**Employment Insights with the NRTC – Episode 7**

Opening Music

Introduction: Thank you for joining us on Employment Insights with the NRTC. On this episode, we are joined by our host Sylvia Stinson-Perez and today's guest, Lucy. Lucy shares about her employment journey of using her knowledge of speaking a second language and turning it into a career. Continue listening for more.

Sylvia: Welcome back to another episode of NRTC Employment Insights. We are thrilled today to have Lucy joining us. Thank you so much for being with us today, Lucy. I'm super excited.

Lucy: I'm very excited also. Thank you so much for this opportunity, Sylvia.

Sylvia: Oh, you're welcome. So, Lucy, we'll jump into our questions. Tell us a little bit about your vision impairment.

Lucy: I have congenital cataracts and glaucoma. I was born in Honduras where the access to proper medical treatment isn't as readily available as it is here. So at the age of seven, I came to the US and went through a couple of different surgeries here. And I eventually lost the little site that I had by age 15 because of retinal detachment. So I would have cornea transplants. And then after a while, my corneas would get cloudy again, and I would lose the little bit of sight that I might have gained with a previous surgery. And then eventually, I just lost all of it, but.

Sylvia: Okay. Yeah. That's a challenge. Wow.

Lucy: It is.

Sylvia: And Lucy, so tell us about your work history and your career journey, which I think is fascinating.

Lucy: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Sylvia: Because you took a skill-- what I love is that you took a skill that you had and turned it into a job.

Lucy: I did. I am a fluent Spanish speaker. I went to the University of South Florida in Tampa to get a bachelor's in languages. So Spanish was the main focus, of course, and I took all kinds of different courses in Latin American history and studies and literature, learned everything that I could about my own culture, and started working for LanguageLine Solutions shortly after I graduated with my bachelor's from there. And I worked for a LanguageLine for about five years. And subsequently, I began working for another company that's based out of Portland, Oregon. It's Certified Languages International, and I'm still working with them. Also, I've done some work for the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine, Florida over the past couple of years as an interpreter for the students there with Spanish-speaking parents who may need an interpreter for an individual educational plan. So that's been a wonderful opportunity to be able to work with them. And recently, I have been working in Daytona, Florida at the residential rehabilitation center for the blind with Spanish speaking clients, interpreting for them through all of their classes while they've been in training. So in a nutshell, that's been my experience.

Sylvia: Yeah, I think it's really cool that you took a skill that you had, speaking Spanish, and turned that into a career. And clearly, to be an interpreter, it takes more than just the ability to speak two languages. What other skills do you think have been really important in developing this as a career?

Lucy: Well, a really good understanding of the target language that you're working with and of the culture is really important. For the companies that I have worked for, I have mostly been doing work in the medical field from home over the phone. So I needed to have a proper understanding of medical terminology, of course, but also, all the nuances that go along with the things that are being said by the Spanish-speaking patient and how to interpret that into English and have that information be transmitted in a way that renders the interpretation.

Sylvia: So really good communication skills. And it sounds like to me a constant learning because you're having to learn new things all the time. And if you're introduced to a new culture, I'm guessing you're going to have to go and get some information, right, and learn about that culture?

Lucy: That is correct. Yes, absolutely.

Sylvia: Yeah. So communications and constantly learning. That's super interesting. So, Lucy, you have been able to work remotely throughout your career to some extent but also to work in person. And you were even working remotely prior to COVID and the pandemic. So what are the challenges and the benefits of both working remotely and working in person?

Lucy: The benefits of working at an on-site location, you can network with other people, you can have more in-person-- get to know the coworkers that you're working with. And some of the challenges with working remotely are that you spend more time indoors and the transportation is also a challenge when trying to work somewhere on site. Sometimes it's difficult to get a ride to where you need to go, especially if it's different locations.

Sylvia: And I guess if you're working on a long-term project, would building rapport with the people be slightly more challenging working remotely? Or what do you think about that? I think that's a big concern that all of us have who work remotely now.

Lucy: It is. I feel like it is a big concern. It's not as easy to build rapport with your coworkers and other people in the company that you're working for when you're working remotely because they don't see you. You may talk to them every now and then, and you're pretty much just a voice on the line. And if you do video, of course, that helps quite a bit, but it's still not the same as being in person.

