

Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation VR Victory

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VR gives Louie a “hand up” through the Inclusive Career Advancement Program

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Louie Wahl has faced a lot of barriers in his journey to stability and meaningful employment.

A single father of a 5-year-old son, he is in recovery for a substance use disorder and spent time in prison. After prison, he knew he had to turn his life around.

“Having felonies and a long criminal history makes it hard to get a decent job and provide for myself and my son,” said Wahl, 35.

With the help of [Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (VR) and the [Inclusive Career Advancement Program](#) (ICAP), he is completing a certificate in Addiction Studies at Klamath Community College and working as a substance abuse recovery intern.

“ICAP has really helped me out,” he said. “I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for the resources and support that I have received.”



On-campus support for VR participants through ICAP

Wahl is a member of the Klamath Tribes. A Tribal program helped him transition to life after prison and connected him to the Klamath Falls VR office. VR can help people in recovery who have had trouble getting a job.

Wahl worked with VR Counselor Betsy Miltimore to set a career goal to become a counselor.

VR covered the cost of tools he needed for school, including a laptop, portable filing box for organizing his schoolwork and a test preparation book for his drug and alcohol counseling credentialing exams. Miltimore also helped cover the cost of tuition at Klamath Community College (KCC) and referred him to the college's Career Coach Chrystal Vaughan for any on campus support needs.

When he returned to college as an ICAP student, he finally had the resources he needed to focus on success.

“Chrystal walked me through everything — took time to walk me around to classes and get my financial aid all together,” he said. “It was way helpful to have Chrystal there because not only did she help me get sorted with school, but with life skills.”

Vaughan connected Wahl to services to help him with expenses while at school, such as the on-campus food pantry and a voucher to lower his energy costs. She also supported him academically.



Crystal Vaughn, a career coach at Klamath Community College, helped ICAP student Louie Wahl navigate college.

At first, they met two to three times a week to work through his barriers, including task management and reading comprehension. As time went on, he slowly adjusted to college coursework.

“At first with my homework, I’d do all that reading and then not be able to remember what I’d read,” he said. Vaughan helped him learn the Cornell Note Taking Method, “and that really helped me to remember and retain the information that I was reading. She helped me with my resume too.

Anything I need, I can go to her to have somebody to talk to. And at the beginning, that was really needed because I didn’t have anyone in my corner.”

“Hand-up” to a better future

Wahl remains committed to his sobriety and finds support from ceremony and sweat lodge. After he completes his certificate, he aims to continue his education and pursue an Associate’s in Psychology.

Through it all, his primary motivation has always been creating a better life for his son.

“I’m not going to put my son through what I had to go through when I was little,” he said, referencing his time in foster care, challenges with addiction and involvement in the criminal justice system.

“I wanted to give my baby chances and opportunities that I never had,” he said, referring to a healthy home and spiritual environment with native rituals and customs.

“Growing up, I never had ceremonies in my life,” he said. “But for my son it’s different because all he *knows* is ceremonies. That’s part of our identity — that fireplace, the ceremony, the song, and the prayers; the use of our medicines and tobacco — they will always be there throughout his life. So, he won’t have to turn to alcohol. Maybe he’ll go even further with his education than I did. But he has to see Dad doing it.”

Wahl looks back on how far he's come since the moment he rose up to challenge a troubled trajectory that wasn't right for him. "The journey from where I started — housing, adapting to school — to where I'm at today is such a big difference. My life has changed so much. A lot of it is in the support I got from ICAP; support I got from Betsy, Chrystal; support I got from the Tribes," he said.

"You have to be ready to ask for that 'hand up' rather than that 'handout'. I wouldn't be here today if I didn't get that assistance."

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