

# VIEW POINT

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## BE THE CHANGE | Joe Davis: 'There's not a day that I feel like I'm at work'

**W**hen I visited the Family Literacy Center (FLC) recently to interview executive director Mary Shelton, I heard about another program under their umbrella — the JMG, or Jobs for Michigan's Graduates program.



**KRYSTAL MORALEE**

Shelton had mentioned that she had been approached to take it on, and at first, she declined because of the workload. However, it fit so well with the FLC's focus on helping people get their GED, she ended up saying yes. The FLC now partners with Youth Solutions and GST Michigan Works to run the program for people in Lapeer, and it's making a real difference. Through school-to-career transitions and individualized support, JMG equips young people with the tools and confidence they need to overcome barriers

and succeed after graduation by combining classroom instruction and competency-based curriculum with adult mentoring, advising, and support; employment training/work experiences; career exposure; student-led leadership development; and postsecondary education exploration.

Within the FLC, Joe Davis is at the helm of the program. I have known Joe for a while, and after chatting with him, it's apparent that he is in the right role. All of his life experiences, including past challenges, fatherhood, and his former role in corrections and doing Scared Straight type programs at the Lapeer County Sheriff's Dept., have equipped him to do this job, and do it well. In fact, he was named the state's JMG Specialist of the Month for February. But what does he do, exactly? "You name it, I do it," he said. A lot of the participants

have a variety of barriers, whether social, family related, educational, missing life skills, lacking confidence — he's seen it all. Many of them come to the program because they came to FLC to get their GED and get kind of stuck on the next moves.

As an inlet, Davis offers life skills classes at a set time, and that leads to conversations. That's when the real barriers can come to light. One person, for example, lives in a rural area where jobs aren't available, yet has access to no transportation. Sometimes, people first need to be connected with resources such as food banks to have their basic needs bolstered before they can jump into their potential.

Davis said he approaches the clients and builds a rapport with them just by being himself and looking for some common ground to meet them on, building from there. His own past includes the military, living in Germany, See **MORALEE** on Page 4B



At the Family Literacy Center in Lapeer, Joe Davis directs the Jobs for Michigan's Graduates program. In February, Davis was named the state's JMG Specialist of the Month.

## MORALEE

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construction, a long career in law enforcement, writing a book, working a corporate job, podcasting, running a branding business, and more, so he has a lot of wisdom earned through experience.

And everything he tackles, he approaches full steam ahead. This job, which he's done since July 2024, is no exception.

"There's not a day that I feel like I'm

at work," he said. "That's the crazy part. I don't even take time off."

Davis is a problem solver and likes to invest in people. He seems to really have a soft spot for those who need a helping hand to get their feet under them, and he's relentless when it comes to finding a way to help them achieve success, not by doing it for them, but for helping them see their own potential.

"It's seeing how these kids come in, and they really think that they have no options," he said. "My reward is when the kids are successful."

That might start simply with a chat about the client's hobbies to start putting the pieces together about potential paths to pursue. Davis is good about really listening and observing and then he serves as a bridge to help them get closer to success. He's got a long roster of participants, and they recently hired another part-time specialist, Jane McGrew, to help the FLC change even more lives.

Some people don't have the basic support they need, whether it's learning skills like emotional and

financial literacy, confidence, problem solving, or the art of the interview, or if it comes down to something more basic like hunger, housing and transportation. Regardless of the situation, Davis meets them where they are, and all of a sudden, they're surrounded by a small but tight family of people who genuinely care whether they succeed — and that can make all the difference in the world.

"It's what the kids make of it," said Davis. "You just have to give them that platform."