

**RFS-24-77904  
BUSINESS PROPOSAL  
ATTACHMENT D**

**Instructions:** Please provide answers in the shaded areas to all questions. Reference all attachments in the shaded area.

***Business Proposal***

- 2.3.1 General (optional)** - Please introduce or summarize any information the Respondent deems relevant or important to the State's successful acquisition of the products and/or services requested in this RFS.

Prairie Quest Inc. (PQC) is an experienced Pre-ETS and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) vendor in the State of Indiana, as well as an approved Employment Network (EN) in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program. The PQC Trains division of our organization exists to provide employment services to students and adults with disabilities in order to help them find successful, long-term employment. We work with participants in federal, state, and local programs to help individuals build skill sets and find employment opportunities. We go beyond simple employment training; PQC Trains empowers students and adults with disabilities to learn practical job skills in order to find employment positions that are fulfilling and meaningful so they can be successful at work and beyond. We provide one-on-one coaching or workshop-based training focused on developing life and work readiness skills. Our courses focus on identifying and cultivating personal strengths for a successful career path with topics including but not limited to areas such as independent living, building natural supports, financial literacy, self-esteem and empowerment. We aim to empower students to gain the core competencies they need to launch a rewarding career.

We have provided Pre-ETS services in 13 Indiana counties since 2018, supporting 40 high schools and 1,567 students in developing in the 5 core Pre-ETS areas. More in-depth details of our current experiences are provided later in this volume as well as in Attachment A, Technical Proposal.

- 2.3.2 Respondent's Company Structure** - Please include in this section the legal form of the Respondent's business organization, the state in which formed (accompanied by a certificate of authority), the types of business ventures in which the organization is involved, and a chart of the organization. If the organization includes more than one (1) product division, the division responsible for the development and marketing of the requested products and/or services in the United States must be described in more detail than other components of the organization. Please enter your response below and indicate if any attachments are included.

A corporation founded in 2004 in Indiana, PQC is a consulting firm specializing in project management and training. Our organizational objective is to firmly focus on

understanding the goals of our customers and provide effective and efficient solutions to meet their mission. Accompanying our organizational philosophy are our company values, which include operating with the highest levels of integrity, honesty, respect, good citizenship, responsibility, quality, and accountability while providing employees with a balanced work setting.

PQC consists of two internal subdivisions: PQC Works and PQC Trains. While PQC Works focuses on performing a variety of government contracting support services, our PQC Trains division provides the State of Indiana with Pre-ETS (since 2018) as well as VR services as a Community Resource Provider (CRP) (since 2016). Through PQC Trains, we work to find meaningful employment for all. From job seeking and training to continued support services, PQC Trains seeks to help individuals find competitive employment in Indiana that puts money in their pockets, enriches their lives, and supports their communities. Among our services in Indiana, we have:

- Provided Pre-ETS support to 40 schools in 13 Indiana counties. Since we first began Pre-ETS, we have helped empower 1,567 students in the program. Our Job Coaches work alongside students to identify strengths, interests and gaps, then tailor curriculum and activities centered on the core Pre-ETS areas and Indiana's Employment First Plan to support students in developing skills and knowledge to help them reach their goals.
- Served as a VR CRP to receive referrals for adults with disabilities who are entering or reentering the workforce and we have been successful in providing placement, employment support, and work readiness to 432 participants. Our employment specialists provide interview preparedness, evaluations, site development, job placement, and job coaching to support each participant's journey to obtaining and maintaining secure and meaningful employment. We develop placement locations where participants can participate in working interviews or work evaluations and potentially receive a job offer.
- Been approved to provide specific skills training for students and adults to learn how to become animators and storyboard artists. This skills training results in obtaining a certification from a nationally-known animation studio software known as Toon Boom. This training has been approved by the Department of Education CTE program, the Indiana Vocational Rehab program, and the Indiana Education Scholarship Program (IESP). This virtually-provided program removes boundaries for those who want to join a growing industry while providing an education that is not dependent on transportation.

Previously, PQC also provided Career Technical Training to students at the Paul Simon Chicago Job Corps Center in Illinois between 2014 and 2018. Our staff put new training programs in place, provided targeted job opportunities based on individual student needs, and revised training strategies to further engage students with and without disabilities and put them on the path to successful employment when they graduate. We provided instruction and career development support to the students enrolled in career training paths such as Computer Service, Nursing/Home Healthcare,

Pharmacy Technician, Material Handling, and Office Administration. Our Career Technical Training team ensured students developed the soft skills, job skills/knowledge, and credentials they would need to succeed in their chosen career field, as well as understand the steps needed to obtain a career following completion of the program. Tasks such as job searching, résumé writing, interviewing, and taking part in a successful on-the-job internship (work-based learning) were vital parts of the program.

PQC's organizational chart along with both the PQC certificate of incorporation and the PQC Trains branch's certificate of organization are included in **Attachment 8**.

**2.3.3 Respondent's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Information** - With the Cabinet appointment of a Chief Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer, on February 1, 2021, the State of Indiana sought to highlight the importance of this issue to the state. Please share leadership plans or efforts to measure and prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Also, what is the demographic compositions of Respondents' Executive Staff and Board Members, if applicable.

