

## Redefining Sue – VRU guidance realigns injured worker's outlook

*By Fred Charlton, Qualified Rehabilitation Consultant, Vocational Rehabilitation unit*

“Why would anyone want to hire me?” These were some of the first words out of Sue’s\* mouth when we began the long journey back to work in June 2009. From her perspective, Sue saw herself as a woman who is more than 50 years old, with a lifting restriction, and nothing much to offer another employer. Because of her restriction, she could not return to her previous job.

This reflection of low self-esteem and value would prove to be a major obstacle to overcome during the next 15 months. Despite words of encouragement and a review of transferrable skills by Vocational Rehabilitation unit (VRU) qualified rehabilitation consultant (QRC) and placement staff members, Sue still had a lack of self-confidence.

The first thing we did was to encourage volunteerism and Sue quickly found a position in a gift shop. She loved customer service work and really enjoyed volunteering, even though there was no pay. Sue was congratulated on getting the first “job” and reminded of a frequent path – from volunteer to paid work.

VRU staff members spent countless hours directly helping Sue to develop her 10- and 20-second script/commercial to be used to introduce herself to prospective employers in the application and interview process. Job-seeking-skills training was provided in general terms and specific to preparation for each of her interviews.

Sue made it through a three-interview process for a retail job. Her spirits went up, but then crashed when she was not selected. Sue soon became a tireless job-seeker and enjoyed attending VRU’s monthly “job club” where she could experience support and learn from others in her same situation. Being able to see herself reflected in the lives of similar job-seekers with their own individual, seemingly insurmountable, obstacles to employment, provided a sense of perspective that was helpful to Sue.

In January 2010, we changed tactics slightly and added one-on-one computer training classes at VRU. Sue made great progress during the next six months and can now create cover letters, attach her resume and complete an online job

\*Not her real name.



application. These training sessions provided rich opportunities to build self-confidence and discuss and reinforce job-seeking-skill lessons.

Sue blossomed with this assistance and her appearance and demeanor began to change. Glimmers of optimism were observed. Upbeat personalized e-mail messages began to pop up in all of our e-mail boxes from Sue, reflecting her pride in accomplishment as she learned new skills.

By July 2010, Sue landed her first job as an usher/security person. Shortly after that, she was hired to work in a company's production department. Despite not being able to keep that job due to transportation issues, Sue is keeping very busy as she continues her usher/security person job and continues to apply for other positions that interest her. She has also begun another volunteer job.

I don't think it's coincidental that Sue has now been offered opportunities for employment. Her transformation to a person who feels capable, valued and "hire-able," is a far cry from her initial expression of "who would want me?" Helping Sue identify her skills and talents was the first step; getting her to believe in herself was the tough part, but the VRU staff was up to the challenge.

