

Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team - May 2008

Isaac V: Finding Employment and Housing

Making the difficult decision to leave his native country, El Salvador, Isaac V. came to the United States more than a decade ago in pursuit of better opportunities.

Arriving in Boston, Isaac found familiarity with a job in the kitchen of an El Salvadorian restaurant, where he worked for several years and leased an apartment with some friends. Lay-offs at the restaurant affected several employees, including Isaac, causing his mental health problems to resurface into a downward spiral that resulted in his use of alcohol and drugs, and finally homelessness after losing his apartment.



During this time, he experienced a severe relapse of his mental health symptoms and was hospitalized. While in the hospital, Isaac was told about the HomeWork Project, funded in part by a grant from ODEP. The program helps individuals like Isaac to find jobs and housing at the same time.

HomeWork customized an employment opportunity that emphasized his strengths and optimized his potential for success. Assigned a Spanish speaking supervisor, Isaac was able to have some of his duties deferred while he learned computer skills.

At the same time, the Justice Resource Institute helped Isaac find an apartment that met his needs. Their assistance helped him secure affordable housing through the Shelter Plus Care subsidy and provided him a counselor that taught him how to budget his money and save. Turning his life around in every area, Isaac started his new job and moved into his own apartment able to pay 30% of his income for rent.

Today, he is a full-time courier for the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, where he enjoys and appreciates his job and his co-workers. Isaac is very proud to have achieved self-sufficiency and no longer depends on public assistance.

With the support of his counselors and continuing his therapy, Isaac has created a new chapter in his life – a chapter where he fully realizes his purpose for

coming to the United States. He beams, "I have the American dream....a place...a job....and friends".