

*This month the RRTC is spotlighting two outstanding Employment Specialists, Kristen Hamilton and Austin Miller for their team work in developing an organizational partnership with The Vitamin Shoppe.*

Starting in early 2018 Kristen Hamilton was looking for a job for her client Ve'Shonda and saw a listing on an online job board for a full-time "Health Enthusiast" position at the Vitamin Shoppe Distribution Center in Ashland. Kristen assisted Ve'Shonda in completing the application and a month later Ve'Shonda was invited in for an interview. At this point Austin Miller had taken over as Ve'Shonda's lead job coach picking up where Kristen had left off. Austin accompanied Ve'Shonda through the interview and explained to the human resources staff how he would provide support for her with job site training at no cost to the employer. Ve'Shonda did great in the interview and was offered the job, starting at \$13 an hour with full benefits.



The Vitamin Shoppe distribution center is a massive warehouse which serves all of their retail locations on the eastern seaboard. It also fills all online orders for home deliveries for that portion of the country. They employ around 410 in production staff with a total of around 440 including management and HR. All production positions are classified as Health Enthusiasts and management uses a process of trials to determine which role on the production floor is the best fit for each employee.

Ve'Shonda started working in March and impressed everyone. She was placed in an order picking position where she uses a scanner to look up orders and then fill a tote with the correct order by picking the items from the various shelves and then sending it down a conveyor belt. Her work performance was great and her positive and friendly personality made her new coworkers happy to work with her.



A couple of months after Ve'Shonda got her job, Kristen completed a second application for a Health Enthusiast position for her Project SEARCH client, River. River was in his third internship at Project SEARCH and Kristen saw the potential he had for a good match at the Vitamin Shoppe. Since the employer had developed this successful partnership with VCU, they were happy to pull River's application amongst the masses of online applications they received. River came in for an interview and did great. Given his skill set and energetic personality, River was placed in a quality control position. His responsibility is to double check the totes that have already been filled as they come across the conveyor belt making sure they are correct and ready to be shipped out.



Since making the placements at the Vitamin Shoppe, Kristen and Austin have arranged two inclusivity trainings for the distribution center staff. The first training was for the management staff. Management found this training so helpful they requested a second training with the shift leads. Mary Jo Palumbo, Human Resources Manager, reports that she relies on the VCU job coaches to make these placements work by finding the right fit for each individual. Mary Jo sited some other leaders in inclusive

employment such as Walgreens and Sephora that she strives to be like. In the months following River's placement, a third VCU client was also placed. Organizational partnerships like this one demonstrate the benefits each party contributes. Thank you Kristen and Austin for bringing VCU-RRTC and The Vitamin Shoppe together over these great placements!