PQC is a woman-owned small business, and we work to build upon and promote diversity, equity and inclusion efforts within our organization. Our leadership team is 75% female, and PQC Trains reflects and reaps the benefits of female leadership with 70% of our Job Coaches also being women and another 25% of our team being part of minority groups. In our hiring practices, we provide equal employment opportunities to all employees and applications for employment; and we prohibit discrimination and harassment of any type without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability status, genetics, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state or local laws.

We maintain a serious focus on engaging in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Along with completing an annual EEOC filing, we hold a variety of training sessions for our staff. In 2023, we held a total of 42 training sessions and, among these, several held a specific concentration on inclusion and involved an outside consultant specializing in organizational diversity coming in to speak on the subject. Additionally, PQC is also the benefactor of the Beyond Able not-for-profit, which holds a core focus of providing jobs for individuals with employment barriers such as disabilities and educational challenges.

**2.3.4 Company Financial Information** - This section must include documents to demonstrate the Respondent's financial stability. Examples of acceptable documents include most recent Dunn & Bradstreet Business Report (preferred) or audited financial statements for the two (2) most recently completed fiscal years. If neither of these can be provided, explain why, and include an income statement and balance sheet, for each of the two most recently completed fiscal years.

If the documents being provided by the Respondent are those of a parent or holding company, additional information should be provided for the entity/organization directly responding to this RFP. That additional information should explain the business relationship between the entities and demonstrate the financial stability of the entity/organization which is directly responding to this RFP.

PQC's most recent Dunn & Bradstreet Report is provided in **Attachment 9**.

- 2.3.5 Integrity of Company Structure and Financial Reporting** - This section must include a statement indicating that the CEO and/or CFO, of the responding entity/organization, has taken personal responsibility for the thoroughness and correctness of any/all financial information supplied with this proposal. The areas of interest to the State in considering corporate responsibility include the following items: separation of audit functions from corporate boards and board members, if any, the manner in which the organization assures board integrity, and the separation of audit functions and consulting services. The State will consider the information offered in this section to determine the responsibility of the Respondent under IC 5-22-16-1(d).

Management (i.e., the President/CEO and the Director of Finance) is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with the modified cash basis of accounting; this includes determining that the modified cash basis of accounting is an acceptable basis for the preparation of the financial statements in the circumstances. Management is also responsible for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

- 2.3.6 Contract Terms/Clauses** - Please provide the requested information in RFP Section 2.3.6.

PQC accepts the contract terms/clauses as documented in the sample contract and has indicated this agreement in Attachment I – Attestation Form.

- 2.3.7 References** - Reference information is captured on **Attachment G** Respondent should complete the reference information portion of the **Attachment G** which includes the name, address, and telephone number of the client facility and the name, title, and phone/fax numbers of a person who may be contacted for further information if the State elects to do so. The rest of **Attachment G** should be completed by the reference and **emailed DIRECTLY** to the State. The State should receive **THREE (3) Attachment Hs** from clients for whom the Respondent has provided products and/or services that are the same or similar to those products and/or services requested in this RFP. **Attachment G** should be submitted to [idoareferences@idoa.in.gov](mailto:idoareferences@idoa.in.gov). **Attachment G** should be submitted no more than ten (10) business days after the proposal submission due date listed in Section 1.24 of the RFP. Please provide the customer information for each reference.



<b>Customer 1</b>	
Legal Name of Company or Governmental Entity	Eastern Indiana Works
Company Mailing Address	4620 W. Bethel Ave.
Company City, State, Zip	Muncie, IN 47308
Company Website Address	<a href="https://www.easternindianaworks.org/">https://www.easternindianaworks.org/</a>
Contact Person	Gabby Davis
Contact Title	Business Services Manager
Company Telephone Number	765-807-2365
Company Fax Number	N/A
Contact E-mail	<a href="mailto:GDavis@easternindianaworks.org">GDavis@easternindianaworks.org</a>
Industry of Company	Workforce Development Board
<b>Customer 2</b>	
Legal Name of Company or Governmental Entity	Sodexo
Company Mailing Address	1502 East Street
Company City, State, Zip	North Manchester, IN 46962
Company Website Address	<a href="https://manchester.sodexomyway.com/">https://manchester.sodexomyway.com/</a>
Contact Person	Lisa Beery
Contact Title	General Manager / Director of Dining Services
Company Telephone Number	260-982-5251
Company Fax Number	N/A
Contact E-mail	<a href="mailto:Lisa.Beery@sodexo.com">Lisa.Beery@sodexo.com</a>
Industry of Company	Food service
<b>Customer 3</b>	
Legal Name of Company or Governmental Entity	Jay County Jr-Sr High School
Company Mailing Address	2072 West State Road 67
Company City, State, Zip	Portland, IN 47371
Company Website Address	<a href="https://www.jayschoolcorp.org/o/jr-sr-high-school">https://www.jayschoolcorp.org/o/jr-sr-high-school</a>
Contact Person	Chad Dodd*
Contact Title	Principal
Company Telephone Number	260-726-9306 x001
Company Fax Number	260-726-9760
Contact E-mail	<a href="mailto:cdodd@jayschools.k12.in.us">cdodd@jayschools.k12.in.us</a>
Industry of Company	Education

\*PQC would like to note that while Mr. Dodd may refer to staffing concerns in his response, PQC has not had a break in services and a number of the staffing transitions were due to the school/school system itself hiring our staff. Of the Job Coaches supporting Mr. Dodd's school, four of those staff members were hired directly within the Jay County school system while a fifth individual was hired directly into a Delaware Co. school system. Mr. Dodd also previously provided another testimonial on our services, which can be found at <https://vimeo.com/695866587>.

