Secrets to Success…

Real people. Real Stories. Real Success.

Real stories from local youth throughout Northeast Missouri.

Bold stories of determination, commitment, choice, risk, teamwork, attitude, & passion all coming together to create opportunity & make a difference in the lives of youth.
Secrets to Success

Real People. Real Stories. Real Success.

LOQW is a leader in providing community employment services, community skills training, and service coordination in Northeast Missouri. In April of 1983, our agency became incorporated as a not-for-profit organization. Today we serve 14 counties in Northeast Missouri, we employ over 100 people and we serve approximately 500 customers annually.

Our Business Center and Administrative Offices are located in Monroe City, Missouri. We also have office locations in Hannibal, Kirksville, Shelbina, and Macon.

Please feel free to contact us for more information:

Learning Opportunities/Quality Works, Inc.
201 North Locust Street, P.O. Box254
Monroe City, MO 63456
573-735-4282
www.loqw.com

We would like to express our thanks to the individuals highlighted in these success stories. Their openness and honesty made these success stories possible. It is their hope, and ours, that these stories serve as inspiration for others along the way on their road of career planning and personal discovery.

LOQW, Inc.
“The Less You Have the More You Stand to Gain”

~by Zach Atteberry

My name is Zach and I’m sharing my story with you to help you understand the value of employment and community and how successful someone can be with the right supports in place.

I work at the Northeast Missouri Humane Society here in Hannibal, Missouri. Despite having autism, I have volunteered there for two years and have befriended countless feline, canine, and human friends. After graduating high school, I was offered a part time job. My job entails that I clean all the cat cages and dog cages, socialize animals, and help steer unwanted behavior in an effort to get more animals adopted. I have been through a long road of trial, failure, and success to reach the place that I am now. I have become socially active in my community and feel much happier as a result. My inspiration to succeed was drawn from several places such Learning Opportunities/Quality Works, Inc. (LOQW), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, my family, and the Humane Society.

My life hasn’t always been filled with pleasure and success. In the beginning, I was unsure of myself and had no clear idea of where to even start. Anxiety and doubt shrouded my mind when I first voyaged out on my journey to be someone. The beginning of this emotional battle commenced at the start of middle school. At that time, my foster dad had just died and my mom was recovering from thyroid cancer. We also had to move houses due to a financial problem. Already a blow in the beginning of the year, I felt like a leaf–fragile and could break at any time.

In middle school, students picked on me for being different and unique. I was autistic and did not fancy being socially active. I did not want any part of sports, classrooms, or discussion groups. Not only did students take part in embarrassing and tormenting me–teachers did as well. I was always picked on to give presentations, to stand up in front of the class, and answer questions on the chalk board. I barely passed middle school with all D’s. Middle school did not improve any, and as I made the transition to high school, I didn’t expect any change.

High school was surprisingly the hardest, yet most enlightening part of my life. I was forced to participate in socially stressful situations such as gym and give oral presentations in English. I was verbally abused and disliked at by other students. I dropped out in the middle of the 11th
year after failing 10th grade and most of middle school. I did not see a light at the end of the tunnel. I was lost.

The summer arrived. I occupied my time by playing video games, chatting to friends, watching television. It was a normal teenager’s life. Halfway through the summer, I was given my first cat. My new companion’s name was Tiger. Tiger was an F3 Bengal. He was very loving, very friendly, and active. It didn’t take long for the love affair to bloom. I have always loved cats; cats give me confidence.

It was about a week before the next high school year that a life changing event happened. I was in touch with LOQW about returning to school. The deal was that the school raises my volunteer time at the animal shelter from two hours a day to four hours a day. They accepted my proposal and I returned. During the next few months, school was still hard but not unbearable. Students were still mean, and presentations were rigorous. I actually did try in presentations and performed well enough to pass with all A’s that year compared to all D’s in previous years.

Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as LOQW, employs several helpful services for people that find it difficult find a career or to live independently. LOQW assigned me one employment consultant – his name was Aaron. Aaron and I had multiple discussions over interview etiquette, individual living skills and work. We also played video games and had fun at various stores such as Wal-Mart and Pet Co. I began to enjoy my community.

Employment Consultants, the professional staff from LOQW, make the difference. These staff are just regular people that push you to become more active and successful by bringing you out into the community. Caseworkers are there to help you dissect and solve work related problems, learn individual living skills, and become socially and physically active. LOQW can also hire job coaches (or retention specialists) to help with succeeding your new job.

I started volunteering four hours at the Northeast Missouri Humane Society per day and it really boosted my confidence. I started working and found that I actually have skills and knowledge that can be helpful in a work environment, and by helping animals, I felt better about myself. I volunteered until the end of school, and also joined the animal care club at my high school where I helped in various fundraisers. On the last day of school I walked out with my diploma in one hand and the Northeast Missouri Humane Society Club scholarship in the other.

After school, I was employed as a part time worker. I found it very difficult to manage myself. I was unable to use the hose at first, and made myriad of mistakes such as forgetting to water a
cat, streaking windows, and not cleaning dishes well enough. I was very flummoxed and executed many mistakes. After much guidance and demonstration by LOQW job coaches on the following month, I was able to clean all the cat cages, dog cages, and dishes flawlessly. I started to mimic new tasks that I had learned and performed them with only a few mistakes here and there. I found myself around and even taught myself to sweep and mop.

