

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network

By Jackie Gast, Director

I used to be a mentor in the school system. Although my middle school student failed most of his classes, I knew I could fix this child. If he only did this, this and that, all would be good. What I did not truly realize was that poor grades are not just about school work but a reflection of the child's life in general.

The first year I was with this student, he missed 30 days of school. I tracked his days absent, not counting the suspensions, and found he mostly missed Wednesdays. When asked why he said because he asked his mom if he could stay home and she said ok. As you can imagine, one can get behind pretty easily when missing that many days in a 180 schedule.

By working with him, I knew he could do the work with some additional support. Because of family matters, he transferred to another school and was put in a one-on-one program for half days. It was the best thing for him. His grades began to improve and he acted out less. He actually started coming to school on Wednesdays! Then he moved again, was taken out of the one-on-one and he began to do poorly again.

I realized he was in a downward cycle again with no light at the end of the tunnel. His grades had been bad for so long that, even after the brief time getting good grades, he did not care about them anymore. He would talk in class or be disrespectful, forcing his teachers to take disciplinary action. The suspensions came from getting in fights both verbal and physical. With all the negativity, he felt he must be a bad person so why try to be good.

Now think about this child in six years when he becomes an adult. He is not so cute and cuddly anymore. Now we have little tolerance for him.

Believe it or not, folks like you and me can be made to feel unimportant through constant rejection or failure like this young man. I hear about adults with disabilities that meet with rejection when trying to find employment. After a while, these individuals give up. Why try? They have knocked on literally 100 doors and none of them open. These people have tried and tried and have failed. Many times, they do not always know there are a multitude of services that can help them.

If you know of someone who may be in a similar situation and may like to give competitive employment another shot, have them contact Jackie Gast at 410 749-0144 and reference this article. At the very least, we may be able to get them services they did not know were available and employers need them!

By the way, last I heard, the young man is doing well. He has a mentor at his school that he sees everyday which is just what he needed.