**2.3.8 Registration to do Business** – Per RFP 2.3.8, Respondents providing the products and/or services required by this RFP must be registered to do business by the Indiana Secretary of State. The Secretary of State contact information may be found in Section 1.18 of the RFP. This process must be concluded prior to contract negotiations with the State. It is the successful Respondent's responsibility to complete the required registration with the Secretary of State. Please indicate the status of registration, if applicable. Please clearly state if you are registered and if not provide an explanation.

PQC was formed and is located in the state of Indiana. Our certificate of incorporation is included in **Attachment 8**.

**2.3.9 Authorizing Document** - Respondent personnel signing the Executive Summary of the proposal must be legally authorized by the organization to commit the organization contractually. This section shall contain proof of such authority. A copy of corporate bylaws or a corporate resolution adopted by the board of directors indicating this authority will fulfill this requirement. Please enter your response below and indicate if any attachments are included.

President/CEO Stacey Smith has the authority to contractually commit PQC. PQC's bylaws are in **Attachment 10**.

**2.3.10 General Information** - Each Respondent must enter your company's general information including contact information.

Business Information	
Legal Name of Company	Prairie Quest Inc.
Contact Name	Stacey Smith
Contact Title	President/CEO
Contact E-mail Address	Stacey@PQCworks.com
Company Mailing Address	4211 Hobson Ct., Suite A
Company City, State, Zip	Fort Wayne, IN 46815
Company Telephone Number	260-420-7374
Company Fax Number	260-420-3536
Company Website Address	<a href="http://www.pgctrains.com">www.pgctrains.com</a> ; <a href="http://www.pqcworks.com">www.pqcworks.com</a>
Federal Tax Identification Number (FTIN)	20-1214908
Number of Employees (company)	272
Years of Experience	19
Number of U.S. Offices	1
Year Indiana Office Established (if applicable)	2004 (a second office will be established in South Bend by February 2024)
Parent Company (if applicable)	N/A

Revenues (\$MM, previous year)	
Revenues (\$MM, 2 years prior)	
% Of Revenue from Indiana customers	

- a. Does your Company have a formal disaster recovery plan? Please provide a yes/no response. If no, please provide an explanation of any alternative solution your company has to offer. If yes, please note and include as an attachment.

No, PQC does not have a current formal disaster recovery plan; however, our alternative continuity solution in the event of a disaster preventing employees from working at PQC HQ or designated work sites includes:

- All of PQC's IT support is backed up offsite with the capability of remote access for PQC personnel.
- PQC has an existing telework policy in place authorizing key personnel to work from home using PQC-provided Chromebooks and laptops when applicable. As part of this policy, we:
  - Require employees to review and complete our Telecommuting Work Agreement, which records details related to each employee approved for telework, their remote work location and workplace description, assigned telework days and hours, reporting requirements, equipment, limitations and liabilities, etc.
  - Pre-verify employee access to all needed connections and programs.
  - Provide clear and accessible telecommuting and security policies, as well as guidance on telework and web-based training on successful work-from-home strategies.
  - Conduct heightened surveillance and reinforce daily/weekly metrics.
- PQC has specialized insurance in regard to handling IT and cyber access.

PQC utilized this solution as part of our response to challenges associated with COVID-19 and ensuring the safety and well-being of employees while maintaining business continuity in the face of uncertainty. We successfully implemented this model in support of our work with Pre-ETS as well as other contracts—including the U.S. Air Force Medical Service Referral Management program encompassing 35+ locations across the U.S.—with no impact to our service levels and without missing even one contract deliverable.

- b. What is your company's technology and process for securing any State information that is maintained within your company?

**PQC Standard on Data Handling/Security**

PQC has the responsibility to protect participant privacy by ensuring the data is secure and confidential. Because privacy, security, and confidentiality are sensitive issues, it is important to proactively communicate key messages about how we are protecting

participants while using data responsibly to improve participant achievement.

We take our moral and legal responsibility to protect participant privacy and ensure data security and confidentiality seriously. We value the use of data in improving participant achievement and system performance in our state, and we also understand how vital it is to ensure those data are accessed and used appropriately by creating clear policies around data security.

We do not collect data for collection's sake, and access is limited and appropriate. The data the state collects meet specific policy, practice, and service needs, and no one can access the data who should not. You can find our state's data security policy online.

FERPA is the floor for protecting participant privacy, not the ceiling. FERPA provides parameters for what is permissible when sharing participant information. The law does not prohibit sharing data across agencies. We are responsible for determining how data will be protected.

The responsibility to protect participant data is system wide. While the state must play a leadership role in data security policies, districts, schools, and their staff also have a responsibility to adhere to these policies and be good stewards of participant data.

