# Stefan's Success At State



Author John Maxwell said, "Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others." This is exactly what State Window Corporation ("State") has set out to accomplish in collaboration with Project Search Toronto, based at the Toronto Rehab–UHN and Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Project SEARCH is a one-year transition to work program for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that helps students move successfully from high school to the workforce. State supports Project SEARCH Toronto because we take great pride in not only being a company that promotes diversity and inclusion, but also one that seeks to explore ways to enrich the fabric of our work culture.

With an increase in labour shortages across the industry, State is actively hiring in Vaughan's manufacturing plant. We worked throughout the pandemic, and now that most restrictions have been lifted, we took the opportunity to contact Project SEARCH Toronto with our job openings. Stefan Close-Jonquet is a former Project SEARCH student, and his resume, caught our attention. We quickly set up an in-person interview. Stefan met with the Director of Operations and me in our DaVinci boardroom. He toured the manufacturing facility and tested out the powered drill gun on the window frame unit. We instantly hired Stefan because we were mutually interested in the opportunity to work together.

Stefan joined the company on October 4th, 2021 with a huge smile, eager to learn everything on his first day of orientation. This was also the week of Thanksgiving in which the company distributed over 600 frozen turkeys to each staff member. Stefan was excited to meet all the employees, learn about the machinery and receive his "State" t-shirt and turkey. He attentively listened to all health and safety protocols and working procedures in the manufacturing plant. It was definitely a successful first week and he couldn't wait to be back again. For the first two weeks he received on-the-job coaching support from an Employment Solutions Advisor from Community Living Toronto. But soon afterwards, we were all in agreement that her assistance was no longer required, as he was in his element and managed his responsibilities well. This was also a result of his supervisor's and team members' support in guiding him along the way. What I particularly appreciated was how the Employment Solutions Advisor provided initial training to our staff and supervisor who would be working closely with Stefan in order for them to understand best practices for his preferred communication and learning style.

Stefan is thriving in the louver department with six other team members. He inserts gaskets in the anchor of the window frame, then carries the finished product onto a trolley for the next working station. I recently asked Stefan what he enjoyed most about his job and he replied, "my friends here and the job I do." Stefan demonstrates our core values and is a valuable contributor to our company. The team admires his observant, task-focused and curious personality. Additionally, not only has his compassionate and kind presence in our workplace increased morale in the department, but it has also made it a more rewarding place to work. Although Stefan has a lengthy commute to and from the workplace, his mother commented, "It's worth it, just to see how happy and motivated he is about his job."

State is privileged to be a place where youth with disabilities can develop the skills and confidence they require in today's competitive job market. We continue to strive to change the social barriers and challenge other employers towards creating a more inclusive and diverse workforce for the next generation. We hope Stefan's story opens a door, or window, for many other individuals with disabilities so that they too can contribute their talents, gain value-added experiences and enhance their organization's workplace culture.

A warm welcome and continued success to Stefan in his new role at State!

**To learn more about Project SEARCH Toronto:** Visit projectsearchtoronto.ca, or email the program at projectsearchtoronto@gmail.com. Follow them on LinkedIn or @projectsearchTO.

The Project SEARCH program model was introduced in Ontario as an innovative best practice by the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN). Project SEARCH Toronto is powered by partnerships including ODEN, Holland Bloorview and Toronto Rehab-UHN (the business site hosts), the Toronto District School Board (the education partner) and Community Living Toronto (the developmental service and employment support partner). United Way Greater Toronto's Career Navigator program funded the employment and developmental service supports.

State of Kindness Foundation (philanthropic arm of State) generously provided funding for classroom furniture and equipment at Toronto Rehab-UHN's Rumsey Neuro Centre.

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December 2021

