A AbilityFirst, an organization that advocates for and alongside people with developmental disabilities and their families, has helped more than 500 people with disabilities find employment over the years and has supported even more in successfully maintaining their jobs.

“Our staff work closely with clients to determine their strengths as well as their desires and matches those with positions available with prospective employers,” she said, adding that they identify jobs through traditional methods as well as with the help of board members and other supporters.

“Our clients are good, reliable workers because their skills and desires have been matched well with the job and because of the strong support they receive on the job from AbilityFirst job coaches.”

For Vera, even though he knew what kind of job he would like, he needed to train for the interview process by doing mock interviews to gain confidence in answering and asking questions. That also helped him create a daily check list, including dressing properly and making eye contact.

Taking a rest from his busy schedule in the break room recently, Vera said how much he appreciates AbilityFirst helping him find this job.

“I came to AbilityFirst through the regional center — it’s a great organization and was key in helping me apply to this job,” he said.

Vera also has an AbilityFirst job coach, Alisa Marin, who stops by during the week to see how he is progressing and make sure there is clear communication with his managers on expectations and performance.

“Rafael has been handling his new job and these unusual circumstances very well; he was supposed to only work part time but due to the situation they asked him to come on full time, so it’s a lot,” she said. “There’s a lot to be done, so he’s working hard. He tries to make each customer feel good.”

Meanwhile, Vera said even though working at a grocer is a lot of work during a pandemic, he enjoys using the money to help provide his family with some extra “hazard pay.”

He’s also learned about interacting well with others, even though for a while he had to help enact some rationing measures so people wouldn’t hoard at the store.

“I’ve seen my fair share of panic buying … the first two weeks it became really chaotic and we had to implement rations and tell people ‘Only one pasta, one carton of eggs, one milk’; people didn’t like it but you had to roll with the punches like that,” he said, adding that he also likes the fast pace he’s grown accustomed to at the store lately.

“I enjoy my coworkers and my manager, it’s a really good store and a good company. I’m excited to continue to work here once this is all over too.”