

A Custodian and a Connector

by Brooke Lowin
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Any student or staff member at Western Christian High School in Hull IA knows Susan Van Sloten. Employed as a custodian through the MyChoice employment program of Hope Haven, Van Sloten is in her second school year at Western. She works nearly six hours a day cleaning classrooms, stairwells, the gymnasium, and the lunchroom.

Dave Boender, who works on the custodial crew with Susan, notes her friendliness, attention to detail, and desire for quality work. But it's not only a job well done that Susan is enthusiastic about, but the opportunity to connect with those around her—something she cherishes. In fact, at a recent school event, it was announced that Susan had been voted "Favorite Person" by students, an honor that demonstrates how wholeheartedly Susan has been embraced.



Susan at work



Susan (right) with her supervisor at the high school, Dave Boender (center), and Marv Van Beek, Susan's job coach from My Choice

Western Christian principal Dan Barkel approached the prospect of employing Susan with several motivations in mind.

"I have a son with a disability, and I know how difficult it is to find and keep employment for persons with disabilities, especially now with the laws regarding sheltered workshops," Barkel said. "We had a need at Western Christian High School for custodial help, and I thought that if a person with disabilities could do it, it would be a win-win for ourselves and also for the client.

"I want students at Western to see the potential and the dignity of persons, not just the disability. I also want them to see that they are persons in God's image who are doing their best to serve God—just as we are. Having Susan in our midst every day, and interacting with her, will hopefully help us to be more caring Christians."

Outside of work, Susan is involved in her community by volunteering at Justice for All and participating in the Hope Haven gospel choir. She's also an active member of Faith Reformed Church in Rock Valley, modeling uninhibited worship and service and volunteering each summer in the kitchen during vacation Bible school.