

## Part II:

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### Activities and Outcomes

Since Richard had previous work experience in the food service industry and was motivated to continue working in this field, this direction was pursued in his vocational planning. Fortunately, Linda Brown had recently learned of assistive technology that might help Richard realize his goal: a standing wheelchair. A sales representative for the standing wheelchair company met them at the Hands On Educational Services training facility, the Grand Hyatt Regency Tampa Bay, which partners with this program.



The sales representative demonstrated how the chair might enable Richard to physically carry out the duties of a cook. It is important for a cook to be higher than his/her workstation to most efficiently chop, slice and prepare the product. Richard then met with his psychiatrist to evaluate the feasibility of trying the standing wheelchair and was informed that after physical therapy he should be able to stand for extended periods. The evaluation included areas such as upper body strength, joint flexibility, bone strength, endurance, and cardiovascular health. After purchase of the chair and eight weeks of intensive therapy, two to three times per week, he progressed from standing for five minutes at a time to over 4 hours, which was agreed to be a minimum period for part-time employment.

Once this level of standing was achieved and he was acclimated to the standing wheelchair, Richard started the Hands On Educational Program. Impressed by Richard's work ethic and attitude, the Grand Hyatt Regency offered him a permanent position at the end of the training program. He was hired as a Specialty Cook to prepare garnish in the cold food department for food such as salads, fruit, tuna, potatoes and chicken salad. To carry out these duties, Richard was required to slice or chop fruits and vegetables and then arrange them on buffet trays.

John Ficca points out that there is no obligation for the Hyatt to hire the students who train there, but it does serve as a two week work evaluation where they can view the student's skill level and work habits.

Richard lived in a hotel in Tampa during the culinary training course and after accepting the job with the Grand Hyatt Regency in Tampa, moved from Bradenton to the Tampa area. The support provided through the Hands On Educational Program proved to be an important factor in Richard's success. John Ficca personally helped him locate an apartment and asked the hotel that houses his students during their training to extend the same discount to Richard during the 3 weeks it took to locate and modify his apartment. The door to the bathroom had to be removed to allow wheelchair access, but no other modifications were necessary. John

also loaned Richard the apartment down payment, which Richard paid back after his return to work.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A **manual standing wheelchair** was recommended for Richard, after approval from his physiatrist, to be used primarily at work. Richard also uses *two additional wheelchairs* other than the standing chair. He has a power wheelchair which he uses to commute to and from work and when on household errands outside of his apartment. He also has a manual wheelchair for use around the apartment. The standing wheelchair is left at work.

The engineers at the Grand Hyatt Regency found and modified a *basket* that attaches to Richard's wheelchair to transport his knives. It is attached with a hook which allows Richard to remove the basket and place it above his workstation where it will not interfere with the actual chef tasks carried out at his workspace.

The standing wheelchair placed Richard in a position that was actually too high to ergonomically carry out the duties of his job. The engineers at the Grand Hyatt Regency also built a *workstation platform* to increase the height of his workstation approximately 8 inches.

Richard takes the public transit van to and from work and pays \$2.30 each way. He leaves for work at 5:30 a.m. for the 15 minute commute and starts work at 7:00. He likes to arrive early to set up his workstation, sharpen his knives, grab a cup of coffee and visit with his co-workers. His shift concludes 5 hours later and after cleaning his workstation and putting away his knives, he eats lunch in the employee cafeteria. He returns home around 1:30 and elevates his legs for about 2 hours to reduce the swelling.

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Safety was an important issue that needed to be addressed before Richard could be accepted into the program or hired on a permanent basis. The standing wheelchair could not impede the heavy flow of traffic, since over 60 chefs work in this large commercial kitchen space. A location in the corner of the kitchen was identified as a place where both Richard and other employees could work safely.

The **Florida Department of Vocational Rehabilitation** provided the following services and assistive technology:

1. The insurance co-payment from the physiatrist visit to evaluate his ability to stand.
2. Eight weeks of physical therapy, 2-3 times per week.
3. A manual standing wheelchair, the Easy Stand 5000, by Altimate Medical, which can be found at [www.easystand.com](http://www.easystand.com) for \$2,695.
4. The Hands On Educational Services culinary course, which also included a set of chef knives.
5. Two weeks of hotel charges during the training plus an additional three weeks of hotel charges during the search for an apartment and subsequent modifications to the apartment.
6. Removal of the apartment bathroom door.

The **employer**, the Grand Hyatt Regency of Tampa Bay, provided the following job accommodations and assistive technology:

1. The basket for Richard's knives, which was modified by the Hyatt engineers by attaching the hook to allow him to lift the basket and attach it to his wheelchair. A basket similar to the one purchased and adapted for Richard can be found at <http://www.campingworld.com/browse/skus/index.cfm?skunum=1764> for less than \$20.
2. The workstation platform, which was custom fabricated by the engineers at the Grand Hyatt for under \$100.

### **COST ANALYSIS**

Florida DVR spent a total of \$12,500 on Richard's rehabilitation and return to work, including the cost of services and assistive technology. The cost of the assistive technology was approximately \$2,800, or about 25% of the total expenses. DVR also provided post employment services by helping with some of his prescription medication and wheelchair repairs and maintenance. His case is currently closed but can be re-opened if additional services or expenditures become necessary, as per agency guidelines for all rehabilitation service recipients.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

November 2003 marked Richard's third year of employment. He received the Grand Hyatt Regency All Star Award in June 2000 and his employer stresses this was not related to overcoming disability related obstacles, but for his exemplary work ethic.

Richard was also invited to become a member of the Hands On Educational Services advisory board. A computer was donated for Richard and he has since been learning computer skills. He continues to enjoy his employment at the Grand Hyatt and his hours have increased from four to six hours per day. He also hopes to advance to a more skilled cooking position, once some safety issues are addressed. For example, Richard would need to be able to quickly react to a stove top fire, and there is concern that his manual wheelchair might not be safe in an emergency type situation.

His employer is supportive of opportunities for advancement, but in the meantime Richard says he looks forward to coming to work each day and is most satisfied with his current employment status.



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