

WHAT MATTERS?

Accomplishments

Cherish hired **James** three years ago when he applied to work at the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurant she managed in St. Mary's County. "Everybody has some type of learning curve," she says. "We just had to figure out what works for him."

At first, James, who has an intellectual disability, worked as a cook, but one time he burned some chicken and was reprimanded so sternly by a supervisor that he didn't want to cook anymore. "That supervisor is no longer working for us," notes Cherish. "James is already hard on himself when he makes a mistake. And we all make mistakes. I can teach anybody anything, but if they don't care, it won't matter. James really cares. So two years ago when I moved to a KFC store in Calvert County, I created a new job description for him: Cleaning Captain."

James took pride in his new duties – restocking and organizing supplies, and cleaning tables, floors, windows, and bathrooms. But bringing him into contact with customers also raised new concerns. When a customer tracked mud on a floor James had just mopped, or scattered trash on a recently cleaned table, James would get frustrated and scold the person.

"James was not used to dealing with the public," Cherish says. "I was worried that this could cause a big conflict." To help James work through any unexpected situations, Cherish "steps outside with him to hear him out. I listen, and we always end with a hug. This has been an opportunity for him to work on his own personal development, and it shows. He has grown so much in these years and has learned much better self control in these challenging moments."



James and Cherish at work together.

Learning has worked both ways, with some KFC patrons benefiting from their interactions with James by cleaning up after themselves after finishing their meals. "It's amazing the impact James has on some customers," says Cherish. "He wakes up their awareness. Customers ask about him when he's not here."

James works at KFC three days a week with his job coach, who also drives him to work. Additionally, he volunteers for Meal on Wheels, and has a passion for drawing and music. But he says work is the favorite part of his week: **"I love working. It makes my whole day to come to work. And it's important to me to make my own money that makes my life better."**

His enthusiasm is evident in his energy and commitment as he bustles about the restaurant cleaning and organizing. Occasionally, he and Cherish break into a spontaneous dance to the in-store music. His only complaint: "I'd like to work four days instead of three."

What matters? That our days be spent with purpose. Services are changing to help people with disabilities lead the lives they want. Ensuring they have opportunities to work and spend their days in other meaningful ways, alongside people without disabilities, is one of the ways change is happening. Learn more at: www.md-council.org