

Working hard to pay her way in life, Doriscell was met with a challenge when her hearing aids were no longer fully functioning at work.

At her job, Doriscell fielded questions from customers both in person and on the phone. She needed her hearing aids to work. One day, she found one to be broken, so she reached out to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

Having worked with VR in the past, she expected them to finance her new hearing aids, as they were preventing her from being successful at her workplace. However, after updating her file, VR turned her away, stating that her income was too high.

Doriscell was faced with a dilemma. As the sole income for herself, she needed this job. But she couldn't do her job as effectively with the old hearing aids. Yet her job was preventing her from receiving new ones.

Doriscell told us, "I cannot pay for a hearing aid. It's not right to have to lose a job and risk becoming homeless" in order for VR to finance the hearing aids. Doriscell is hard of hearing, so their refusal was preventing her from succeeding with her disability.

Some customers at her work place were rude, and they would ask to speak with someone else. Others were understanding, Doriscell told us, if they had some experience with deaf and hard of hearing people before. She said, "If you have not experienced it [the deaf and hard of hearing experience] and you have hearing yourself, what would you expect?" She understood that many customers did not expect to interact with someone who was hard of hearing, but she attributes the frustration that accompanies the surprise to lack of awareness.

Meanwhile, Doriscell has had hearing aids for 27 years. She said that she's learning "patience is key."

After complaining to her doctor who supplied her with temporary hearing aids, her audiologist recommended she contact Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT).

Becky Allen advocated for Doriscell and set up a meeting with Doriscell and VR. She made a request for an exemption to the VR policy, and after advocating that the Financial Needs Assessment use her current actual income, rather than the prior year's gross income, VR approved Doriscell for new hearing aids. Her Individualized Plan for Employment was amended.

After almost two years of waiting, Doriscell was able to hear her customers again.

Now her hearing aids work "very well." She consistently visits her audiologist to check their condition and function. With surgery coming up, she's thankful for her doctor.



## DRT Client Story: Doriscell

She told us, “You need a doctor who knows what’s going on. That’s basically what you need – an advocate. The doctor needs to be your advocate, too.”

Thankfully she had several advocates ready to help. But she also learned the lesson of self-advocacy. Regarding advice for others who have a similar experience, she said, “Make sure to get as much information as you possibly can. Keep asking questions. Be a self-advocate. Keep searching for answers. When your doctor can’t be your advocate, you have to be your own advocate.”

Now with a new job, one more related to her degree, Doriscell is excited about her interactions with others at work. With functioning hearing aids and many lessons learned, she can embrace her new path with eagerness and joy.