

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEER WORK

By Thomas Erchick

After volunteering at my local Public Library for a little more than two years, I can honestly say that volunteering in general is a great way to enhance social skills for those of us on the spectrum. In the time I've been working at the library, I've noticed that my social skills have improved dramatically. Volunteering at the library has helped me to be able to speak and converse with people I don't know. If they are frustrated, I have learned to speak with them without getting upset myself; their frustration, I'm learning, is not mine. I also have an easier time helping people find what they are looking for. Volunteering there has also been very helpful for me by learning how to function in a sometimes chaotic and stressful situation with relative ease.

Another skill I have acquired from volunteering at the library is being able to learn how to follow instructions from multiple people, especially all at once, without getting overwhelmed. My supervisor, Mrs. George, is helping me to learn how to prioritize the varied instructions given to me—highest priority first, lowest priority last. Also, a perk from working here is that the people you help just may compliment your assistance to your boss. This, in turn, builds your boss's trust in your abilities and commitment to your job. Your boss will then start trusting you to handle bigger tasks and responsibilities. I started out by doing anything that needed to be taken care of: re-shelving books, moving shelves, and in my case, reaching for anything up high (since everyone else is shorter than me). When my sister got assigned to work behind the circulation desk, her previous position became vacant, the Children's Librarian's Assistant. My supervisor asked her boss, the Director of the Library,

who would fill my sister's position. Both of them agreed since I already knew what to do, they would try me out in that position. This helped to boost my personal confidence in myself and my abilities. It also strengthened skills I didn't even know I had.

Volunteering at a Public Library (or anywhere) helps you prepare for what life has in store for you. It might also make it easier to choose a major and a field of study for college, and eventually a job or career. For that same reason, volunteering helps you to get experience in the field and working with other people. By taking the initiative and volunteering you are not only being a great example for other unique individuals on the spectrum, you are also helping other people gain a better understanding about individuals on the spectrum, and this will hopefully help others prepare to handle tasks they are given in a business environment.

There may be setbacks, and you may be asked to re-do things you think you completed well. The key is to remember that it is all a part of learning how to navigate in a business environment, and not to get upset or bent out of shape over it. I, for one, am looking forward to learning the new skills my boss and the Director have talked to me about.