Working at the humane Society with the support of LOQW and Vocational Rehabilitation gave me the confidence I needed to succeed. Do not think the smallest opportunity can’t make the difference – it can. The rewards that are reaped from securing a friendship with animals and with behavioral places such as LOQW are paramount to success.

As for my future, I study animal behavior in my spare time and figure on working in the animal welfare field, either as a veterinary technician majoring in feline behavior, an adoption coordinator or possibly a shelter administrator. Even if it is a small obstacle, work to overcome it. Little by little, you can make success happen. One day at a time, one challenge after another.

Please enjoy the success stories included here and draw inspiration for your own success!
Max Homer is a recent graduate of Kirksville High School and alumni of the Youth Exploration for Success (YES) Summer Youth Program in Adair County Missouri. Max used the time he spent in high school classes and working with LOQW to do some real career planning and personal discovery.

Max worked with his Employment Consultant and others in his personal network (including family, friends, teachers, and others) to figure out what would be the best choice for him. Max took part in many work opportunity classes through his high school and has participated in the YES Program for the past few summers. The YES Program afforded him the opportunity to try out many types of work and also utilize the Career Planning Guide from the Missouri Planning Council (MPCDD). This is an easy to use guide to career discovery. It takes a person through the steps it takes to take charge of your own job search and career planning with the support of your personal network. This type of career planning and personal discovery helped Max to focus heavily on his conditions, preferences, and contributions to work.

Specifically, Max went through a lot of personal discovery to figure out what his conditions for employment were. As a new high school graduate he realized that he had to work his way up to the perfect job, but he had some things that were a must for him in any job he would accept. Max needs to be a part of a team. This is critical for his job satisfaction. It is also important for his success that he has clear goals and expectations set by his employer. He also spent time thinking about the things that he would like to have in a job, his preferences. Max wants to wear a cool uniform and be recognized for the work he is doing in his community. Max then worked with his network to become more confident in his contributions to a potential employer, those things that he brings to the table that are of benefit to a business. Max is talented young man with a lot of passion for helping people and making his community a better place. With this type of planning and the support of his career network, Max was able to secure his dream job at the Adair County Ambulance District. He plays a critical role in the maintenance of the building and equipment and clearly recognized as part of the team by his co-workers, supervisors, and the community.
Creativity Leads to Self-Discovery for this Young Artist

Lakota lives in a very small town in Northeast Missouri. She is your typical teenage girl... she is dealing with learning how to have healthy relationships, finding out who she is, testing her boundaries, and planning for her future.

To work toward these goals Lakota participated in the Youth Exploration for Success (YES) Summer Youth Program in Macon Missouri and is beginning to discover her many talents. During the YES Summer Program Lakota spent time with other kids her age and worked with several area college students as mentors in the program. It’s important for Lakota and other girls her age to have strong role models in their lives.

While participating in the YES Program Lakota began her career exploration by doing research on different careers, discovering what jobs are available in various career fields, taking tours of local employers, and trying out different types of work. This type of career exploration is just what Lakota needed as she began to figure out her conditions, preferences, and contributions for work. Lakota also had the opportunity to have lots of fun and make new friends her own age. She went swimming and fishing and helped others with art projects. Lakota is an incredibly talented and creative person. She put these talents to work in the YES Program as she and the other youth worked on job readiness skills, career exploration, and self-advocacy projects. Learning to be strong self-advocates is an important part of transitioning from high school to adulthood for any teenager, but it is especially important when you are a person with a disability.

Lakota has been involved in many difficult situations in her life and has found that expressing herself creatively helps her to deal with these things. Lakota is just beginning her journey of career planning and self-discovery, but she has learned that her creativity will always be a big part of both her work and personal life. She plans to continue to work with a Support Coach from LOQW and she works toward her goals of finding her first job and living on her own.
Jack’s Story is One of Risk and Opportunity

Jack’s story is one of calculated risk. This type of risk partnered with careful planning can often equal huge opportunity for people. “Jack” has asked that we not use his real name, but he did want to share his story so that others could benefit from his experiences. As Jack was beginning his career planning he and his family began to realize that one of his biggest disincentives to working and pursuing full time employment was the fear of losing his benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). This was a very scary prospect for both Jack and his family because benefits from the SSA represent more than just the dollar amount received each month, they represent security.

Jack and his County Connections Service Coordinator contacted the Benefits Specialist at Learning Opportunities/Quality Works, Inc. (LOQW) when he and his mother first received a letter from SSA notifying him that his SSI (Supplemental Security Income) benefits were going to be reduced. They were requesting a consultation from the agency’s certified benefits planner to understand what was happening. Jack enjoys his job, but his family was concerned about his long term security. You see, Jack is a 20 year old young man that has been diagnosed with autism. He has just graduated from high school and has been working a part time job at a local healthcare facility. Jack is a hard worker and a bit of a perfectionist. He loves his job and is very good at it. He currently lives at home with his parents but plans to move out some day when he has enough money saved and is ready for the independence.

