

## **Climbing the Hill and Taking the Big Drop into Working at Kings Island Amusement Park**

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A friend from school had a job at Kings Island as a scare actor for the Halloween Haunt. He told me his job let him scare people at night. That sounded like a good time, so I wanted to apply. Soon, I got an email asking me for a park interview. At the interview I was devastated to learn I was too young to become a scare actor. The scare actors had to be a minimum of sixteen years to perform at Haunt, and I was fourteen. I questioned if I should wait until I turned sixteen or apply for another job? The interviewer gave jobs of cleaning services, food services, or games. Games sounded more exciting because you get to interact with people to help them win prizes. Actually, I didn't know much about games, but I was a crew member at our school carnival. I told the interviewer the little bit I knew about games. Evidently, it was enough to convince her to hire me onto their team. However, I didn't know, starting a job at fourteen presents additional challenges, not to mention the confusion I sometimes experience as a person with mild Autism.

Large theme parks have large amounts of paperwork to complete. Once I completed the information on the Kings Island online system, I presented for processing. The big shocker came when the Human Resources representative asked me for my work permit. What? Work Permit!? He explained that a 14 year old needs a work permit to complete processing. Maybe the job wasn't such a good idea, but I really wanted to be a scare actor when I turned 16. Since my ASD school had no photo IDs, the next stop was the BMV for a photo identification. At last, I went back to human resources for round two of processing. It was denied again! My school didn't complete the permit correctly. Most of the students worked in the school sponsored jobs program, so no one had ever needed a work permit. After asking for help, the human resources representative sent me to another school for the correct authentication of the permit. In a few minutes, I found myself in a strange high school, in a strange guidance office. The lady at the desk asked me who sent me there. I told her that Kings Island said that she knew work permits. She grumbled and signed my permit.

The third time was a charm; my processing was complete. Training for a job had many facets. Theme parks want a uniform look. Tests were given for all the game rules. Money handling was new for me. I would worry about giving correct change to guests and returning it to “The Glory”. The Glory was a banking machine that organized change. It took me time, but I became comfortable with the system. In addition I was trained to provide a “Best Day Ever” experience to guests to encourage them to play the games as often as they wish. After 2.5 years as a games associate, I turned 16. Finally, I was eligible to become a scare actor! Was being a scare actor a dream come true? Not exactly. The role was physically demanding and had a late night curtain call. The rest of the weekend I could work my calm shift at games without having to scream at guests. This year I did not have to decide if I would continue as a scare actor: COVID19 decided for me.

After thinking about how I had a few sudden starts and stops before I started working for Kings Island, I know I climbed a big hill in learning skills in customer service, responsibility and money management. Most importantly, I learned how to ask for help at work when I didn’t understand how to do something. As a student with mild Autism Spectrum Disorder, asking for help with school is a constant. Kings Island did a good job allowing me to have a quiet place to go if work or the summer heat became too overwhelming. If I could change anything about the process, I would make it easier to get a work permit. The online application was confusing for my school and going to another school to complete the application was a bit stressful. Offering several training sessions to practice customer service skills is also very important. Lastly, the best part of my job was the chance to make so many friends. We got to go to fun employee ride nights and special employee celebrations. I also discovered that I can do a good job at work. After waiting 2 years for a dream job at the Halloween Haunt, I learned other jobs can be great too. I hope that my five seasons at Kings Island helps me prepare for the real workplace in the future. It certainly has done more for me than I ever expected.

