

By Jackie Gast, Director

The ESBLN's territory is the nine counties of Maryland. A great success story was recently shared by The Benedictine Open Community in Ridgely, MD that I would like to pass along. The following was written by Kelley Malone, vocational coordinator at Benedictine and she says it best.

Five years ago, Tyra Wilmer in the Dietary Department at William Hill Gardens, hired a gentleman from our program to work part-time as a dishwasher. Anthony (not his real name) has a diagnosis of Mental Retardation. He graduated from Benedictine's school in 1992 at the age of 21. Unlike most of his peers, Anthony has had no family to provide the safety net of support most developmentally disabled adults benefit from. Anthony has significant challenges to overcome on a daily basis in order to get through the day. His disability causes a very slow cognitive processing effect, which results in long pauses when Anthony is spoken to. It can take 30-60 seconds for his brain to receive basic information, process, and then to respond. Conceptual information can take over a day to fully comprehend and respond to.

By the age of 30, despite years of trying, Anthony had never been able to keep a job in the community. Anthony's preferred community work was (and is) dishwashing. In November of 2001, the vocational coordinator working with Anthony assisted him in completing an application for a part-time dish washing job available at William Hill Gardens (which at that time had just opened). Five years later, Anthony is still employed, and is frequently called upon to fill in for his vacationing co-workers.

What is different about this job at William Hill Gardens that helped him be successful when historically he had met with failure? The only difference was and is the staff at William Hill Gardens. Often employers have stigmatized perceptions that label individuals with developmental disabilities as being "stupid" "lazy" "weird" or "unappreciative". Just as bad, employers often resort to sentimental attitudes, "feeling sorry" for those with developmental disabilities, thereby treating them with lowered expectations and standards. It has been and continues to be, the people he works with who have been the one factor that has supported Anthony's success. Anthony already came with skills; with motivation to work and succeed... a bit of humanity was the missing ingredient. Greeting Anthony as an equal, WHG staff has given him the gift of the same expectations and standards that other employees are due, with minor modifications made to accommodate his disability. Anthony has reciprocated a gift...his loyalty to the company and to staff and the development of authentic relationships with the people with whom he works.

Thank you, Kelly Malone for this testimonial and William Hill Gardens for your commitment to gaining success. Think of what the rest of us could accomplish if we had higher expectations of ourselves, our employees, our children, our prospective job candidates, our