

WHAT MATTERS?

Expectations

When **Evan** was diagnosed with autism as a toddler in 1995, his mother, Andrea, recalls his doctor's grim words: "Go home and mourn the loss of a normal child." Fortunately, Andrea then met the director of her local Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) early intervention program, who offered another memorable piece of advice: "You'll have to invent Evan's future."

Fast forward 20 years full of creative and supportive teachers and therapists, and "Evan has become the man he was meant to be," says Andrea. "He's smart, funny, talented, and a hard worker." He still has a significant disability – a language-processing disorder that makes verbal communication difficult – but thanks to assistance from his job coach and a personal support aide, he is enjoying a full life.

Evan works 32 hours a week at the AACPS early intervention resource center. He delivers mail, does data entry on the computer, and several times a day takes a break to play classical music on the piano in the lobby, entertaining himself and others. Music is Evan's passion, and he is studying music composition at Anne Arundel Community College, where he also performs with a brass ensemble.

Evan's job coach accompanies him to his job, and his personal support aide helps him at school. **"I'm very excited to have this job where people rely on me," Evan notes. "I want to do a great job more than anything."**

His employer, Wes, director of the resource center, says, "When we hired Evan, it was with the expectation that he be a significant contributing member of our team. I was



Evan reviews a document with a co-worker.

confident that combining high expectations along with job duties selected in areas of his strengths would create success. Some staff initially expressed concern that he might be a distraction, but he has proven to be a positive influence and an example of what's possible when people are given the chance to shine. Evan demonstrates daily that he is capable both personally and professionally."

Evan has become a valued member of his community, paying forward the trust placed in him. As Wes points out, "Evan gives hope to families of newly diagnosed infants and toddlers when they walk in the door for the first time and meet him."