

Ivan Rivera:

I acquired my disability when I was 43. I think the thought for me was, what do I do now? The learning about the disability, how to manage the disability, how to manage one's life, because everything's changed.

Speaker 2:

Employment First, Celebrating Diversity in the Workforce.

Ivan Rivera:

I have lymphedema in my right leg, which is a result of cancer, and I have a few autoimmune disabilities, as well. I lost a lot of confidence in myself once I've acquired the disability, because I was no longer able to do the things that were normal or everyday for me. I was very confused, I was scared, and I retreated for a few years and decided that it's better to have a second life than to have no life at all.

Initially, I actually started vocational rehabilitation, which I was with voc rehab throughout my time getting my associate's degree. I found that in my forties, I actually did better at studying. My grades were astronomical, so I gained a lot of confidence because of that, because VR was really, really good, I had a counselor that was just fantastic. I was with an employment network that I signed up with after voc rehab. And then, my employment network coordinator called me and said, "Hey, there's a position at Ability360 that may interest you." I went ahead and I interviewed, and about a week or two later, I got the job.

Social Security has set forth work incentives to allow someone to test their ability to work. There's what they call a trial work period where you can earn as much as you want to for a certain amount of time, and it will not affect your cash benefit. If in fact you cannot work at a certain level, your cash benefit comes back to you. All of this put together helped me quite a bit. What employment means to me now is being able to plan for the future, knowing that there is something strategic that I have set in place, getting up and doing something productive every morning and knowing that where I'm going, I'm actually helping people. I feel like I have a second life.

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.