

Meaningful Day: How Changing the Day's Activities Changed One Man's Attitude

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How you spend your day is how you spend your life. When your day is filled with meaningful activities, your life has more meaning. For many people with disabilities, days can sometimes be spent in activities that don't match your skills or interests.

Josh, a 26-year-old with cerebral palsy, found himself in such a position. Spending three days a week in an adult day center wasn't a good match for his needs and made him feel like a child. It caused him to act out at home and become upset with his personal care workers. But since he began taking part in activities that are a better fit for his skills and interests, his attitude and days are much more joyful.

Finding More Meaningful Activities

His personal care worker, Dan, reviewed community websites for activities that would be better suited for Josh and then contacted a number of local volunteer and other organizations and set up regular activities for Josh. One day a week he serves as a greeter at a local frozen yogurt shop. His bright smile and warm welcome make customers feel at home as they enter the store.

On Friday, he works as a greeter at a craft store. This job taps into Josh's natural artistic interest and talent, who enjoys painting and doing hobbies when he's not working. People say they like seeing him and even stop by just to see how he's doing.

On another day he puts both his art and social skills to use serving as a companion at a hospital. He works with a woman, who is deaf, and they paint together and Josh communicates with her on a tablet computer, which helps him increase the range of motion in his hands.

He has also volunteered for a Red Cross blood drive and rang the bell for the Salvation Army. His personal care workers are looking for future opportunities as well such as doing agricultural work. They are hoping to have Josh and a friend pair up to plant or water flowers or vegetables or work in a community garden plot. They are also thinking big, about possibilities such as connecting Josh to an engineer who could help design a robotic arm that could help him do more detailed work.

Outside of his activities, Josh keeps busy painting and doing other crafts. He decorated jars and sold them and other items for a local fair and donated some of his profits to a local park project.

A Change in Attitude

His mom Tammy says finding more meaningful activities for Josh to do during the day has made all the difference in the world. She says his attitude has shifted and everyday he is excited to make a meaningful contribution to the community.

"He has a sense of responsibility and happier than he's been before," She say. "Now when he gets up in the morning there's a real sense that he's getting ready for the day." One of his personal care workers, Dan, works with him in the morning on a routine including stretching, range of motion activities and an obstacle course in his wheelchair. But from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday he is on duty. He treats it like a job, not watching any television during that time. "I would not have believed three months ago that this would be Josh's life today. I see a huge transformation in his attitude, maturity level and overall sense of responsibility," says Tammy. "It's incredible the number of people that are giving him these opportunities and I sincerely hope that he will set a precedent for others in the community."