Cade (00:00)
Alright, welcome back to More Like Than You Think. I'm Cade and I'm joined here today with Sydney and Brittany.

and we're gonna be talking, as we've been a lot, about employment and working and and a disability focus and customized employment and things like that. so today's conversation should be pretty fun and

we'll see where we go. but

Yeah, maybe Sydney you could start us off with introducing yourself and what you do and then Britney you can go after her.

Sydney Esch (00:31)
Yeah, of course. yeah, so my name's Sydney. I am a the program manager of employment services at Imagine, which is a nonprofit organization that supports people with disabilities in all different ways. so I run our employment program, which includes customized benefits planning and a little bit of everything.

Britni Baldwin (00:53)
And I'm Britney Baldwin and I'm the employment services supervisor at Imagine. So I support our team that supports individuals looking for jobs and keeping their jobs.

Cade (01:03)
Okay, gotcha.

Cool. Sweet. Well we could just go ahead and jump in if you want. really just starting with the question or or asking the question of what does anyone can work mean to you? and what's been your experience with that and anything around there, so

Sydney Esch (01:26)
Good question.

Cade (01:28)
Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (01:30)
I think what anyone can work means to me is that everyone everyone can do it. Everyone has capabilities and they have the ability to contribute to society. for what we've experienced in the field or what I've experienced in the field is that that's not always the belief. and so that's a big thing that we always rewrite is that.

You can work, you have a purpose, and you have contributions to give to society.

Britni Baldwin (02:01)

I'd agree with that too. Yeah, everyone has some kind of skill and some kind of contribution that they can contribute to this world. And you know, people just need different supports. That's it. It's like that's why we come in we we're there to support and set it up for them to be successful.

Cade (02:19)
Yeah, I'm wondering one of the things that I've been wondering and I'm sure other people have too is how all the pieces fit together between customized employment, benefits planning, and supported employment and like what goes where and what how all that fits together. so that would be great if you could go into some of that.

Sydney Esch (02:41)
Yeah.

It is a big puzzle piece, I think. so I think they all go together and really you get your best services if you have all of it together because it helps you make that informed decision, be able to reach higher goals, a little bit of everything. so kind of how I think it works is like customized employment is really looking at somebody who has been deemed that they can't work or that will never really fit that

Job description and then working with them to understand their skills and their strengths, and then being able to help others see that skill and strength. But often with people with disabilities, they may be on benefits like Social Security, like SSI, SSDI, also Medicaid, right? So for those waiver services that help us provide supported employment and customized employment.

They're on those so working does impact it. So that's where benefits planning comes in where it can help make an informed decision of how much they want to work, how much they want to make, if they want to stay on their benefits, or if they want to explore what it would look like not on benefits. So it's kind of just figuring out and understanding all the systems that come into play. That's what I would say.

Britni Baldwin (04:03)
too. Sometimes we get someone too that's looking for a job and they are just aired with support and employment. And then we realize, wow, this is that they need a customized approach. They they need someone to dig a little deeper and help carve out a job and work with the business on what works for the individually in the business. And then that's when we pivot.

Cade (04:23)
Okay, gotcha.

Do you guys have any examples that can remain anonymous of like people that you've seen seen have success with customized employment?

Sydney Esch (04:37)
Yes, we have had

Cade (04:38)
Okay.

Sydney Esch (04:39)
one placement actually recently. They haven't started just yet.

Cade (04:42)
Okay.

Sydney Esch (04:44)
So I I have two examples that come to mind. One of a placement that just happened, and then one that I saw when I started working. one was a gentleman that I when I started, he was already in a customized placement. and so when I started working, he was working at a kind of like a Hallmark card store. And so he did really well of like unpackaging them and separating the cards. and the CEO loved him and it really worked out really well for him.

the other one that we just recently had is somebody just got a job at a school to be kind of a greeter. and Brittany, I think you could probably speak more to that one if you don't mind.

Britni Baldwin (05:25)
yes, so she got a job at

It's a grocery store. So in a a grocery store. But they want her to work whenever like the school kids are getting out, like the high school kids that are coming in there. They thought she would be great. So it would be a greeter and welcome them in the store. and then the hope is that she is going to do more tasks later on, but that's where she's going to start. And that's because she's brilliant and she's a happy person, will make you feel welcome any anywhere you go.

Cade (05:56)
Yeah.

Sydney Esch (05:57)
She likes it by her room.

Britni Baldwin (05:58)
Mm-hmm.

Cade (05:58)
Mm.