**2.3.11 Experience Serving State Governments - Please provide a brief description of your company's experience in serving state governments and/or quasi-governmental accounts.**

PQC has provided support and services to the state of Indiana since 2004. Our organization began as an IT solutions provider to the state and provided staffing to the prime contractors related to the Peoplesoft deployment. Some of our early projects included:

1. Supporting the State of Indiana FSSA with Medicaid Operations Support/Knowledge Services from July 2007 to September 2008. PQC assisted with the development of materials to support the office of Medicaid Policy and Planning. We worked closely with the state team to develop standard operating procedures, statement of work, and scope of effort. We aided in the development of process mapping and workflow analysis, component specifications, system maintenance, user interface and software training manuals, technical publications, and commercial end-user documentation.
2. Providing support from 2004–2008 across Indiana to help implement the PeopleSoft Financial management system for the State Government. This project, ENCOMPASS (Enterprise Common Processing and Analytics Systems), completed the implementation of PeopleSoft as the statewide financial management system. This implementation established a new, common Chart of Accounts for state agencies and entities and brought the Auditor of State on-line with the rest of the ENCOMPASS agencies. Over 125 Indiana state agencies were included in this effort.



3. Supporting the Common Construction Wage project from 2007–2008 for the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. PQC was engaged to design, distribute, collect and tabulate data for a Common Construction Wage survey on behalf of the Department of Workforce Development. Upon inception of the project, our team worked closely with the Dept. of Workforce Development team to develop the survey and then worked with the unions and the constructions associations to create buy in. Meetings were held across the state, and our team engaged parties on both sides to create a transparent process and worked to engage more results.

Additionally, PQC was involved in the OneIndiana and OnePurdue program that focused on spend analysis and worked closely with the state's Office of Administration for over 2 years.

Over time, however, we diversified and expanded our services to focus on training and support capabilities. We created our PQC Trains division in 2016 as we began working with the State of Connecticut's Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide training and support for people with disabilities. We then became an Indiana VR provider in 2017. As a VR provider, we receive referrals for adults with disabilities who are entering or reentering the workforce and we have been successful in providing placement, employment support and work readiness to more than 430 participants. Our employment specialists provide interview preparedness, evaluations, site development, job placement, and job coaching to support each participant's journey to obtaining and maintaining secure and meaningful employment. We develop placement locations where participants can participate in working interviews or work evaluations and potentially receive a job offer.

For Pre-ETS, PQC has provided services for the State of Indiana since 2018. In the Pre-ETS program, we work to provide students with the tools, training and resources to help them in the areas of competitive employment, postsecondary education and independent living. Our personnel focus on supporting students' development in the core areas as needed: job exploration, work-based learning, counseling on post-secondary transition/education opportunities, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy. We work with students to understand their goals and desires; and we identify strengths, interests, and gaps, and then tailor curriculum and activities to support students in developing skills and knowledge to help them reach their goals. Since we started supporting the Pre-ETS program, we've worked with 40 schools across 40 counties and a total of 1,567 students so far.

**2.3.12 Experience Serving Similar Clients** - Please describe your company's experience in serving customers of a similar size to the State with similar scope. Please provide specific clients and detailed examples.

As previously noted, PQC is experienced in supporting similar clients with services similar in scope to those described in this RFI. We are an experienced provider of Pre-ETS, VR, and Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services (BDDS) supporting

individuals with disabilities, and we have supported programs in the State of Indiana since 2016. Additionally, we are an approved Ticket to Work vendor with extensive knowledge of Federal regulations related to SSI and SSDI. We also previously provided Career Technical Training (CTT) support at Paul Simon Chicago Job Corps Center.

### **Pre-ETS**

PQC began providing Pre-ETS in 2018 in Jay and Randolph counties, supporting 130+ students at Jay County High School, Randolph Southern High School, Monroe Central High School, Union City High School, and Winchester Community High School. To date, we have supported 1,567 students across 40 schools, and conducted 57,238 sessions helping those students develop in the Pre-ETS core activities. As part of our growth initiative, we are currently in the process of establishing a satellite PQC office in South Bend, Ind., to further bolster our program as it continues to grow in that region. This second office will be established by February 2024.

Our dedicated Pre-ETS Job Coaches meet with students to understand their goals and desires. We identify strengths, interests, and gaps, and then tailor curriculum and activities to support students in developing skills and knowledge to help them reach their goals. Our curriculum and activities center on the core Pre-ETS areas:

1. **Job exploration** – We focus on assisting students in exploring potential career pathways, helping students complete interest inventories and explore careers through a variety of resources. Examples of job exploration activities our Job Coaches have supported include:

- a. When a Pre-ETS student took an interest in potential military service, the PQC Job Coach reached out to the National Guard Recruiting Office and organized a visit by 2 recruiters to the school to speak with students considering military service.
- b. Assisting a senior student in setting up a ride-along with the Richmond Police Dept. This concept then ultimately developed into the department's Cadet Program.
- c. Connecting a student to an entrepreneur and speaker who educated the student on the pros and cons of starting a business and being your own boss.
- d. Setting up a group tour at a local factory to learn more about available job paths. Following the tour, the Job Coach discussed the experience with the students, including which students had an interest in that possible path and the pay, hours, and qualifications needed for the company and positions.
- e. Helping a student identify and use helpful job search websites to find available local positions.

