

## Miss T-Serving up Smiles Daily

The lunch hour rush comes in with the busy hustle at McAlister's Deli, located in the Summit Fair Shopping Center in Lee's Summit, MO. Life is happening all around; business people on phones, mothers pushing strollers, young people grabbing a quick bite. With the fast pace of life, one might not notice the young lady at the table with the golden smile. She's wrapping the silverware that you will use at McAlister's Deli. She is also one of the friendliest and happiest individuals in food service. Just spend a few minutes with her, and you will have made a new friend.

Tionna Jackson had difficult times as a child in a school setting. She was either ill from being around other children or just not comfortable in the public school environment. Her mother, Tina, pulled her from public education to homeschool her beginning when she was 7 years old. She did a phenomenal job learning at home with her mother as her teacher. At age 16, they began the very important transition to adulthood.



"I wanted to get her communicating, socializing, and gaining skills that I knew she would need as an adult," says mom.

Tina sought out several community volunteer opportunities for "Miss T," (aka Tionna) which was incorporated into her home school journey for the next four years. This set the pace for her transition from high school to community employment. All aboard for Miss T's Travels!

### Riding the Transition Train

Her first stop on the transition train was at *The Style Room* for 1 hour each week. Soft skills were identified and worked on such as; unloading a dryer, folding towels, sweeping the floor, straightening the waiting room and emptying the trash. She was there for 7 months.

Her next stop for skill building was the *Mid-Continent Public Library in Lee's Summit*. She dusted shelves, cut paper, stamped and placed stickers on books 2 hours twice a week for a year. The opportunities were coming fast and building in complexity.

Her third stop on the journey was *John Knox Village*, a retirement center in the area. She was part of assisting their sewing circle and naturally fell into taking lunch orders for the resident's lunches. She would place their "order," bringing the food and other items to them. She was in their lives for a year.

Next stop? *The Good Shepherd Hospice*, volunteering from home completing full projects. Tionna spent time in her home assembling grief packets for those who were



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losing or had lost loved ones. In the year she volunteered, she put together 3,600 packets to give hope and support to people in the KC area!

Now was when the big questions emerged. Was she ready for employment? We all want to be in a paid position where we matter and feel good about ourselves. Were these unpaid volunteer positions enough to have readied her for the real world? Where would she find her first paid job?



Miss T worked with Employment Specialist, Michelle Vangordon, KC Rehabilitation Institute over a year searching for a job. Raymond Miller was the first person they met at *McAlister's Deli*. He identified the area that few people wanted- wrapping silverware at the Deli. This task was actually perfect for Miss T! She was given a chance. They believed in her and she was very personable. Preston Vangordon, her job coach from Vocational Rehabilitation, accompanied her for almost two months, but she is working on her own now. She works 10-12 hours a week, interacts with her coworkers and the public, and has a wage to take home. She is proud and successful! She looks forward to her independent ride to work with her favorite driver, Martin Bryant, through EITAS (Jackson County Board of Services).

Tionna pictured with 3 of her managers from McAlister's Deli; Jon, Chase and Ben

## Making a Difference

Miss T also enjoys being part of groups that make a difference! She has been part of change in our communities by assisting 2 groups; **KASA** and the **RAC**.

**KASA** is Kids as Self Advocates. This is a group of young people with challenges that participate in monthly conference calls in which they review documents and contribute to improving the approach and language to support individuals with disabilities. The Regional Advisory Council (RAC) of the Department of Mental Health in Kansas City has also benefitted greatly from Tionna's involvement. As the **RAC** was providing community conversation opportunities in the KC area counties, Tionna attended each one, putting her special brand of enthusiasm and assistance into each Saturday morning event.

So, if you ever need to eat and would like to meet her, stop by McAlister's. You may just encounter that warm smile she serves up or her friendly ways. Introduce yourself!

"The staff loves her! She's fantastic! We love her to death. She helps our business... she improves our atmosphere," says Jon Lesue, manager of McAlister's.



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While this Transition Train keeps on rollin' and no one is sure where the next stop is, she is on the journey of a lifetime. Her adult life holds so much promise and success because of her drive, ambition, support, vision and acceptance in the community. All aboard!



**Proud moment- Miss T and her first check from McAlister's Deli**

Submitted by Kansas City Regional Office Staff

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