

## WHAT MATTERS?

# Choices

**Dom**, 25, works three and one-half hours weekday mornings at his neighborhood bakery, and sometimes chooses to work extra on weekends. He likes the work and the money he earns.

Just four years ago, Dom, born with an intellectual disability, spent his days in a sheltered workshop. His job coach, Erin, explains, “We have our own unique challenges in Dorchester County, being a poor, rural area with low employment opportunities. Families used to the sheltered workshops didn’t want their adult children out in a world they feared was not safe or friendly. Some said, ‘My son can’t work.’ It’s not just about work, it’s about supporting them to do what they want. Dom wanted to work. Despite high unemployment, everybody knows everybody in this rural community, and we’ve found our small local businesses can do natural supports really well.”

The neighborhood bakery was looking for a dishwasher — a hard-working, organized, friendly, and reliable employee. Erin asked Dom, “Can you do that?” His answer: “Absolutely.”

Erin supported him with job coaching initially, but that need faded as Dom’s confidence increased, and he now works independently, with Erin driving him to and from work.

“He is often the only dishwasher on the shift,” notes Erin. “He clocks in and out independently, manages his own time and breaks, and has earned the respect and friendship of his co-workers. This is a small local bakery, not a franchise or chain. He is a fully included member of his community, and he’s proud of the work he does.”

Erin adds that Dom’s boss at the bakery agrees with her assessment that “Dom is an excellent employee, a hard worker who never



*Dom plays basketball with a friend at the YMCA.*

misses a day. He even chooses to work the days around Thanksgiving and snow days.”

Dom has a case manager who helps him keep track of his earned income and government benefits to ensure that all his needs are met.

After work, Erin drives Dom to meet up with his friends for lunch. They also receive support, and together they talk about what interests them. Personalities emerge during this discussion, and they make choices about what to do during the afternoon. Sometimes, Dom volunteers at an animal shelter, and he loves going to the YMCA to play basketball with his friends Isaac, Ryan, Nick, and Aaron. The men are often joined in a game by other community members.

On this afternoon at the Y, Dom dribbles his ball in the sun-streaked gym, passing it under one leg and then catching it. The men laugh and take turns leaping high to make shots, enjoying each other’s buoyant energy.

**When asked which he loves best, working at the bakery or playing basketball, Dom pauses thoughtfully, ball in hand, to consider. Then he breaks into a wide grin and says, “both.”**

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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](http://www.md-council.org)