What do you think are some of the myths or things that people believe about customized employment, supported employment, benefits planning, like all that stuff that you've heard time and time again of like the main concerns people have or the myths they have about things?

Britni Baldwin (06:19)
The biggest thing is losing their benefits if they work. So it's scary. you know, if I get a job then I don't have long term supports and then that's where the benefits planning comes in.

Cade (06:22)
Okay, yeah. Mm-hmm. Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (06:29)
The other myth that I would say is that just that it's

You need a specific employer to be able to work with. But I think that that can be created. I think something that our team talks about a lot is just we're all human beings, even the employer is a human being and they deserve the chance to learn and the opportunity to meet someone that they've never met before either. So kind of the placements that we see aren't always perfect before we even get there. It's we kind of help create that support network.

And

the other myth is that it's not, supported employment isn't the only thing that gets support. We all have support at work and in life, and it's kind of normalizing that.

Cade (07:15)
yeah, what are the like trends that you're seeing right now within employment in the disability space? I don't know, it could be from the client side or from your guys' side or

Things that you've been noticing, like the direction things are moving in.

Britni Baldwin (07:33)
I think people are a little more f afraid to work right now because there's a lot of things that are changing with policy and with funding. So I think there's a little bit more fear for the people that we support, unfortunately. and there we have a long wait list too because of those things. So there are a lot of people that are just waiting to get support as well.

Sydney Esch (08:00)
To add to that, I think I would add there's the fear piece, but then there's also with all of the changes that are happening, there's this

almost like a urgency fear of that I need to quit my job or I need to cut hours that we all we always see, but I think that that's been more prevalent recently.

Cade (08:20)
Gotcha. Yeah. What would you recommend for the people that are like on the wait list currently or like d what what kind of things can they be doing in the meantime? That would be helpful.

Britni Baldwin (08:31)
yeah. Yeah. There's other supports out there. Yeah. Like a a good one is like just start getting prepared to go to work. You know, like

Cade (08:40)
Mm.

Britni Baldwin (08:41)
set an alarm clock, have a routine, yeah, make sure hygiene, good hygiene. Those are like all good first steps before.

Cade (08:50)
Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Britni Baldwin (08:54)
Yeah, and then utilize other centers too. There's like workforce centers, or different training centers. See what's out there in the community.

Cade (09:03)
Mm-hmm.

Totally.

Sydney Esch (09:05)
I would also say lean into your own community, right? Like

Cade (09:08)
Mm.

Sydney Esch (09:09)
getting a job is really about who you know. So the people that you know, the people that you make community with, maybe the stores you frequent in, kind of talking to them and learning about their jobs and their businesses to see what exactly it is that someone wants to do while they're waiting for services can help them exponentially once they even get into services, because then it can help them speed up the process of getting a job.

Because that is something that takes a long time. So anything they can do beforehand to look at their own network is always helpful.

Cade (09:40)
Yeah, that makes sense. I know just the people around you matter so much whenever you can't you're like waiting for things and so yeah, I think that's so important.

Britni Baldwin (09:51)
I think even getting out there and volunteering and getting some like

Cade (09:54)
Hm.

Britni Baldwin (09:55)
some kind of work experience and start exploring

Cade (09:57)
Mm-hmm.

Britni Baldwin (09:58)
different areas could be helpful too.

Cade (10:01)
Yeah.

Yeah, it kinda sounds like I mean, how I like to approach a lot of things is like you can start now. It might not be the exact way that you want to or exactly what you want to do, but you can start. And that's like kinda

Sydney Esch (10:16)
Yeah.

Cade (10:17)
just goes for anything. And so I mean I'm hearing that that probably applies here too, of like start with what you have and then build from there.

I am curious to hear both of your takes on somebody who is not currently working and they but they want to work but they don't really know w what they want to do but they want to start doing something. Like how do you balance the I want to do this thing but I can't yet?

I mean we were just kind of talking about that, but like, you know, what are some more like you know, things to like how do you balance both of those whenever somebody may be really insistent on like wanting this specific thing but it might not be realistic right now? I don't know if you guys have any advice on how to navigate that.

Sydney Esch (11:19)
Yeah.

I think that makes for a good employment search, honestly, because if you have that goal, then you have a pathway of how to grow. So it's like kind of looking at where you can start, right? So like a kind of extreme example could be if someone wants to be a firefighter, right? How do you what can you do to be a firefighter? Or what can you do to pol

Cade (11:40)
Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (11:40)
be a police officer, right? Like what are those other tasks that are in there? and how can you volunteer? Kind of going back to the volunteering, 'cause I think

The more you build your resume, the better of a candidate you become. So kind of just however

Cade (11:54)
Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (11:55)
you can get experience in that field and in that area helps you grow and then be a good candidate.

