**Marsha**

# Background

Marsha is a 23-year-old with an intellectual disability who completed Cedar Park ISD’s 18–21 program prior to graduating high school. Marsha currently receives $841 per month from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and has received benefits counseling. She has a Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver. Marsha does not have a guardian, but her grandmother helps her with financial support, housing, transportation, and moral guidance. The VR counselor identified that Marsha needs assistance with self-direction, work skills, and interpersonal skills. Marsha’s current Individualized Plan for Employment goal is to become a floral designer.

# Home and Community Exploration

On January 3, the Supported Employment (SE) specialist (Mary) first visited with Marsha and her grandmother (Pearl) at their home for about an hour and a half. During the visit Mary explained SE services, which include collecting information and observing Marsha’s skills and abilities. Marsha gave Mary a tour of the home. Marsha said that she cares for the many plants in the home in addition to caring for her cat. Marsha’s room was neat, clean, and well-organized. Pearl told Mary that Marsha takes pride in her room. Marsha’s living situation appears stable, and her grandmother, who owns the home, has no plans to move.

Marsha explained her daily routine: she gets up in the morning—using the alarm on her cell phone—takes a shower, gets dressed, and grooms herself. Next, she makes a bowl of cereal for breakfast. Following that, she watches TV, works on arts and crafts, looks at magazines, and completes chores, such as sweeping, mopping, washing the dishes, and doing simple laundry. On Mondays and Fridays she attends classes at ARCIL (A Resource Center for Independent Living). On Wednesdays she attends a floral design class at Austin Community College (ACC). Marsha said that she is doing well in the class and would like to take the other classes in the floral design series. ACC currently offers a Continuing Education Floral Design certificate. The program states, “Our program is comprehensive and introduces/prepares students to enter the floral industry. However, our students range from the hobbyist to those looking to start a new career.”

Marsha and her grandmother verified that Pearl pays the bills and that Marsha lacks money management skills and has trouble with simple math. Marsha has a bank account, but it is currently used only to deposit the SSA check. Marsha takes medication, with supervision from her grandmother, for depression and mild anxiety. When Marsha becomes frustrated or anxious, she listens to music, takes a walk, and tries to evaluate the situation.

Marsha and Pearl identified the following resources and individuals who support Marsha:

* ARCIL—where Marsha takes classes related to independent living
* Bluebonnet Trails Community Services—where Marsha receives case management and counseling, which she thinks can help her with maintaining a job

Mary’s second visit with Marsha, which was an hour long and on January 10, was at ARCIL. Marsha introduced her instructor, Teri Cooke, and the three of us visited and discussed what type of assistance Marsha needs when learning and remembering new tasks and managing her anxiety. Mary also observed Marsha in the class completing tasks and socializing with peers. It was determined that Marsha would need systems in place to remind her to complete tasks correctly and would require initial training to learn new things. Once Marsha performs reoccurring tasks, she becomes more independent. Marsha seems shy and withdrawn until she feels comfortable.

While driving Marsha home, Marsha and I discovered a bus stop about a half a mile from Marsha’s house, and she identified Lowe’s, HEB, Red Barn, a floral shop, and Michaels. Marsha agreed to try to successfully ride the bus on her own.

On January 18, Mary met Marsha at her home and showed Marsha how to locate the Capital Metro application on her phone to identify a route to the closest HEB. The route requires one transfer and takes about 30 minutes. Together Marsha and I walked to the bus stop, which was a half-mile from Marsha’s house. Marsha was dressed appropriately and wore decent walking shoes. Marsha identified the correct bus when it arrived, entered the bus, and paid her fare. She used the app to identify where to get off the bus to transfer. Marsha successfully transferred to the next bus with only a few cues. Marsha said that continuing to use the bus could be a new way for her to get around in the community.

# Career Exploration

Marsha shared that she had completed some work experiences while in school. One involved assisting a preschool classroom teacher, which included completing craft projects with the students, cleaning the activity centers, making copies, and preparing materials for activities. Marsha suggested that I contact her teacher, Ms. Mills, or her school job coach for more information. The second work experience was at a nonprofit, Creative Reuse. Creative Reuse sells gently used creative materials donated from individuals and businesses at an affordable price and hosts educational and craft workshops as well as other community events that facilitate the positive reuse of discarded materials that otherwise would end up in the landfill. Marsha sorted through donated materials and packaged reusable materials. Ms. Mills said that Marsha’s school job coach reported that Marsha sometimes required redirection to complete her assigned tasks of sorting, packaging, and labeling materials, rather than spending too much time working on craft projects. Nonetheless, Marsha received compliments on her ability to converse with others in structured social settings. The school job coach also reported that toward the end of the work experience Marsha was able to work independently, as she was able to take all redirection from her natural supports at the site.

