



Community Based Training Work Site: *Food Lion, Beckley WV*

Don Smith, Store Manager at the Beckley Food Lion, was immediately interested in becoming a Community Based Training work site for the Employment Services Division at Mountain State Centers for Independent Living in Beckley.

The Beckley Food Lion has been a Community Based Training site for the Raleigh County school system for more than five years. When Mark Kodack, a transition facilitator for the Raleigh County school system, initially came to Don with the idea, Don saw the benefit to students of having real world work experience. Once a week, a job coach with the school system brings students to work in the store for a few hours. The students learn about jobs available at the Food Lion and have a chance to do the actual hands on work which helps them identify job skills they may have in a supported work environment.

The transitioning program has also benefited Food Lion. Upon graduation, students who have participated in the transitioning program have applied for a job, and several have been hired - people who have become loyal long-term employees.

Another benefit of the transitioning program is that two or three times a year Mark Kodack checks in at Food Lion to monitor progress. Mark is also available to help his students after they have become permanent employees. Mark wants to hear from employers how he can improve the program. At one meeting Don mentioned the Food Lion dress code. Mark decided to make it a condition of the program that students dress in accordance with the Food Lion dress code. The benefit to having the students adhere to dress code and wear name tags like permanent staff is that the students are automatically considered as staff when they are on site which provides the students with a more realistic insight into being an employee.

One year, the students asked Don if they could make Mother's Day cards and pass them out to customers on Mother's Day. Don thought it was a great idea. The next week a lady called Don to tell him how much it meant to her since she had recently lost her daughter. This is an example of how the students' enthusiasm helps build customer loyalty at Food Lion.

One of the students who became a permanent employee is Josh. Don tells us that Josh is one of the most loyal employees he has ever had and wishes he had ten more like him. In his position as service associate Josh bags groceries, helps customers carry bags to their cars and is otherwise always willing to do whatever it takes. Josh recently won the employee of the quarter award.

Another employee, David, also came through the transitioning program. David is a grocery associate and is responsible for getting groceries on the shelf and helping customers and is another loyal helpful Food Lion employee.

Don says that just because a person has a disability doesn't mean they can't work or be a valued employee. Don encourages other businesses to consider hiring people with disabilities.

Based on his experience with the student transitioning program, Don expects to enjoy a similarly beneficial outcome to being a Community Based Training site for the Employment Services Division at Mountain State Centers for Independent Living in Beckley.

When you are in the area visit the Food Lion, 1018 N. Eisenhower Drive, Beckley and say hello to Don Smith. You can visit the Food Lion Web site at www.foodlion.com.

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