

Finding her passion, using her gifts: Woman talks to legislators about working in the community

Heather Goldstein showcased the work she does at Family Video as part of "Take Your Legislator to Work Day."
By Catherine W. Idzerda

JANESVILLE—Heather Goldstein has found her happy place, the spot in the universe where she functions best.

The location? Family Video, 1950 Center Ave., Janesville.

On Thursday, Goldstein had the chance to share her success and happiness with Rep. Deb Kolste, D-Janesville and Sen. Tim Cullen, D-Janesville, as part of the Wisconsin Board for People with Disabilities "Take Your Legislator to Work Day."

The day highlights people with disabilities who have found success working in a community setting.

Goldstein describes herself as having "functional recovery from autism."

"I'll have autism for the rest of my life," Goldstein said.

But she has learned to cope with the condition through a variety of therapies, and has learned how to adjust her life to stay healthy.

Goldstein was diagnosed when she was 13. Doctors said that because of the number of seizures she was suffering, and her ability to cope in ordinary settings, she would never be a functioning member of society.

But using a combination of therapies, and a lot of hard work, Goldstein now has her own home, a driver's license and a job that fits her personality.

"Movies are my thing," Goldstein said. "I have a passion for them."

She's one of those movie buff who can give you the title of a movie only knowing a few tidbits of its plot. Goldstein also knows which movies Hollywood reviewers panned, but were popular among regular folks.

Goldstein had a lively discussion with Cullen about the recently released movie, "The Judge," that received bad reviews. Cullen thought it was a great movie. Goldstein agreed.

Goldstein said she agreed to be a representative for "Take Your Legislator to Work Day" because she represented someone who has a disability, "but you can't tell by looking at him."

"People can have a disability, but still bring a lot to the workplace," Goldstein said.

To keep herself healthy, Goldstein works shorter shifts and focuses on managing her stress level, both on and off the job.

This year, "Take Your Legislator to Work Day" comes in the middle of concerns about changes to

rules coming down from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid that could change how many people with disabilities would be served in segregated settings or what used to be called “sheltered workshops.” Examples include places such as KANDU in Janesville and VIP Services in Elkhorn.

Many operators of such segregated settings now refer to them as “pre-vocational” settings, because some of the people are being trained for community jobs.

But the Wisconsin Board for People with Disabilities noted that fewer than five percent of people who work in such facilities move on to work in the community.

Some states have moved away completely from segregated settings, and some advocates are concerned it will happen in Wisconsin. Many people with disabilities and their families have asked for segregated settings to be preserved.

Department of Health Services Director Kitty Rhoades said, however, that her proposal to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid includes the full spectrum of choices.

Kolste said her office had received a memo about the issue from Rhoades, stating that she wanted to preserve choice.

“I think they (segregated workshops) are always going to have a part in providing services,” Kolste said. “Some of it might have to change.”