



EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHT | RACHEL KINGSBURY

A cozy little shop with natural lighting, wooden bins of fresh produce, and a big chalkboard covered in colorful lists of bulk grains and smoothie ingredients The Grocery is one of Ohio City's hidden gems. Over the summer, The Grocery's owner, **Rachel Kingsbury**, partnered with LEAP to be an assessment site for six consumers looking to hone their skills and gain work experience. On a chilly Thursday afternoon, we sat down with Rachel (and a one of her local pour-over coffees) to talk about what she's learned over the past 10 months as a business-owner and as a LEAP partner.



Rachel outside her store on Lorain Ave.

Tell us a little bit about The Grocery, How did you get to where you are now?

RACHEL: I started The Grocery because I felt that the neighborhood needed some amenities. One of the things you see in other cities is dry cleaners, bakeries, and little bodega-style shops that service the neighborhood and the needs of the people that live there, so I opened The Grocery up with the idea of serving the direct walking traffic. I also wanted to be able to support the people that were coming out of the Cleveland Culinary Launch Kitchen, that were working really hard selling their goods at farmers' markets, as well as the farmers that weren't big enough to sell their products to the larger grocers. I also feel like the people in this area--no matter what your income level--are conscious of what they're eating and their health; it's a topic people that have in the forefront of their minds, so having accessibility is really important. So that's basically what I wanted to do: provide accessibility for healthy, locally-sourced, fresh food.

How long have you been open now?

RACHEL: 10 months!

You also have an urban garden, right?

RACHEL: Yes. We're focusing our gardening efforts at 44th & Franklin. It's an urban garden called Garden 44. It's about 4,000 square feet, and we did a lot of growing there this summer. We cultivated eggplants, hot peppers, green bell peppers, greens, a *lot* of tomatoes, and zucchinis.

What do you see The Grocery being five years from now?

RACHEL: I don't see The Grocery being any bigger than this storefront. I see there being a separate location, and I see there being a larger extension during the harvesting season where we have stands that go to the side lot where you can get more fresh produce. I like it to be small, I like it to be personal because the shop isn't just about commerce; to me it's about community. So, I never want someone to feel like they're at self-check-out.

Let's talk about your interaction with LEAP. Do you think LEAP is important to Ohio City?

RACHEL: I think that LEAP helps keep the diversity. When you're in a customer service situation where you're seeing people that are different from you and you're interacting with them, you remember you're a person and they're a person and that everybody has a role in this world, and everybody is important. I think that you guys offer a lot to the community.

What is your favorite part about working with LEAP consumers?

RACHEL: They are eager! They are eager and willing to do anything. You will get a lot of feedback from them as well, so it helps you realize where your systems need tweaking. But honestly, it is their hunger for work and when they've completed something, to see the joy of accomplishment, that's what makes me the happiest.

The shop isn't just about commerce; to me, it's about community.

You've been an assessment site for us for a few months, with six different people from LEAP working here. What's the value to you as a business person of being an assessment site?

RACHEL: Well, I'm always changing my staff here, just trying to find the right fit. So, having the LEAP consumers come in with their different skill sets, different ways that they need to learn things, and finding out what their strengths and weaknesses are is really beneficial to me. I've been able to create a set of tasks that I give to everyone. It helps me determine, "Is this what you excel at? Are you more a front of house or back of house kind of person?" Essentially, it's helped me assess talent.

What have you learned about working with people with disabilities that you didn't know before?

RACHEL: I hadn't really worked with people with disabilities beforehand. I think their customer service—you always think they're going to be really shy, but they're not. A lot of consumers were able to count money and do transactions and work with the computer. I think computers are really going to help advance people with disabilities because they're very user-friendly. If you have the interface that allows them to do the transactions or programs then their world opens right up.



Rachel working with a consumer this summer.

What advice would you give to an employer who was thinking about working with LEAP?

RACHEL: I would say definitely talk to your job coach about what you are going to be tasking and then let them know how involved they need to be in overseeing those tasks. For example, if I had consumers cutting food, I would show them how and then watch them do it and then determine if it's something they're not going to do, or if the coach needs to stand closely by, or if the coach doesn't need to worry about it because they had the dexterity there. So just communicating with your coach right off the bat so everyone can be on the same page. I would encourage them just to relax and breathe and enjoy themselves because it's fun—it's nice. You come in, it's a fresh face and because they're so eager and willing to work, and there's no baggage coming along.

Did you have any fears about this coming into it?

RACHEL: I personally didn't, but because my space is so small you just kind of wonder how that's going to work out. But I had no fears and there was nothing to be afraid of at the end of the day anyways.

Do you believe that having people with disabilities working here has added to the value of The Grocery?

RACHEL: Yeah, I think that it lets people know that we're very welcoming and I think it makes them feel more comfortable.

What do you see as your future relationship with LEAP?

RACHEL: For the immediate next six months I would definitely enjoy continuing to be an assessment site, and that could be something that goes into the far future. But, as my business grows and I'm able to take on more part- and full-time employees, I'd like to be matched with someone.

*Visit The Grocery at 3815 Lorain Ave. in Cleveland:
Monday-Friday from 7:00am-7:00pm,
Saturday from 9:00am-6:00pm,
and Sunday from 10:00am-6:00pm.*

Be sure to connect on social media, too!
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