll and I am here to tell you about my son, Jeremy Tad Carroll, and his employment journey.

A Family's Journey

The first four decades of my son Tad's life was spent trying to understand his disabilities, how to provide the best supports for his needs and how to just take care of him. Finally, at age 44, he gets his first real job with real pay. You can't imagine how proud his mother and I are, but it seems the impact on his life is the most significant benefit. He has become a member of his local community going to work, shopping, eating out, meeting friends, getting away from his routine and sometimes boring surroundings, and just preparing for his day. His attitude has changed with fewer bouts of acting out or disrupting others. Supported employment has been a wonderful influence on his whole life. Not only are we proud for him but also consider employment as a huge step toward Tad becoming more independent and in control of his life. We can see how important this is as we become less of an influence on his life. We will still worry about what he will do once his parents are no longer around. But he will be better able to look out for himself and more in control of his life choices.

Tad

Tad Carroll is 45-years-old. Tad experiences multiple developmental disabilities resulting at birth. Tad is non-ambulatory, non-verbal, communicates primarily with gestures, and has significant personal care needs.

Tad has lived with me and my wife Linda since he was born, and we remain his primary care providers. He also gets support from multiple Personal Support Workers both in his home and community.

Tad requires constant care and oversight for all of his normal personal needs. This requires direct support from one and often two people at a time over a day. It includes communicating with Tad, trying to figure out what his wants and needs are.

Tad "Who He Really Is"

What I just told you about Tad does not tell you anything about who he really is. It does not tell you about his determination for learning and independence. Tad is a loving individual with many friends. He has the same desires and aspirations as others. He hopes to be treated with care and respect by others. One of his greatest attributes is his smile, a wonderful sight often expressed while around friends either playing or working. He requires a variety of stimulating things to keep him busy. Staying home day after day soon becomes very difficult for Tad and his support persons. He prefers traveling about his local community, listening to music and interacting with others. Tad is very physically active and must keep moving, seldom sitting

still in his wheelchair. He definitely likes to be outdoors or riding in a vehicle. One of the few times he will actually sit still is while in the car.

Tad's Pre-Work History

There have been many changes in the Development Disabilities (DD) world since Tad's birth in 1974, the year before Public Law 94-142 was passed giving individuals with DD the right to a free and appropriate public education. The necessity of institutions has become a thing of the past in many states, including Oregon. Individuals with DD are more able to live at home in their local communities with families and friends. Tad graduated high school at age 22 in Elberton, Georgia in 1996. Tad was one of the first with significant developmental disabilities in his school system, the first special education student to attend his high school prom, and the first to walk with his class instead of graduating in a separate afternoon ceremony for Special Ed students.

After moving to Wasco County, Oregon in 1997, Tad started receiving day supports from a local provider, Opportunity Connections (OC). This was his first experience away from home after high school. He was in a sheltered workshop with many of his peers in The Dalles, Oregon. The work varied from sorting items to packaging to shredding paper, all requiring much support but at least providing a place for Tad to be. The workshop settings were generally confining, and facility based, where he worked primarily with individuals with developmental disabilities. The pay rates were well below minimum wage based on productivity, and for Tad, generally under 10 cents per hour. This resulted in bimonthly paychecks seldom exceeding 1 dollar.

In 2016 due to Employment First efforts, OC discontinued Sheltered Workshop activities and switched to a combination of Facility/Community based supported activities approach, providing day supports to their clients from the local DD community. With this change came a new emphasis for community inclusion and employment supports. As you might expect, Tad's integration into community employment supports involved a slow planning process.

Tad Gets a Job or "Journey to Employment"

Tad's big Decision "Do I want a Job?"

Not an easy trip, "the Journey to Employment", for Tad and for us. In order to succeed this trip has to be well planned, well supported, and well accepted by not just the client and family but by the entire community. The obstacles at first seem unsurmountable. How do we really believe that a person literally sheltered, protected, and cared for their entire life will be able to get a job and function in such a different environment? Probably before everything else, the family has to realize the possibilities and the need for this to happen. So, Tad at 42 years old, is to go to work in the community for the first time. Once my wife and I accepted that with the right supports, Tad can work in the community, then Tad can get a job. Later in the process, I think Tad's actions fully convinced us of his success.

