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My son, Andy, works at LaRosa's. After a couple of months interning there two days a week through Cincinnati Public Schools' ICAN program, a very kind (and intrepid) family friend asked the franchise owner if Andy could continue one day a week as an employee for the summer. Andy had just aged out of the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) Vocational Rehabilitation program for high school students and was facing a long summer with little structure until the new school year began.

That was two years ago. At the end of that summer, Andy decided not to return to the CPS program and instead increased his schedule at LaRosa's — and he's been working there ever since.

This was a wonderful development. I had worried for years about what employment after high school would look like for Andy. His vocational rehabilitation counselor had been very helpful in identifying Andy's strengths, challenges, and interests, but in the end, it fell to me — or in this case, my determined friend — to find him a job opportunity. To be clear, I'm very grateful for OOD's support; they provided a job coach for nearly a year, which was instrumental in Andy's success.

Fast forward several months. I had no idea that as a recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) from the Social Security Administration (SSA), Andy was required to report his wages to the government. Despite many meetings to plan his employment journey, no one had mentioned this important detail. We didn't discover the oversight until Andy received a letter from the SSA stating that his SSI payments would be temporarily reduced to recover overpaid benefits. Thankfully, the financial impact for Andy was small, but the SSA representative made it clear that accurate wage reporting going forward was nonnegotiable.

Interestingly, I've since learned that some families don't have to report wages directly because their loved one's paycheck is deposited electronically. Andy, however, receives a paper check, which means we handle the reporting ourselves.

Now, we report Andy's wages every month. It's not particularly difficult, but it can be tedious. Wages can only be reported for days that fall within a calendar

month, and since Andy is paid every two weeks, pay periods rarely line up perfectly. Still, it's become part of our routine — we make sure to report by the 5th of each month to avoid another call from the SSA. We also carefully monitor Andy's checking account balance to keep it below the \$2,000 resource limit so he remains eligible for SSI. Honestly, it can feel like a bit of a balancing act at times. When Andy's OOD job coaching funding ended, I worried that all his hard-earned progress might fade without continued support. Although Andy was increasingly independent, I knew that periodic check-ins would help him stay on track — and he genuinely enjoyed working with his job coach. Fortunately, Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) offers a program that funds monthly follow-up visits, which has been a tremendous help.

I'm incredibly thankful that Andy has meaningful employment. He's proud to work at LaRosa's, and while he may not say it outright, I know it gives him a strong sense of purpose and community. The paycheck allows him to enjoy life — meals out, concert tickets, and a fresh pair of Nikes every few months (he has a thing for cool shoes, just like his mom).

The path here wasn't always straightforward, but we've learned a lot along the way. And for now, I think we've found a good rhythm — one that works for Andy and our family.