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Communications Office  
**News Release**

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**Ambitious Mom with Disability Starts Company with Help of VR**

**TITUSVILLE, FL** – Palma Rasmussen is one tough cookie. She was born with multiple auto-immune diseases that make it difficult for her to stay healthy. Her joints are so badly affected that she has a hard time moving around. In fact, she relies on a wheelchair for any type of mobility.

One chat with her on the phone, though, and you know the disease hasn't affected one ounce of her lively spirit. "I was born like this, so you kind of have to say, 'We can cry about this or we can do something about this,' and I don't intend to cry," Palma says. "By the age of 15, I had the joints of a 90 year old. I wanted to do something. I didn't want my disability to define me."

It was Palma's children who indirectly helped her realize her career goal. "The VR (Vocational Rehabilitation) counselor mentioned services for my daughter, who has a learning disability," Palma says. "So I started researching VR for her and learned that they could help me, as well."

Vocational Rehabilitation helped Palma start her own business, P&K Graphics, which creates promotional products for businesses and individuals. "They helped me first by buying some equipment I needed for my business to grow," Palma says. "They gave me the opportunity to work from home, too, which is something I needed to do in order to be independent." Palma's VR Counselor, Traci Griffin, knew opening her own business was the right move for Palma. "Self-employment gave her flexibility she may not have gotten in standard external employment."

After getting the business up and running, Traci took the next step toward helping Palma become more independent. "They also helped me with an assisted vehicle because of my disabilities," Palma says. "I couldn't even get out for a year and a half because my car couldn't support my wheelchair. VR was instrumental in getting me help so I could get a vehicle and be able to get out there and become a member of society again."

VR paid for the conversion portion of Palma's van, but Palma paid for the vehicle. Getting the modified vehicle was something Palma desperately wanted. "My daughter went off to college, and I wasn't able to see her off," Palma says. "For me, the vehicle was amazing because it meant I could do the things other moms were doing. Now I'll be able to attend my daughter's college graduation."

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The vehicle has also made it possible for Palma to promote her company and drum up more business. She has high hopes for the business she is running, with the help of her husband. “I want to be so self-sufficient I don’t need to worry about cutting coupons,” Palma says. “You know you live differently on disability. You don’t expect to do the things other people do, because there’s a lack of funds. Maybe with the business, I’ll be able to do things for my kids and for myself that we couldn’t have dreamt of before.”

That’s not where Palma’s goals end, though. She also hopes to one day be able to reach out to help others like herself achieve their dreams. “I’d like to get big enough to be able to offer jobs to other people with disabilities,” Palma says. “I understand them, and we need to be able to show others that we’re worth the time and effort, because we are like everyone else.”

Traci sees no barrier Palma can’t overcome. “She is such a positive lady, intelligent, dynamic, and self-motivated.” Palma’s positive attitude about living life with a disability is inspiring. “Life is a bunch of hills and valleys, and when you start on that road and VR is there with you, the road is a lot easier,” Palma says. “I’d tell anyone thinking about VR to give it a shot, because it’s life changing.”

Florida’s Vocational Rehabilitation program is committed to helping people with disabilities become part of America’s workforce. Our employer-focused website, **FLJobConnections.com**, allows businesses to search at no charge for employees who are ready to go to work, as well as to post available jobs. VR has 80 offices across Florida, and last year helped 6,071 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit **Rehabworks.org**.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA--When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "people with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound"); and “people with a mental illness” (rather than “the mentally ill”).