

LAURIA IS PART OF THE TEAM AT HER JOB

Lauria Cournoyer is a buswoman at Viola's Restaurant in Los Alamos.

"I wash dishes and clean tables," she says. "I like the people, the customers and the workers, and especially my boss Belinda."



Lauria Cournoyer at work

Belinda is Viola's owner Belinda Jaramillo, who hired Cournoyer to work two days a week at the restaurant. "She is very eager to learn, and we all love having her here," says Jaramillo. "She livens things up every time she's here. She's definitely part of our team."

The 27-year-old Cournoyer has volunteered at a senior center and animal shelter in the past, but this is only her second paying job. "It feels good making my own money. I'm a very busy buswoman!"

Speaking of buses, the White Rock resident takes the bus to work and has become an expert on the Los Alamos County public transit system.

Her father Michael says when he needs to take a bus, he checks with Lauria to make sure he's reading the schedules correctly.

Lauria, who has autism spectrum disorder, is the second member of her family to use the services of the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Her brother Gabriel has also participated in the agency's employment services program. In Lauria's case, her counselor, Alix Dean, helped her determine the kind of work she might like to do. Then they worked together to develop a resume and practice answering interview questions. And NMDVR provided Cournoyer with a job coach to assist her while she's on the job.

"We're thankful to DVR for everything they've done," Michael Cournoyer says.

Also helping Lauria stay "on task" and focused at work is a software program called AVAIL, which lists tasks that need to be done. "It's not hard to get confused. AVAIL tells me what I should be doing next and gets me back on track," she says. Lauria was recently invited to the national Association of People Supporting Employment First conference in Ohio, where she served on a panel with the software designer, demonstrating how AVAIL works.

Jaramillo is glad her staff at Viola's has a chance to work with Cournoyer, "because it teaches everyone, all the way around." She adds there was not a lot of reticence in making the decision to hire a local resident with a disability. "I was just like, 'Let's do this and see how it goes.' So far it has worked out."



Lauria Cournoyer (left) at 2023 APSE conference.

For information about NMDVR programs, contact your nearest office. There are two dozen locations across the state: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/.

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps eligible individuals with documented disabilities find suitable employment. Vocational rehabilitation is a voluntary program supporting people who want to work. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit dvr.state.nm.us or call 505-954-8500.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2023, the total funds awarded is \$22,066,600. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

###