2. **Work-based learning** – We support the development of in- and/or after-school work-based learning opportunities. Among their support services, our Job Coaches build networks of local community-based work experiences and guest speakers, facilitate job shadowing, explore corporate internship opportunities, etc. Examples of work-based learning activities our Job Coaches have arranged include:

- a. Regularly supporting students in developing resumes and cover letters.

- b. Assisting a student in successfully obtaining a job at a radio station within weeks of beginning Pre-ETS supports.
- c. Developing the Food Patrol program (discussed further below) to create work-based learning opportunities with the potential to receive work readiness certification.

3. **Work-based learning: Stipends** – PQC began offering stipend opportunities to students in 2021, providing them an opportunity to receive payment for duties they performed via stipend checks while also gaining hands-on work experience. Some work-based learning: stipend experiences from our program have included:

- a. Coordinating a large summer internship program across 84 students in different counties. Students participated in a range of opportunities and ultimately supported 26 programs. Some worked in schools to help clean, prepare, and reset the school to be ready for the new year. Others worked jobs in their communities, including helping at food banks, businesses, and even a couple of programs related to creative media or new advanced manufacturing options. Each student's hours were tracked, and they received a fair wage for their time.
- b. Discussing the stipend program with an employer and student, and finalizing the stipend plan with a schedule, an agreed-upon start date, an hourly rate to be applied for time worked, and an understanding that the Job Coach would also periodically observe the student.
- c. Observing student participation in stipend experiences as they support city maintenance crews, event staff, teachers, etc. (Our Job Coaches also conduct evaluations for each student on attendance, timeliness, appearance/hygiene, on-the-job relationships and communication, comprehension, concentration, desire to learn, confidence, behavior, etc.)

4. **Counseling on post-secondary transition/education opportunities** – We provide students support in researching and obtaining more knowledge on the opportunities they can pursue after high school, including information and experiences related to college applications and admissions processes, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms, disability support services, opportunities associated with specific career fields and pathways, etc. Examples of post-secondary counseling activities our Job Coaches have organized include:

- a. Discussing postsecondary education plans; admissions and cost requirements; and ideal focuses/majors with students, helping them explore what they would like about certain paths and what a typical day might look like.
- b. Developing and conducting college visits to campuses like Ball State University, Indiana University-East, Ivy Tech, etc. PQC also assisted in coordinating student visits to the Indianapolis Job Corps to learn more about its Heavy Equipment program.
- c. Assisting students in understanding and completing FAFSA and other financial aid forms, college and program applications, and scholarship forms. Our Job Coaches also directly reach out to Financial Aid Officers and work with students to estimate the cost to attend preferred universities.

d. Helping to identify programs and resources available at different colleges, trade schools, etc., based on disability and financial needs.

e. Providing students with information about VR and BDDS programs that can be entered into after graduation. When applicable, we complete program referral forms and provide an introduction for our students to our VR and/or BDDS Employment Specialists.

5. **Workplace readiness** – We provide programming aimed to develop student social skills and independent living capabilities. Workplace readiness skill development can focus on building a variety of skills, including but not limited to communication, financial literacy, time management and punctuality, transportation training, etc. Examples of workplace readiness our Job Coaches have conducted include:

a. Assisting a student in the car-buying process by helping them learn and understand insurance requirements. PQC contacted a local insurance agent who took time to explain the options and different policies to our student.

b. Helping a student practice the online driver's test and complete paperwork required for the driver's exam.

c. Setting up meeting for junior- and senior-grade students to speak with Vocational Rehabilitation representatives about services.

d. Providing lessons on business etiquette, appropriate attire, and good hygiene.

e. Developing student financial knowledge, including online banking, checking balances, transferring funds, depositing checks, and protecting banking information.

6. **Self-advocacy** – We help students learn about their rights and responsibilities as well as how to request accommodations or services/supports they need for post-secondary education and/or employment. Examples of self-advocacy supports our Job Coaches have implemented include:

a. Reaching out to a local Vocational Rehabilitation office to obtain services to assist with accommodations needed for a student who had obtained a job. PQC also helped set the student up for a VR appointment for a job coach and provided transportation assistance.

b. Accompanying a student to the Medicaid office in order to have the student's Medicaid reinstated. (When it was discovered the student needed proof of work from 2 prior employers, PQC accompanied the student to the previous jobs to obtain the appropriate documentation while explaining the student's rights and responsibilities for receiving the benefits.)

c. Discussing the potential for Walmart to provide assistance for a student needing accommodations to take the assessments for employment.

d. Coordinating individual and group-based games/activities to reiterate self-advocacy and communication lessons, with topics including "I" messages, assertive/passive/and aggressive communication, non-verbal communication, and picture communication.