Sylvia: And another thing that occurs to me with working remotely but I think has been a little bit of a surprise to a lot of people is the technology learning curve. You have to have much greater skills, I think, for technology when you work remotely because you can't just yell across the hall to your neighbor and say, "Hey, I'm having problems with this," or to your IT person who could come in remotely to your computer, but it's much more challenging when you're not in the office, I think. And that's something I don't think a lot of people realize until they have that experience.

Lucy: That's true. Yes, technology is definitely a big part of being able to work independently and remotely. I've had to learn how to set up my own spreadsheets to have the calculations for everything that I earn. Since I work as an independent contractor, I keep track of all of that. So I log all of my calls, the number of minutes the call lasted. All that information is on a spreadsheet, and I had to learn on my own how to make that work for me. So that's just a small example of the things that I've needed to learn with regard to technology to be able to adapt.

Sylvia: That's a great example. Great example. So, Lucy, what would you say are the key skills that have led to your success?

Lucy: The key skills that have led to my success have been-- one of them I would say is adaptability because whether I'm working from home remotely or on site, I'm having to work with different people, either over the phone or in different clients. In the workplace, I have different coworkers. And also, situations that might come up that you might need to figure out how to solve, you have to be able to have that ability to work independently and figure out what you need to do to get the job done.

Sylvia: Anything else? That's a really important one.

Lucy: As we mentioned, technology is a very important one. With regard to skills for people who are blind or visually impaired, I would say Braille is definitely a big part of what has helped me to be successful. I learned Braille from very early on even though I had a little bit of sight. And I am very grateful to have been able to do that and develop my Braille skills throughout the time that I was in school because now I use a Braille display to do all of my interpreting. And so I have to type fast, and Braille all of my information. I have a bit of a shorthand, if you could say that, with how I type my information and relay it back in Spanish or in English. And so that's a very necessary skill. Orientation and mobility skills, definitely working on site is a very important one for you to be able to navigate different areas where you might be working. That was definitely something I exercised a couple of months ago when I started working at the rehabilitation center here for the blind.

Sylvia: It's interesting to me, Lucy, that when I ask that question about blindness skills, pretty much everybody says the same thing. And I'm so glad because those skills are so important. And I think sometimes the skills part gets underestimated. And especially for people who are newer to vision loss, and they're trying to get a job, and they don't have the skills, and it really does interfere with their ability to get a job but mostly to retain that job. So what would you say to VR, vocational rehabilitation, counselors who might listen to this and who are working with people who are blind or low vision and trying to work with them on placement and getting them ready for employment? What would you say are some key things that are really important for them to know?

Lucy: One of the things that I noticed working at the rehabilitation center is the importance of working with a diverse population of people. Vocational rehabilitation counselors, it would be really important for them to have a good handle on the culture of the clients that they might be working with and different needs that they might have depending on their background, and that's something that I've noticed. And also, having adequate evaluations to determine what type of technology might be needed.

Sylvia: Yeah. I think the training piece is so important. Understanding what a person is going to need technology-wise, training-wise, accommodations-wise, equipment-wise. All of those are important to be successful.

Lucy: Also, having the proper equipment. So that's part of the assessment for the client to have the proper equipment that they're going to need to be able to do well at their job.

Sylvia: Yeah. It's really important. And so finally, Lucy, what advice would you give someone maybe who's young or who is new to vision loss or whatever, and they're looking for a job? What kind of advice would you give people who are visually impaired and looking for work?

Lucy: I would say find out what your passion is, what you really like to do. And learn everything that you can about it, research it, find other people that may have that same interest. And also, networking is really important and gaining the skills necessary for the career that you would like to go into whether it be through training or through university schooling. And also, to advocate for yourself. Unfortunately, as blind people in a sighted world, we have to do certain things to prove that we can do the things we can do. And so we have to be able to speak up for ourselves and have what we want.

Sylvia: And need.

Lucy: And need. Correct.

Sylvia: Yeah. Those are some great pieces of advice, Lucy. All of those are just fantastic.

Lucy: Thank you.

Sylvia: Well, it has been so wonderful talking to you, Lucy. And again, I think it's just fantastic, even magical, that you took a skill and turned it into a career. And I guess I would just encourage more people to kind of figure out. Like you said, find something you're passionate about and that you're good at, and see if you can turn that into work.

Lucy: That's right. As a child, I would interpret for my family. And I realized how much I enjoyed being able to do that. And once I graduated from high school, that was definitely something that I felt passionate about and wanted to be able to do. So I'm living my dream.

Sylvia: Awesome. Thank you so much, Lucy.

Lucy: Thank you!

Closing music.