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State helps developmentally disabled gain jobs

By Rita Price

The place is big, busy and neon-lit. Mike Groleau had never spent time at a racino before, much less worked for one. He instantly felt overwhelmed.

"Everything was going over my head," Groleau said.

But he had a strategy, and he reminded himself to stick with it: *Be honest. Help them understand your disability. Tell them you're going to give them 100 percent. They just might have to be a little easy with you at first.*

That was five weeks ago, and already Groleau smiles at the memory.

"I'm very comfortable now," he said of his new job at Scioto Downs Racetrack & Casino.

At 39, the Circleville resident is competitively employed for the first time in his life. He's among hundreds of Ohioans with developmental disabilities who have received additional help finding community jobs since [Gov. John Kasich launched the state's Employment First directive two years ago.](#)

The policy aims to sharply decrease Ohio's reliance on segregated settings and workshops by mandating a preference for community employment. State officials set a goal of increasing community employment by 10 percent, to 7,727 working-age adults, by June 30. As of Dec. 30, it was up by about 8.5 percent.

"We're pretty pleased with that number in terms of ramping up the initiative," said Kristen Helling, who leads the Employment First project through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

For the rest of the story, click [here](#).