

Cynthia Ross:

My name is Cynthia Ross and I'm a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Peer Support Specialist. My disability is paranoid schizophrenia. I was diagnosed at the age of 21, my last year of undergrad school.

Speaker 2:

Employment first, celebrating diversity in the workforce.

Cynthia Ross:

At the time of my diagnosis, there weren't any support services that are robust as they are today, so there wasn't any incentive or encouragement from anyone to pursue work. I made several attempts to try to work on my own. Due to my disability and hospitalizations, I was not able to successfully keep a job, but I wanted to work, so my feelings were despair, hopelessness, no goals, no direction. As time went on, the years passed. With 10 years on disability, I discovered that they had more services available for people with disabilities. That began my journey into employment. I was encouraged to go back to school to get a master's in Rehabilitation Counseling. I chose Vocational Rehabilitation and it assisted me with continuing with school, and because of the Social Security Ticket to Work program, I was able to complete my master's.

Voc rehab was very supportive. They inspired me to keep going. Even sometimes I had doubts like, "Can I really do this?" They were right there for me, giving me whole and courage and confidence. I believe that here in Arizona, they are doing a phenomenal job. The providers, the employment specialists, all of them are doing a phenomenal job preparing people with disabilities for jobs. What I would tell someone who feels that they cannot work is that we have services and supports that are uniquely positioned to help people to get jobs, to help them overcome their barriers, and to help them understand their unique capabilities, and translate that to clear goals that they can use in the workforce.

Speaker 2:

If you have a disability and are interested in working, visit des.az.gov/VR, or call 1-800-563-1221. Employers interested in diversifying their workforce to include workers with disabilities can email RSAEMP@azdes.gov.