



Career Development Success Story: Chris Walker

Chris Walker came to the Goodwill L.I.F.E. Academy as a student in 2006, and made an immediate impact on his fellow students and the staff. "He's always positive, happy, and encouraging," says L.I.F.E. Academy principal Lynn Pottorf. "He befriended everyone."

The L.I.F.E. Academy is a Lee County charter school for students with developmental disabilities. Chris, who has Cerebral Palsy and uses a motorized wheelchair, received training in functional academics, as well as vocational, workforce, and life skills at the school.

"He's such a bright young man," adds Principal Pottorf. "He has so much intellectual ability, but it's kind of trapped in there. He's got so much going on and we wanted to make sure people recognized his full potential."

To encourage him to live up to that potential, the school welcomed Chris into its vocational transition program. There, he gained job experience through an internship at the Goodwill processing facility. Goodwill Operations Supervisor Karen Myers says that the job was sometimes challenging for him, but, she adds, "Chris was always smiling, and always willing to try."

Chris graduated from the L.I.F.E. Academy in June 2009, and was offered a position as a store greeter at the North Fort Myers Goodwill store, which he started in January 2010. He takes his job very seriously, and spent time practicing his greetings at home with his father, Dennis Walker.

In just a few short months, Chris has made a big impression on the store. "The customers love him," says Shift Supervisor Debra Beard. "And they're disappointed when they don't see him. When he's not here, they always ask me 'Where's Chris?'"

Dennis is pleased with the progress his son has made, thanks in part to Goodwill and the L.I.F.E. Academy's transition program. "I remember praying that he'd just be able to communicate with me," says Dennis. "Now, you can't get him to stop talking, so this is the perfect job for him."

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