It definitely helps to understand if Tad has a desire to actually work in the community away from the controlled environment with his long-time friends. With Tad others like him who are non-verbal and often struggle to get people to understand his thoughts or wishes, this is a

very difficult and important step on the way to community employment. Tad cannot say “I want a Job”, so how can he communicate that idea?

The first year of Tad’s journey to employment was consumed with addressing that question, did he truly want to work? It was very important that we were not making this important decision for him. In Tad’s case, we eventually relied on his desire to be involved in various activities away from the home and day support facility. It became apparent that he enjoyed traveling around town, shopping in certain stores, engaging in group activities like bowling, meeting and interacting new people. It was also apparent that the alternative of staying in the same support facility or at home soon became problematic for Tad, often acting out, interrupting things, loud vocalizing, and often just expressing displeasure with things in general.

Tad’s Employment Planning Team

Once we determined Tad’s desire to have a job, we formed a comprehensive employment team. The team participants include us, Tad, Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, Oregon developmental Disability coordinator, Service Coordinator for the local DD services office, the local provider organization (OC) for job placement service, OC job coaches and attendant care staff. The planning process starts by the team getting an understanding of Tad’s basic character (he is social and likes to be around people). Other important characteristics include that he enjoys being outside, he likes riding in a vehicle, he listens to music while driving, he enjoys new things, and he loves to be on the go.

The big decision then was that Tad might actually enjoy and be successful at a delivery or distribution job. Then a **miracle happened**, a local restaurant decided to start a lunch time delivery service that needed a delivery person and was interested in Tad filling that position. In fact, since Tad was initially looking for work for a few hours each day and only three days a week, a second individual with DD was also interested in the same type of work and would be hired as well to work on the other 2 days each week. Actually, it was not a miracle but hard work that resulted in this happening. Based on Tad’s apparent work interests, a discovery step conducted by the local provider was able to locate the opening in the new restaurant service. The owner of Lilo’s Hawaiian BBQ restaurant believed that everyone had a right to work – what a great match.

The team then looked at Tad’s support needs for the delivery activities. We decided that he needed to try out an assistive technology device to support basic communication. A Job Coach and Attendant Care Provider worked with Tad to encourage him to use his device in public when meeting with potential employers, staff, and customers. Other individualized carved employment supports included those listed here.

- Job Coach 100% of the time Tad is working
- 1:1 Attendant Care Support Staff
- Reliable vehicle for deliveries
- All provider staff needed to be trained on implementing his safety plan
- Safety Plan in vehicle at all time
- On-the-job Training, once Tad was hired as a delivery person

Tad Goes to Work

Tad started work on November 1, 2018, his first real job with real pay in his life. We were apprehensive about how this would work out with the other parts of Tad's life. The importance of the routine schedule was a positive factor. We all -- family, Tad, and support persons -- soon became accustomed to Tad's new life. During the nine months of Tad's employment, he never missed a day of work. He began using the assistive communicator to greet people, to tell them what he was doing, and to thank them for ordering lunches from Lilo's.

From our observations he seemed to benefit greatly from this experience. Just to list a few he began to anticipate going out, there seemed to be purpose in his life, less anxiety by knowing how his day would start out, and better cooperation. He became part of the local community, a contributor with a sense of worth. He liked the routine that also sent him to many different parts of the city and made many new friends.

After a few weeks of work, it became apparent the customers came to understand and encourage Tad more when delivering. He got many return orders indicating the customers satisfaction and acceptance. This also indicates a win for the employer, Lilo's.

I'm not sure about how Tad felt about making a more equitable paycheck, but he was glad to get one. Tad was earning \$11.25 per hour for the first time in his life, just like others rather than the subminimum wage of 10 cents per hour. He became a taxpayer. In addition, as a side benefit, he was registered to vote the first time ever.

How do we know that Tad enjoyed his job?

In the end, Tad had to show us by his actions that he could actually be successful at employment. I certainly had doubts about it ever happening, but it did mainly due to his determination and hard work just getting up and going each day of his schedule. We could tell he liked his job just by his day to day reactions – life was better. This also provides a huge satisfaction and peace of mind for his mom and dad. There is life for Tad after us, and it looks like it will come from him becoming accepted and a true part of his community.