

Tastee Freez of Easton: *Warming up to the Bottom Line*

Kelley Malone, Vocational Coordinator at Benedictine OCP in Ridgely, MD is the ESBLN guest writer for this month. Thank you, Kelley.

There are many employers in our community who understand the value of hiring individuals with disabilities. If your bottom line is hiring people who report to work on time prepared to work hard, it pays to hire from a huge, untapped labor resource: people with disabilities. One business in particular, Tastee Freez in Easton, owned and managed by the Patel family, exemplifies the “win-win” dynamic of hiring a qualified individual with a disability.

Mrs. Patel first met “Stewart” at the Tastee Freez as a customer; he and his housemates had come to the restaurant for lunch. Mrs. Patel had been looking for a part-time person to assist behind the counter and help keep the dining area clean through peak lunch hours. She wanted someone who could demonstrate initiative and follow directions and recognized these qualities in Stewart as he interacted with his housemates and house staff. The result was a phone call shortly thereafter to Benedictine Open Community, inquiring if Stewart needed a job.

Finding a job is relatively easy; keeping a job and growing in the position is another story. Establishing loyalty and rallying employees around the mission of management is a process that, if successful, can be compared to a three-legged stool. Benedictine Open Community Program and other provider agencies specialize in facilitating the process of ensuring the stool is sturdy and has all three of its legs.

The first leg in the stool is Stewart’s own unique strengths and abilities. The second leg is the manager’s willingness to see past the disability, to the **ability**. Ms. Patel’s judgment was unclouded by stigma; all she saw in Stewart was the employee she had been looking for and was not able to find in the non-disabled community. Ms. Patel says of Stewart, “I don’t understand why employers may be reluctant to hire people with disabilities. Stewart is always willing to work, he is very reliable, and customers ask for him when he isn’t here.” The third leg supporting the stool is the transportation and job coaching provided by the provider agency. To best support Stewart in being successful, Benedictine provided a job coach who trained with him, providing on-going reinforcements to management’s directives. Ms. Patel comments, “I am grateful for how easy it is to contact Benedictine Vocational staff” and appreciates Benedictine’s “professionalism and responsiveness in helping us to best support Stewart.”

Stewart is going on his third year at Tastee Freez. His hours have been increased, as well as his responsibilities. When asked how having a job has impacted his life, Stewart replies, “Good! I like it!”

The next time you have a job opening, try recruiting from any of the several providers in the area who provide vocational supports to individuals with developmental disabilities. Let us help you take care of your bottom line!

For more information, contact Kelley Malone at 410-634-2115 ext. 1320 or www.esbln.org.