



## Creating a Legacy

Clarissa Kirk worked for the Dollar Tree for nine years, eventually moving into management, but she knew she needed more. Driven by a need to help others, she decided to try for a career in healthcare.

"I needed a change. Honestly, I wasn't that satisfied with my job anymore," Clarissa said. "I was not helping people. And I wanted to do something where I could make a difference, something where I could make a legacy going forward." Clarissa thought about a career in healthcare for years, but as a deaf person, she worried that she may not be able to perform healthcare-related tasks, such as listening to a stethoscope. She finally got tired of wondering whether she could or couldn't, she explained, and decided to just try. She registered at the Full Employment Council, who helped her get funding through the America's Promise program, as well as the WIOA Adult program. Using that funding, Clarissa was able to enroll in a Certified Nursing Assistant Program at the University of Central Missouri in Lee's Summit. She said her teachers at the University of Central Missouri, whom she described as "amazing," helped her learn how to complete all the tasks necessary to become a certified nursing assistant – including how to use a stethoscope.

The one part her teachers didn't have to teach Clarissa was how to have compassion and passion for her new career.

"Right now, I work at John Knox Village in Lee's Summit. I love it," said Clarissa. "It's like family there. Everyone is happy. They are there for each other, and they love each other. And the residents...oh, I love hearing their stories growing up." Clarissa currently works in the Alzheimer's Unit, which comes with a specific set of challenges. But she is up for the task.

"There are days when it's good, and there are days when it is bad," she explained. "But it doesn't feel like work. It feels like I am doing something. And my passion is coming out. I can't describe it. You have to be there to feel it."

## Overcoming Barriers

**Clarissa Kirk, who was born deaf, encourages others to not let barriers derail their success.**

When asked about her experience at the Full Employment Council, Clarissa said she enjoyed it and was thankful that the staff at the FEC helped connect her to funding, which covered the cost of her tuition, as well as her uniforms and supplies.

"It was just full, hands-on support, and that's really amazing to have for that," she said.

Clarissa said if she could give advice to anyone who is considering trying a new career or going back to school, it would be to do it.

"You're worth it," Clarissa said. "You owe it to yourselves to try. You owe it to yourself to feel satisfied. You owe it to yourself to be happy, to enjoy life. And if you are sitting at home, wondering, that's not enjoying life. That's just sitting there and just moving through it. That's not worth it. You're worth it. You should try something...something that makes you enjoy it. Something that makes you feel really, really good inside your soul, and just take that next step. And the FEC will help you through it, if you try."

**"...it doesn't feel like work. It feels like I am doing something." - Clarissa Kirk**

Clarissa had additional advice for anyone who may also have a disability, or any type of barrier they may need to overcome in order to get the training they need.

"Don't let anything define you. Don't let your hearing define you. Don't let your disability or whatever is stopping you define you. Just move on. Try it. You'll never know. You might be amazed by how much you enjoy doing what you're doing from here on," she said.

For Clarissa, the risk, the commitment and the hard work were all worth it, but she wanted to acknowledge the support and love she received along the way.

"If it wasn't for the encouragement of my family, my husband, my children and those amazing teachers... I don't think I would have gotten as far as I can, because I had a few challenges, but I overcome them, with all those supports that I had behind me," she said. "If it wasn't for that support and that love, and that encouragement, I honestly don't know where I would be right now. And with the help of FEC, also, life is good."