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## Hard Work Key to Overcoming Life's Challenges

Matt Mitchell hasn't let challenges in life slow him down.

He's involved in many community activities and recently started a community job with a local restaurant.

Matt was born with Williams' syndrome, which has only 30,000 diagnosed cases worldwide. "I don't let the Williams syndrome affect me or stop me from living a normal life because I have always had a supportive family and great friends," Matt said. As an example, he talked about times his brothers would always stand up for him when other kids didn't understand what William's syndrome was.

People with William's syndrome typically have trouble with spatial tasks, such as reading and assembling puzzles, but many have engaging personalities and can be good in social interactions.

One of Matt's long-term goals has been to get a community job. As a high school sophomore, he started thinking about his future and finding ways to be able to get out of his house more. He knew it was time to get a job. Like many teenagers, he wanted to be more independent and have his own spending money.

While in high school, he started working with Vocational Rehabilitation, which is a state program that helps people with various disabilities prepare to obtain and maintain employment.

As part of his work with Vocational Rehabilitation at that time, Matt took part in job training at Arby's. His hiring manager said Matt's greatest assets were his conversational skills and customer service.

After graduating high school in 2008, Matt became affiliated with Carey Services to continue his job preparation. Through his work with Carey Services' employment services program and production facility, he has improved his strengths and developed new skills that have helped him as he recently started working at McDonald's in Marion.

While working with employment specialist Karen Willhite, Matt has been able to receive a

variety of services including job readiness training, interviewing preparation and support and job placement.

It's not all work and no play, though.

Matt has participated in Faceplace, a program at Community School of the Arts in which many participants include individuals we serve. He has portrayed Elvis in the play *Blue Christmas*, a thug in *Beauty and the Beast* and he also was part of the cast in a production based on the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*.

Matthew also is active in the Special Olympics. He's a member of the Xtreme basketball team and also participates in the cornhole, bowling and football teams.

This past spring, though, he began working on a way to supplement his work in Carey Services' production facility with a community job. In March, Matt started a job shadow at McDonald's with job coach Shay Coates to see whether food-service work would be something he would like.

The job shadow led to a full-fledged work experience, where Matt, his job coach and his employment specialist created him a task list of possible job duties he worked on for eight weeks.

Those duties were mostly basic cleaning and small maintenance jobs, but it led to a job offer and a position where he works three days a week.

"Matt has come a long way and has done such a great job," said Willhite, the employment specialist who helped Matt through parts of the process. "He's doing a good job and he definitely likes meeting new people and running into people he already knows."

Part of the job also involves being an unofficial greeter, since he's in the restaurant's seating area much of the time. Meeting people isn't a problem.

"Matt's a social person, so he likes the interaction with the public," Willhite said. "A part of the job is customer service and dealing with people, and he loves that part of it."

Carey Services provides transportation for his job, and will continue to provide job coaching assistance as needed.

"He's learning new skills, and the managers at McDonald's have been really pleased," Willhite said. "It's been a good success story for someone who has worked really hard to get where he is today."