We incorporated our Pre-ETS curriculum into our online LMS, which allows our Job Coaches to select individual courses for additional training coverage, either on the student's own or together with their Job Coach. Presently, we have more than 250 courses covering training topics within the 5 core Pre-ETS areas; some topics include Financial Wellness, Finding the Right Job for You, Work Attitudes, Dressing for an Interview, My IEP Meeting, What Is Self-Advocacy?, Self-Awareness: Who Are You?, Rights at Work, College Prep, and Interview Questions. The LMS automatically tracks student progress through their assigned training course(s), and provides them with a proof of completion achievement certificate that they can add to their portfolio.

To enhance our training, PQC has also developed and incorporated our own hands-on training materials, including:

- **Beyond Able Resource Kits**—These are convenient and easy-to-transport training kits focused on specific training areas. We developed these kits after realizing there was a need for assessment and training tools that were mobile enough to go where our participants were rather than needing the participants to come to a centralized location. These kits allow the Job Coach to engage a student or group of students in a hands-on activity to assess and/or build specific job skills and understanding. For example, with our Cash Basics kit, students learn to count and handle coins and bills during monetary transactions, like they would if they were working as a cashier. This includes activities such as totaling up purchases, receiving and counting money, and ensuring appropriate change is returned. Each kit contains hands-on elements as well as structured courseware and worksheets that are specific to related types of jobs and job exploration. Participants can also use the kits to refresh their understanding and build up repetitive steps to increase their capacity and overall confidence. Upon completion of the training, our participants receive a certificate, and this can be added to their résumé/portfolio.
- **My Toolbox Training**—This training course is designed to help students ages 14 to 22 to work on mastering employment skills and getting a job. With 10 hours of training over 5 days, it covers a variety of topics useful in obtaining and maintaining employment. The subjects include: Taking initiative and self-direction, work ethic, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, integrity, listening/speaking, conflict resolution, customer service, respect for diversity, teamwork, productivity, professionalism, workplace safety, information literacy, and information security. Students will receive completion badges and certifications as they master skills.

Additionally, our team is always on the lookout for new opportunities for programs and service offerings. Over the years, some of the Pre-ETS-focused programs we have developed and supported have included:

- **Toon Boom Training**—This program began with Wes-Del School Corp., who we worked closely with to create and write the Digital Animation Graduation Pathway, which led to 2 industry certifications that were added to the Indiana

CTE-approved certification list. Initially, this program was an in-person offering at Wes-Del; however, it has since expanded into the PQC Trains Toon Boom Digital Animation Program and offers virtual training opportunities in Storyboard Pro as well as Harmony software.

- **Resource/Transition Fairs**—In Spring 2023, PQC spearheaded and facilitated Resource/Transition Fairs in 5 different regions. These events brought together local service providers, employers, students and their families to provide an opportunity to share the different resources available to students when they graduate or leave high school.
- **The Food Patrol Program**—In prior program years, PQC developed the Food Patrol program in collaboration with Second Harvest Food Bank and local schools to create work-based learning opportunities with the potential to receive work readiness certification. This program focused on supporting volunteer staffing for the food bank, with students helping to feed families while cultivating their skills and building their resumes in a low-risk business atmosphere. Food Patrol was designed as a year-long program with two segments that students could participate in:
  - **Second Harvest Food Bank Support**—During the summer, students worked at the Food Bank one day per week. While there, PQC's Pre-ETS Job Coach remained on site and provided supportive employment coaching. Students completed training and assigned tasks, such as housekeeping, logistics, food safety, etc.
  - **School Pantry Services**—This part of the program occurred during the school year and provided families in need with a safe and convenient school environment to shop for food to fill their pantries. Pantry services were held after the school day, and Food Patrol students took on specific jobs before, during, and after the event to help with the weekly distribution of food, such as setting up and cleaning stations, restocking items, providing customer service to families, etc.

**Testimonials from PQC Pre-ETS Students:**

- *Kimberly Alanis-Reyes, Adams High School:* "I enjoy working in Pre-ETS because I get an opportunity to get help preparing for a job and help with other things that will allow me to be successful. I have learned through job shadowing and volunteering whether or not the career I'm interested in is a good fit for me. My job coach is very helpful and caring."
- *Benjamin Decker, a 2023 Norwell High School graduate:* "I was in high school, having only 4 more years of required school, and in my freshman year, I took an assisted study hall class. A new staff member offered my class an opportunity to be in a program that would help us transition into the real world after high school. Later, a new sub-program was established, where we students would go out into the community and give volunteer service. I signed up for the program, and I am confident that I am capable of working toward

my goals, persevering through the hard times, and communicating effectively. Being in [the Pre-ETS] program helped me to later go on to college for a bachelor's degree in civil engineering. Without this program, it would be tough to picture how I would get to where I am today."

