

# Frank: Leveraging Natural Supports in the Workplace

## Background

Frank Hellmer is a 31-year-old man who lives alone in Little Rock, Arkansas. He enjoys playing video games in his spare time. In addition to having Autism, Frank also has been diagnosed with Depression and a combination of significant health-related challenges including Diabetes and Hypertension. Frank explains that together these diagnoses can cause him to have some unique workplace support needs. Frank currently works as a data analyst for Centene Corporation where he has accessed a range of natural supports that have enabled his ongoing success.

## How Natural Supports\* Worked for Frank

As a data analyst at Centene Corporation, Frank receives data requests through a ticketing system. He needs to pull the requested data from Centene's database and present it in spreadsheet form to the person requesting the information. These requests are assigned on a rotation. Frank accesses his direct supervisor as an important natural support to manage these requests. During their structured, biweekly meetings, they review Frank's outstanding tickets and other workplace announcements. When Frank has difficulty responding to a ticket request, they negotiate reasonable due dates for tasks and allow for extensions as needed or shift tickets that are too complicated. Frank regards his supervisor as a mentor who helps him whenever he has questions. This also helps Frank to prioritize, focus, and feel reassured.



## \* What do we mean by natural supports?


Natural supports are methods of assistance that exist in any workplace that all employees can tap into. These supports help the person to perform their job responsibilities. Natural supports can involve people, procedures, customs, tools, and benefits that are typically available in the workplace, along with individualized supports provided by colleagues. They **are not** paid supports from an employment support provider. From [The Importance of Natural Supports](#).

In his role, Frank works with a team of roughly 15 other data analysts. Frank considers these co-workers to be another valuable natural support. Frank notes that several have been helpful in explaining how to communicate more professionally, especially over email. Frank values this coaching as he said it “helps him know what not to do next time” and he can be more appropriate in social and professional situations. As he says, “Sometimes I have problems knowing how to act in [certain] situations, what to say to who, how much and how often to text someone, and things of that nature.” This supports Frank to act and communicate better in both social and professional situations. Frank also notes that co-workers answer his questions without reprimand and offer him step-by-step written instructions for tasks. They are also willing to provide further clarification if he remains confused.

In addition to Frank’s supervisor and co-workers, Frank also leverages the ability to work remotely and have flexible work hours. This allows Frank to attend weekly therapy sessions for emotional support and regular psychiatrist appointments to monitor his medications. This flexibility also allows him the time he needs to coordinate his other health care and independent living needs. For example, he can grocery shop in the morning when he has transportation support available and make up those hours later that night.

## What happened

Frank has worked at Centene Corporation since February 24, 2020. Frank continues to put procedures in place such as modifications to his computer’s ringtones to differentiate tasks, alert him to a new data request, and be more independent. He also created a new system that listed tasks for each day. Frank says that what has helped him the most is having allies and a mentor at work who are invested in his success. He looks forward to being a voice for other people with disabilities around the importance of employment.



“I believe [my employment has] helped show that people with disabilities can contribute in the workplace and be a good return on investment, if you will just give us a chance to thrive...”

## Highlights

- » While Frank's supervisor provides natural supports that enable Frank to be successful in meeting his job tasks, Frank's co-workers offer natural supports in the form of gentle coaching and mentoring, particularly around workplace etiquette and appropriate communication.
- » Frank's flexible work schedule allows him to manage other aspects of his life including health care and independent living support needs.
- » Centene's approach to supporting Frank has allowed him to grow and perform his job duties in ways that maximize his learning and independence.



Further information about me can be obtained on my LinkedIn Profile here:

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