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Coffee creates opportunities with Rolling Bean

It might look like a just a cup of coffee.

For many Carey Services clients, though, a cup of coffee means much more than a lowly hot beverage. Coffee has opened the door to employment for many of them.

As it nears its two-year anniversary, the Rolling Bean coffee business is growing, which means it also is creating more opportunities for people with disabilities to learn valuable job skills. Some of those skills can directly correlate to a job in the food-service industry while some can be valuable in any job.

From its start serving Carey Services' Marion campus buildings, the Rolling Bean expanded last winter to the lobby of Family Service Society in downtown Marion. In early April, the Rolling Bean also opened a coffee cart at Marion Public Library.

"We're doing more than just selling coffee and snacks," said Greg Maynard, the agency's director of fund and strategic advancement who helps oversee the business. "Sure, a customer wants a good cup of coffee and courteous service, but we are able to do much more with the business than just create business transaction. We're teaching life skills; a cup of coffee is just the tool we're using."

The Rolling Bean was the brainchild of the agency's employment services department, which helps people with disabilities find work in the community. Department staff members work with clients to discover job interests, assess their skills levels and help them develop new skills or improve current skills necessary to work in their desired job field.

The Rolling Bean is a great tool to help clients in all three of those areas.

In its 23 months of operation, the Rolling Bean has employed nine agency clients, some of whom have since moved on to other employment opportunities in the community. The business also has had 25 clients participate in job-training opportunities using various part of the Rolling Bean operation while working with the employment services staff.

"It's small, but we run the Rolling Bean like a real business," said Tim Kendrick, Carey Services' employment services manager who oversees daily operations. "Yes, we sell coffee and snacks;

that's the part everyone sees. But we also use the backroom aspects of the business to help people develop skills."

When they become a Carey Services client, one of the first things an employment services client has to do is declare an occupational area in which they think they want to work. Some clients want jobs that entail public interaction; others are emphatic that they want to work by themselves or in a less public setting.

The Rolling Bean can provide experiences for both. Customer service, the selling of the product, will allow those who want interaction to develop skills. Those who want something quieter might learn how to inventory the products that go on the cart or develop skills in cleaning and maintaining the coffee equipment.

"We've been able to use the coffee cart with many of our clients on those small tasks," Kendrick said. "Many of our folks have never really worked, so we start small by breaking down jobs into various steps or processes that build on each other. As someone masters one of the skills, we'll build on what they've learned and add to it all with the client's goals and future employability in mind."

Think of all of the components that go into selling a cup of coffee. There's the customer service component: is the salesperson pleasant? Did they complete the order correctly? Did they receive the correct amount of money and return the correct change? Then, after the transaction, there can be the inventory component that can involve proper accounting for materials or restocking those materials that are low.

That doesn't involve the preparation time needed to prepare the coffee and other items that will be sold that day or the clean-up time after the business closes to ensure all rules and regulations are met. The room in which the Rolling Bean stores and prepares the coffee and other products is licensed by the Grant County Health Department.

"At Carey Services, our priorities are the health, safety and success of those we serve," Maynard said. "As we help our clients work toward success in the areas they choose, the Rolling Bean has been a valuable tool in our work to help turn abilities and barriers into opportunities."