- *Julia Schultz, Cowan High School:* "I have enjoyed working with Pre-ETS. Pre-ETS has provided me with the opportunity to experience the ToonBoom program. The program has helped me further my animation skills that I will use to get a job in the future."
- *Owen Laisure, Bluffton High School:* "Pre-ETS has helped me so much to give me different experiences. I learned all about different jobs like the real-world work settings, getting tips on interview skills, and how to advocate for myself. Megan, my Job Coach, makes learning fun, and I love working with her."
- *Corbin Trigg, Bluffton High School:* "Pre-ETS has helped me get out of my comfort zone and be more confident about having a disability. I've learned how to advocate for myself. "
- *Hannah Sexton, Bluffton High School:* "Whenever I first met my Job Coach through Pre-ETS, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I was working at Pizza King and I was making \$9.50. Often times, I would be overworked and didn't know it. I didn't know that I could ask for help when reading things for my job. I didn't know anything about my IEP or what it meant. All I knew is that I had a disability. Pre-ETS and my amazing Job Coach taught me about what my IEP stood for and what it means. Before Pre ETS, there were teachers that wouldn't let me go test in private rooms, wouldn't let me use calculators, wouldn't read things to me or allow me to go somewhere where they could read it to me. I had no idea this was against my IEP. Until Pre-ETS, I didn't believe I could be anything else other than working at Pizza King. Nobody asked me what my dream job was until my Job Coach. She helped me study and practice my skills for my CAN test. This is something that I never thought I could do. Pre-ETS doesn't only help you with jobs and education, they also teach you the things that go into organization, workplace readiness, workplace attitude, and how to get along with people that are hard to work with. Thank you, Pre-ETS, and thank you to my amazing Job Coach that's helped me grow and learn as much as I have!"

### **Vocational Rehabilitation**

PQC began serving as a Community Resource Provider (CRP) in Connecticut in 2015 and in Indiana in 2016, providing vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, including transition support, that aligns with the Pre-ETS RFS activities. As a CRP, we provide VR services that assist individuals with disabilities as they work, enter, or re-enter the workplace through the use of assessments, evaluation, job placement/retention services, and work-site supports such as job coaching. We maximize on-the-job learning and engage participants in on- and offsite career readiness activities,

including interview preparedness, work assessments, personal and career development, job coaching, and job placement. We work with participants to establish a consistent pattern of accountability, promptness, attendance, and reliability. Our staff develop employer partnerships and make arrangements with employers for the VR participants to engage in working interviews and skills assessments, or compete for permanent positions, which provides an opportunity for participants to receive feedback and/or potentially gain employment. Since we began our work as a CRP, we have successfully supported 432 participants with transition services including placement, employment support, and work readiness. Our services are divided into support categories including, but not limited to, Discovery Services and Milestone Services.

Our Discovery Services are aimed at career readiness and planning. Discovery Services includes activities such as job exploration counseling through vocational and situational assessments, job shadowing, workplace readiness skills building, and more. These services help our participants plan and prepare for job opportunities. As part of this process, we provide an on-site evaluator/job coach to assist the participant with learning new tasks and to assess the individual's ability to identify career interests and work competitively in the targeted environment.

Activities under our Milestone Services category include work-based learning experiences, workplace readiness training, and on-the-job supports. As part of our transition services support for CRP participants, we engage them in career readiness activities, including interview preparedness, work-based learning opportunities, personal and career development, job coaching, and job placement. Our Employment Specialists help participants experience the application process, produce a marketable résumé, practice interviewing, and overcome obstacles. Participants can also engage in Trial Work Experiences, which are designed to create connections with employers and open opportunities for job shadowing, and allows a participant to maximize training in their chosen field before entering the workforce.

PQC also offers one-on-one coaching or workshop-based training focused on developing life skills or work readiness skills. Our life skills courses focus on identifying and cultivating personal strengths for a successful career path, regardless of the career a person may choose. This may include content such as: independent living, building natural supports, financial literacy, self-esteem and empowerment, etc. Our work readiness workshops are aimed at individuals with little exposure to the "world of work." Here we empower attendees to gain the core competencies they need to launch a rewarding career. Course offerings include but are not limited to: interview preparation and interviewing skills, customer service, conflict management, job search strategies, transition planning, résumé and cover letter support, etc.

Additionally, we work to have our VR personnel attain Benefits Information Network (BIN) certification. BIN training gives Employment Specialists the knowledge and



expertise they need to provide accurate and up-to-date information about work incentives and state and federal benefits to Vocational Rehabilitation Service participants. All BIN liaisons must also undergo an annual training and recertification process that includes training exercises, competency tests, and field assignments. We have provided 73 participants with BIN support since we first began offering the services in 2018.

We have supported VR services in the State of Indiana since 2016, and previously supported the State of Connecticut from 2015 through 2017. Our challenge as a Connecticut CRP provider was that we had built a program (similar to our Indiana program) that was based on building a client base and engaging highly qualified Employment Specialists, but due to internal state financial burdens, the Connecticut program had several limitations to the number of clients they could serve. Throughout the project, PQC leadership made several trips to Connecticut to meet with state leadership, seek input, address issues, and work to improve services for our consumers. Ultimately, we felt that as a smaller CRP focused on higher quality services, it became financially difficult for us to continue our CRP services. As we transitioned out of the Connecticut CRP services, we were dedicated to working closely with the state and ensured that our consumers were our number one concern as we concluded that program.

