**Nathaniel**

(Nathaniel)

My name’s Nathaniel, I work for Ramsey County as a certified peer recovery specialist. I work with people facing mental health challenges in the community, to help them achieve their recovery goals. Before working for Ramsey County, I worked for Regions Hospital as a peer specialist, and before that it had been a long time since I had stable employment. I knew I just wanted to change in life and to give back, and you know, I had been considering going back to work for a while, but it was a case manager who helped me find the resources, realize that it was a real possibility, and I didn’t have to just stay at home, collecting benefits. Meeting with my VR worker answered a lot of those questions about what kind of supports I could get, just from practicing job interviews, since I hadn’t had one in a long time, to being able to find clothes for a job interview. You know, being on a fixed income, that was a big barrier to going back to work. And finding job leads and just creating a place where I could go with questions, especially about benefits, which was a big concern that I had.

(Melissa)

Working with Nathaniel was like working with someone on the really very motivated side. He was really goal-oriented. He really was wanting to give back. He was really wanting to help other people. It was really fun to work with Nathaniel because of his level of motivation and commitment. Were there times he was nervous and kind of afraid to make the next steps? Absolutely. But he moved forward with a lot of support. And then it was working with him about benefits, actually, and moving forward from that, because he was nervous about losing them. He didn’t want to be without something, some income, and didn’t want to be without his medical coverage and things like that. And we were able to get him that information and that helped to kind of ease things along the way.

(Nathaniel)

Again, it’s a career, not just a job. A job, to me, feels like kind of a dead end, that this is where you are and where you will be. A career gives me hope that I’m always growing, changing. I’m able to see more rewards. I have absolutely no regrets making the decision to go back to work. It was probably the best choice I’ve made in my life, honestly. Financially, it’s a huge difference, not to be worrying about paying rent or having enough food to eat. It’s now about saving for retirement and long-term goals. Owning my own house is something that I thought was never even possible, and now it’s something that I feel like I, you know, I can do in the next five years. I would say my life has purpose now. It feels like I’m always busy, always doing something. It’s a big change, and being able to feel like you can accomplish things, really living again, not just kind of surviving day to day.