

Interview with an Employer

Morningside interviewed Lisa Ferguson, Assistant Manager at the Lacey Walmart to share her perspective on working with individuals with developmental disabilities employed by Walmart.

Q: How long have you worked at Walmart?

A: I have worked at Walmart for 36 years. I have worked at the Lacey [Hawks Prairie] store for 9 years supervising the front end of the store. I manage all the employees who help customers, cashiers, cart retrievers, greeters and maintenance workers who keep the store clean.

Q: How many people work at this location?

A: We have between 350-450 employees depending on the time of year.

Q: Have you worked with people with disabilities prior to supervising clients Morningside supports?

A: Throughout my career at Walmart every store I have been at has employed someone that is challenged. What I have found is that people with developmental disabilities bring a lot of joy to the workplace. People with disabilities are easy to work with and typically they are very welcoming and friendly. You just find out what their needs are and go from there.

Q: Did you have any knowledge of programs like Morningside's which support individuals with developmental disabilities in jobs?

A: I didn't know of Morningside's program until I arrived at the Lacey store. Most of the communities I have worked in have programs like Morningside working with individuals with challenges. We are willing to work with a program like Morningside to see if there are people that are a good fit to match needs of the store with the needs of the individual.

Q: What has been your experience working with people with disabilities?

A: It has been very positive. Jeff is always positive and happy. He will do anything I ask him. He makes my day, he is so friendly, and he makes all of us feel so good because he is so positive. I have seen so much growth in Robyn these past 10 years since she has been with us. She is so outgoing now and has gained so much confidence. She isn't shy now and she will speak up for her needs. It has been wonderful to see someone grow and develop.

Q: What does employing individuals with developmental disabilities bring to Walmart?

A: It helps other associates as well as customers see and experience that they can do a job just as well as anyone else. People with disabilities are the same as anyone. It also gives exposure to other associates or customers to people with disabilities that they maybe never had and hopefully it will dispel misconceptions.

Q: How is it working with our staff?

A: Morningside's staff are wonderful! If you need someone just give a call and staff will be there as soon as possible. Also if the client has a concern such as scheduling and trying to figure out something they are there to assist. Morningside staff assist their clients when they go through training. They are fantastic. Any questions or help you need Morningside will be there.

Q: What would you say to another company that is interested in hiring a client that Morningside supports?

A: If they have the opportunity to hire someone Morningside supports, they should. A Morningside client's skills and interests, matched with the right job, along with Morningside job coaches – they can do anything they want to. Morningside is always there to assist. It is comforting to know that we have that support. Plus you are helping the community, plus you get a great dependable employee. They are a lot more dependable than most others. Morningside and Jane Mohr [job coach at Walmart] have been great. They are dependable and are quality people. They help a lot.



l-r Robyn Branham, Lisa Ferguson, Jeff Doiron

Interview with Michael Cade, Chair, Board of Trustees

Q: Why are you on the Board?

A: I am a tried and true economic developer. My career in economic development has spanned nearly 25 years now – and I truly believe in the impact that positive economic development activities can have on communities and people. When I was looking to become involved in an organization, to assist in their leadership and the fulfillment of their mission, I found



Michael Cade speaking at Olympia Rotary Club about the EDC partnership with SPSCC in developing the Business Resource Center

Morningside. I saw that the mission of the organization was directly in alignment with my core values and personal mission to positively impact the quality of life for my neighbors and the citizens of the community in which I reside and work. When Morningside is successful, they have a huge impact upon the quality of the lives of individuals whom they serve. I believe heartily in the transformative power of employment. From the work that I have seen firsthand that Morningside does, by working to provide life-transforming opportunities to my neighbors and fellow citizens with employment, our entire community benefits. The life-changing opportunities for people with disabilities has a cumulative impact upon the rest of the community – we all benefit from a higher quality of living -- we all receive that gift of a quality community. Morningside does that. I see it in the work of its team, in the businesses that they serve, and those that are served. Morningside changes lives for the better – and they *are* economic development. If I can participate in some small way, I feel that I have contributed to the fulfillment of my life goals.

Q: What excites you the most about the organization's work in the world?

A: I have seen impacts – incredibly positive impacts – on three elements of the mission of the organization. First the support of the person – the person who has an opportunity to help his/her self through employment. Second, the employer that hires a client of Morningside – we have testimonials on the creation of a new corporate culture that speaks to the team unity and sense of purpose that grows amongst the other employees. And third, the families of the client – they increase their sense of community by engaging and being engaged in the opportunity. I have had the opportunity to serve on several community based boards – Morningside is on the cutting edge of creativity by improving access and opportunities to employment for those with disabilities – and that truly is exciting work.

Q: What do you want to accomplish by serving on the Board?

A: I want to increase awareness of the organization [in the community] – and I want to support the professional staff so that they can expand on their work and opportunities for the clients they serve.

Q: What do you offer in your role as Chairman?

A: This is a great question. I would like to answer that I offer my expertise, my access to employers, my knowledge of economic trends so that the organization can continue to plan effectively, and I would like to say so I can positively impact the tenor and critical thinking of the rest of the Board. I don't know if I can say that. I hope that I can. In retrospect, I offer my time. I offer my thinking and support – and if my role is cheerleader for the professional staff, then so be it. If, after my tenure, I feel that my best contribution was simply as a promoter of the folks that transform lives, then I will be glad to have offered that. I said it earlier, the employment opportunities that Morningside provides – or more correctly said, enables and supports, transforms lives. If that is the case, then I will gladly hand the Chairman's gavel to my successor!



Jim Larson CEO and Michael Cade Chairman of the Board at the EDC sponsored Wisdom and Chocolate event.

Q: What advice would you give someone serving on a not-for-profit board?

A: I believe that the greatest advice I can provide someone who is serving on a board of a not for profit is to enjoy the opportunity. Seek out ways you can positively impact that organization's mission statement. You will find many ways that the service will positively impact your life.