Jack and his mother met with the Benefit’s Specialist from LOQW to discuss his situation. Learning to maneuver the world of Social Security benefits can be overwhelming. Working with a trained professional made it easier to manage. There was some initial paperwork to be filled out and consent forms to sign so that the Benefits Specialist could obtain a benefits planning summary from SSA.

The review of someone’s benefits is complicated and very unique to the person, but in Jack’s case his benefits were being reduced because he was receiving an income, a benefits check, and not paying out for any type of living expenses. Jack and his family are in no way interested in remaining on benefits forever; the goal is for Jack to be self-sufficient. However they are concerned about planning and preparing for his future now while he is still a young. Jack and his family acted on the recommendations of the Benefits Specialist and Jack is now paying his mother a flat fee per month for his living expenses and by supplying SSA with the proper documentation his benefits reduction has been discontinued. This affords Jack and his family the opportunity to save for his own home and make a more smooth transition from school to work. This is a risk that Jack hopes will pay off in the reward of home ownership!
Opportunity and Exposure to Choices makes a World of Difference

Tina is new to Northeast Missouri. She recently moved here from a small community adjacent to the St. Louis Metro Area. Tina made a move from her home to escape a very difficult situation. She is trying to make a new start. Tina is 18 years old, starting her senior year of high school, and is starting over. Tina has left behind her family and pets that she loved. She is starting a brand new school where she knows no one and is dealing with all the anxiety that goes with this for a teenage girl. This has been a difficult adjustment for her. To add to this Tina is trying to begin career planning and self-discovery. Tina has not had the opportunity to try many things in the past. Fun things like going swimming, making friends, or even having a part time summer job were not available to Tina.

Once Tina was settled in to her new home in Monroe City, she and the people supporting her worked to get her settled in school and connected with other resources that would help her begin to set goals and work toward a smooth transition out of high school. Tina enrolled in the Youth Exploration for Success (YES) Summer Youth Program at Learning Opportunities/Quality Works, Inc. in Monroe City. Through the YES Program Tina was involved in Job Readiness, Career Exploration, Recreational Activities, and Self-Advocacy Skill Building. Tina has dealt with emotional issues as she worked to start a new part time job, make new friends and discover things that she is good at and likes to do. Tina learned to swim for the first time in her life! She went fishing at the local lake. She also made several new friends. Tina discovered many new hobbies that she enjoyed and like most girls her age likes trying out new hair styles, clothes, and makeup with her friends. For the first time, Tina also tried out some volunteer work and held a part time job. Tina loves earning a paycheck, but even more importantly Tina discovered that she likes to serve people. She makes amazing cookies and other snacks and loves to see people enjoy her creations. For the first time in her life, Tina is taking advantage of her opportunities and plans to make the most of them!
Attitude is everything for Jared and he has the friends and personal networks to prove it!

Jared Niemeyer is one of those people that everyone knows by name. He is charming and funny and has the ability to put people at ease quickly. This is probably why he excels at his job and in his community. Jared is a senior at Kirksville High School in Northeast Missouri. He is very excited about his senior year and is ready to enjoy all it has to offer! He is actively involved in sports and other extracurricular activities at his school. His exception attitude has also helped him excel at one his other passions... promoting disability awareness issues and self-advocacy among other high school students. Jared has been actively involved in the State and National Youth Activation Committees. This remains very important to Jared. This self-activism and the related activities has also afforded him many opportunities, including trips to Washington D.C. and an opportunity to meet with Vice President Biden and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden at a function in our Nation’s Capital!

Jared receives some individualized supports at school and on his job. Jared utilizes the support of a job coach at his part-time job at Hy-Vee in Kirksville. His job coach provides supports on site to Jared at his job as needed by Jared and his employer. Jared is the epitome of a Hy-Vee employee. He is very customer focused, friendly, and welcoming. He has a strong work ethic and enjoys his job very much. Like anyone his age, he is learning to balance the responsibilities of work with the fun of his senior year of high school but he has strong family support and the support of an extended network of friends, family, and co-workers to help him along his journey of transitioning from high school to adulthood. When Jared was searching for his job he used his conditions, preferences, and contributions to find the best job match for him.

Jared says that a positive attitude makes all the difference... and I think he is proof that this is true. We all know that to be successful in life we need a strong network of supports around us...and a positive attitude and an outgoing personality is the best way to meet new people and build your personal network!
Values...

- Staff, volunteers, and community members that take an active interest in people with disabilities.
- Open and ongoing communication with people who have disabilities and all that touch their lives.
- The facilitation and enhancement of resources to insure quality services.
- and above all, we value the choices, rights, and dignity of people with disabilities

It is the Mission of Learning Opportunities/Quality Works, Inc. to positively impact the lives of individuals through support, advocacy & connection to resources.
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES/QUALITY WORKS, INC.

201 NORTH LOCUST STREET, P. O. BOX 254
MONROE CITY, MO 63456
WWW.LOQW.COM

POSITIVELY IMPACTING LIVES THROUGH
SUPPORT, ADVOCACY, AND CONNECTION TO RESOURCES.