PQC is proud of our work supporting VR programs, and we have a variety of success stories. A couple of these are highlighted below:

- PQC is knowledgeable in helping others obtain grants into Technical Service training organizations, like Erskine Green. In fact, one of our VR participants recently graduated from Erskine Green in the field of Inventory Distribution. This participant then successfully obtained a job at a car dealership. After the participant began working and acclimated to the dealership, our VR Employment Specialist went to the dealership and spoke with the Parts Dept. to see whether there was a new opening for our participant to then work in Inventory. A few weeks after that discussion, the participant informed their Employment Specialist that they were going to be an Inventory Clerk for the dealership. Since starting in the position, the participant has now been able to acquire their own car.
- One of PQC's Employment Specialists works with a participant that has vision impairment and a traumatic brain injury (TBI). They obtained a job as a Doorperson (Security position) for a large venue, but needed assistance with arranging transportation from work. (The participant does not have Internet access on their phone, nor do they own a computer.) They use city-based bus transportation to get to work, but are unable to use the bus system to return home because their regular shift ends around 11 p.m. Our Employment Specialist was able to obtain authorization for an Uber card to assist with transportation and also made an "Uber ride guide" for the participant. When the participant was unable to arrange their own Uber transportation, our

Specialist worked with the participant to create a communication system to help them provide notification of when they needed an Uber ride. Additionally, our Specialist received the direct phone numbers of two Uber drivers so that, when the Uber transportation amount happens to run out, the participant could still easily establish a transportation system with the two drivers, who may charge less.

### **Ticket to Work Program**

Since 2017, PQC has been an approved Employment Network (EN) supporting the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program, which provides Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities the choices, opportunities and supports needed to obtain and retain employment and reduce their dependence on cash benefits. Eligible adult "Ticketholders"/beneficiaries are able to assign their Tickets to the EN of their choice to obtain employment services, VR services, or other support services necessary to maximize their economic self-sufficiency through work opportunities.

When we receive a Ticket, PQC directly contacts the beneficiary. We begin working to understand the beneficiary's needs to ensure we're the right EN match for them. Once we accept the Ticket assignment, our Specialists coordinate and provide appropriate services to help the beneficiary find and maintain employment. We offer a variety of services, including career counseling, job search and placement, job training, job accommodation planning, etc. We also help the beneficiary understand how the program works in regard to the benefits they receive.

As part of the program, we work to develop an Individual Work Plan (IWP) in partnership with our beneficiary in such a way that also allows the beneficiary to exercise informed choices in selecting an employment goal and the services they need to achieve that goal. The IWP is a written agreement developed and signed by both the beneficiary and the EN, and it serves as a descriptive record of the beneficiary's employment goals while also detailing the specific services and ongoing supports that the EN will provide to help the beneficiary achieve their employment goals. We reference the IWP as we coordinate the next steps in the program. The IWP is considered a "living document" and can be amended as needed to reflect changing beneficiary needs and goals.

The next phase of the program is the initial job acquisition phase. At minimum, PQC provides career planning and job placement assessment. We can also provide supports for job training and job accommodations.

In the last stage of the program, our specialists provide beneficiaries with ongoing employment support. This can include providing the beneficiary with assistance to retain and/or advance employment, developing further job placement opportunities, and more. At minimum, we conduct quarterly follow-ups with each beneficiary to ensure they're continuing to succeed and meet their goals in employment and

financial independence.

### **Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services (BDDS) Extended**

#### **Employment/Waiver Services**

PQC has been a Medicaid/Home- and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver provider with Indiana's BDDS since 2020. The BDDS oversees a variety of services for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, including two HCBS waiver programs—the Family Supports Waiver (FSW) and Community Integration and Habilitation (CIH) Waiver. These waiver programs provide person-centered individualized supports that assist individuals in living in their own home or family home and have full access to the benefits of community living.

When BDDS services may be applicable, PQC provides information and support services for these two programs to our participants and their guardians. Both programs serve persons with a developmental disability, intellectual disability or autism and who have substantial functional limitations. Through these waivers, PQC helps provide participants with access to meaningful and necessary HCBSs and supports; implements services and supports in a manner that is respectful of the participant's preferences, aspirations, and health and safety needs; ensures services are cost-effective; and facilitates participant involvement in their community, development of social relationships in their home and community, and independent living.

#### **Job Corps Career Technical Training**

In addition to our work as a CRP and Pre-ETS provider, PQC previously performed Career Technical Training (CTT) at Paul Simon Chicago Job Corps Center from 2014 through 2018, teaching more than 330 students ages 16–24 in the career fields supported by the center (i.e., Office Administration, Pharmacy Technician, Certified Nursing Assistant, Computer Services Technician, and Material Handling). Along with providing CTT instruction, our instructors supported short- and long-term placement efforts and developed opportunities for work-based learning, including field trips, internships, community service-learning projects and career exploration activities. These experiences offered a deeper understanding of the tasks that students needed to master to be successful from Day 1 in their career field. Our team developed relationships with the local workforce investment board, community and employers on a consistent basis. Our staff regularly interfaced with and visited the American Job Centers and engaged employers for the center's workforce council. Securing these partnerships offered benefits for Job Corps students, including building work-based learning opportunities as well as the potential for future job and training options. These relationships provided our instructors with insight into new certifications and credentials required in certain fields and/or by specific employers, ultimately helping our team ensure students are fully prepared with the necessary knowledge and training upon entering the workforce. Each month, we also required our CTT instructors to support placement efforts by identifying no less than two new

placement connections per month—this could include employer, military, college, or advanced training opportunities.