On January 24, Marsha and I met at the local library to conduct research related to Marsha’s employment interest. First, Marsha completed an interest finder that identified that she likes to be creative, likes to have set routines, likes being around others she knows, and tends to be shy and withdrawn around strangers. Marsha needed the interest finder questions to be read to her, and examples needed to be provided for her to understand the questions. Once she understood the questions, Marsha was able to describe her likes and dislikes. Her work preferences include hands-on problem-solving and working with others, and she was described as being good-natured and cooperative, in addition to having a positive attitude. Marsha does not like paperwork. Possible jobs identified included merchandising associate, plant services, floral designer, and gardener. As Marsha reviewed each position, she identified that her high school diploma and certificate in floral design supported her employment goal. Earnings full-time could total about $30,000 per year. It was identified that Marsha needs endurance, strength, and fine motor skills to achieve her goals.

Marsha mentioned that she wants to conduct informational interviews and test out her skills at Lowe’s as a merchandising associate for plants, at HEB as a Blooms perishable representative, or at gardening or landscaping business. With assistance, Marsha identified some possible questions to ask on her work observations, after reviewing the job descriptions and information collected about the potential employer.

# Work Observations

Work Observation 1: (January 31) HEB Blooms

Marsha interviewed Sue, the perishable representative. Sue explained to Marsha her general responsibilities at work and told her what she liked and disliked about the job. Marsha asked if she purchased a bouquet of flowers and arranged the flowers would Sue provide her guidance and feedback. Sue agreed. Marsha prepared the flowers by trimming the stems and removing the leaves. She then arranged the flowers in a vase, trimming the stems so that the flowers were of various heights. Sue provided guidance and cues, and Marsha was able to follow the verbal directions and demonstration. Sue complimented Marsha on her arrangement. Marsha then removed the flowers from the vase and wrapped the flowers in paper to give them to her grandmother.

Work Observation 2: (February 7) Gardener/landscaper

Marsha met with Kelly, who owns his own landscaping business, which includes mowing, raking leaves, and maintaining his customer’s gardens and flower beds. Kelly asked Marsha if she had ever used a lawn mower. Marsha had not. Kelly explained that he uses a riding and push lawn mower daily, in addition to a leaf blower. He told Marsha that his Apple watch tracks his mileage daily, which shows that he walks about 15 miles every day. Kelly said that he often goes home very dirty. He does enjoy planting flowers and vegetables for his customers, but he only gets requests with the change of seasons, so he has to do other lawn care to keep his business running. Kelly let Marsha push the lawn mower about 25 feet and blow leaves for about five minutes. Marsha found it to be difficult. Marsha shared later that she is not interested in gardening/landscaping for other people.

Work Observation 3: (February 28) Lowe’s—merchandising associate for plants. Marsha met with Kathy at Lowe’s. Kathy explained to Marsha that she works about 20 hours a week. Each day she waters the plants, picks dead leaves off the plants, stocks plants, and arranges the plants as instructed by her manager. Sometimes Kathy has to load plants and dirt for customers in their cars. Additionally, she stocks the plants inside the store, planters, and other gardening supplies. Kathy informed Marsha that customers sometimes ask questions about the plants, so Lowe’s its employees on plants and the common questions that customers have. Marsha asked Kathy if she could watch Marsha perform her job, and Kathy agreed. To see whether Marsha could identify plants and carry out responsibilities of the job, Kathy gave Marsha a list of plants and asked her to gather and prepare them as though they were for a customer. Kathy also put a 50-pound bag of rocks and five 25-pound bags of Miracle-Gro soil on the list. Marsha struggled with lifting the 50 pounds of rocks but was able to manage the bags of dirt. Marsha either located the plants or asked associates other than Kathy for assistance. Marsha pulled all dead leaves off the plants and suggested that she might want to purchase a couple of pots to transplant the plants into. Marsha would need to use picture cards to identify plants since she cannot read well, but she also suggested that her Apple phone might be able to help her if she can use an app and speak the name of the plant. Marsha also demonstrated how to locate items using the Lowe’s app.