Britni Baldwin (12:02)
I would agree with that too. Work on those transferable skills. And create like a plan to get to where you want to get go.

Cade (12:10)
Mm.

Yeah. And then thinking about people with disabilities specifically, how what are some of the things that you guys offer for like when working specifically with people with disabilities? I know there's like a lot of different things, but maybe it would just be helpful to know like what are those things that you're getting specifically from

working with what you guys do.

Sydney Esch (12:44)
Yeah. I think what you get with working with

A provider of supported employment or customized employment is that additional support to help with preparation and kind of a little bit of a safety net. So kind of something that we do is a little bit of more like practice and preparation. So like we do a lot of mock interviews, help with going out in the community, practice small skills to kind of help transfer what that looks like. so I think

working with a provider is really just having someone in your corner that really understands the world.

world and can help you

Cade (13:19)
Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (13:19)
transfer what you already know into what that looks like at work and then learn those skills in a more safe environment. Because I know something that I think we really have learned is that we all learn from doing. I think that's kind of very common. Like if you think about how many interviews you've been in in your entire career, a lot of times the clients that we work with they may they may have only had one interview or no interview before.

Right, so they don't know

Cade (13:48)
Yeah.

Sydney Esch (13:49)
what professional wear looks like, what how to shake someone's hand, that you need to make eye contact, that you answering the question

Cade (13:53)
Mm. Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (13:56)
is a little bit more like showing this play of how you're a good candidate. so it's really

Cade (14:01)
Mm-hmm.

Sydney Esch (14:02)
selling yourself and teaching somebody how to do that.

Cade (14:06)
Yeah.

Britni Baldwin (14:06)
Yeah, and once they get a job too, they have that ongoing support from us to t you know, support them with being

Cade (14:11)
Mm. Okay, yeah.

Britni Baldwin (14:12)

independent at that job and you know teaching them how to talk to an employer, and how and an employer how to communicate with the individuals we serve as well. So

Cade (14:25)
Mm.

Britni Baldwin (14:27)
yeah, got an advocate.

Sydney Esch (14:28)
Yeah.

Cade (14:29)
Yeah.

Sydney Esch (14:29)
Yeah.

Cade (14:29)
That's nice that it keeps can keep going and it doesn't just it's not just like, okay, we got you here. Bye. You know. yeah. Yeah.

Sydney Esch (14:36)
Yeah. No, that we don't disappear.

Cade (14:41)
That's great. Okay. If you could leave young people with disabilities with one message about their future and employment, what would you want to say?

Sydney Esch (14:55)
I would say don't be afraid to dream big.

Britni Baldwin (14:58)
And keep trying. Just keep trying.

Cade (15:00)
Yeah.

Sydney Esch (15:01)
And ask ask for resources, I think is the other piece of dream big,

Cade (15:05)
Mm.

Sydney Esch (15:05)
but then ask for people like

Cade (15:07)

Mm.

Sydney Esch (15:08)
look for a mentor, look for somebody in the world that has experience and how did you get there?

Cade (15:14)
Yeah. Like dream big but don't just try to do it all on your own. 'Cause you don't have to. Mhm. Right. Mm.

Britni Baldwin (15:18)
Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Like do

Sydney Esch (15:18)
Yeah, none of us do. Yeah.

Britni Baldwin (15:23)
what you can for yourself and then accept the help that you have available.

Cade (15:27)
Mm-hmm. Totally. Cool. Or is there anything else that we didn't cover that you guys were hoping that we would talk about? Or any other thoughts that you have before we wrap up here?

Sydney Esch (15:38)
Mm no. No, I don't think so.

Yeah.

Cade (15:41)
Cool.

Great. Well if you guys want you can let people know where you can get in touch where they can get in touch with you or anything like that.

Britni Baldwin (15:51)
Be our website. Yeah. Imagine Colorado dot

Sydney Esch (15:53)
Yeah. Yeah.

Britni Baldwin (15:54)
or G. Yeah. And then

Cade (15:56)
Okay.

Britni Baldwin (15:56)
yep, employment services will be on there.

Cade (16:00)
Okay, sweet.

Britni Baldwin (16:02)
Yeah.

Cade (16:02)
Cool. Well, it was really great having you two on the show today, and thanks for chatting. and everybody listening, we will see you next time.