National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Writing Contest

Cover by Alexis Green
The 2016 NDEAM Writing Contest

Writing Prompts:

- Why employers should hire people with disabilities
- Your personal story as a person with a disability, and what working means to you
- What working at Peckham has meant to you
- Any other topic you feel relates to the theme of National Disability Employment Awareness Month “#InclusionWorks”

Submissions were accepted in the written form of personal short stories, essays, poetry, or other creative expressions. All work is original.

Hello,

I would like to sincerely thank all participants for your heartfelt submissions for the National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Writing Contest. We were thrilled to receive more than 60 entries for all of our Peckham locations, across all our different business lines.

This was our second year holding an NDEAM Writing Contest and we were so excited to see so many entries. The collection of writing in this book is simply amazing. I am so proud of this workforce, and all of the incredible talents, skills and powerful stories of overcoming barriers that clients have shared with us.

Peckham is successful because of your hard work and commitment to achieving your goals of independence and self-sufficiency. In honor of NDEAM, and the work that you do everyday, we salute you. Thank you for sharing your stories with us.

Mitchell Tomlinson

President & CEO, Peckham, Inc.
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The sharing of personal story is a precious gift. Such sharing provides the opportunity for enhanced understanding, appreciation and learning between the story teller and the people who read them.

Everyone has a unique story to tell including people with a disability. At Peckham, we believe in experiencing the sharing of “our stories”. We hope that by sharing these personal stories of persons with a disability, we all get to appreciate first-hand the power, challenges, determination, frustration, successes, setbacks, celebrations and examples of perseverance that many of our team members from all of our social enterprises have experienced.

We sincerely appreciate their courage and willingness to share their stories.

Greta Wu
Chief Human Services Officer

Artist, Ashley Beach
Darlene snapped awake. She's had the dream again. It's always the same: She's back in Baghdad, Iraq. It's May 9, 2005. She's racing in a Humvee with two other Navy corpsmen to aid a Marine platoon under heavy fire from Iraqi insurgents. Over the radio, the panicked voice of the combat medic on scene screams about multiple casualties, and an unknown number of KIAs. As the Humvee presses on, Darlene finally has a visual of the besieged Marines up ahead. Just then, the corpsman sitting to her right shouts, “Be advised, possible IED fifty meters dead ahead at the four o'clock position!” At that moment, the bomb is remotely detonated. The tremendous explosion cart wheels the doomed vehicle end over end. The two Navy corpsmen and the driver are KIA. Darlene survives the horror but loses her left leg at the knee.

In the suffocating darkness of her small room, Darlene wipes the cold sweat from her face and neck on to her bed sheets. She struggles to control her terror with a breathing exercise taught to her at the Bethesda Naval Hospital in D.C. after being wounded in action. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t. When it doesn’t work, which is most of the time, she simply holds her pillow tightly to her chest and cries...and cries.

Now, with pillow clutched close to her rapidly beating heart, she tells herself she's okay. The year is not 2005 but 2016. She’s not in Iraq but in back in The States. Michigan to be exact. She’s safely out of the war. She received her Purple Heart and her welcome home. In fact, she’s out of the Navy for nine years. She fights with the VA sometimes. Not fun. But frequently, for her, it’s May 9, 2005.

“No stump swelling today. Yeah baby!” she exclaims as she pulls on her prosthetic leg. Thrusting herself out of the damp bed, she knows a busy day lies ahead. She’s got a job; had one for years. She works for Peckham Inc. as a customer service rep for Department of State, NPIC, assisting customers applying for U.S. passports. She likes it. It’s important work. It’s rather like being a medic: she helps people. Today, she’s okay. Darlene Johnston is okay. But, even on her best days, she thinks of the Marines and sailors she left behind in Baghdad. And when she does, she cries...and cries.

Mark Foland, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside

Look At Me
I’m right here; look at me, and not my disability. Some things may take me longer than you, but I can do what you can do. Look at me, but please don’t stare. You can find me anywhere. On the job or in the store; I may be knocking at your door.

Please be gentle, please be kind, for nothing’s broken in my mind. Perhaps my body isn’t whole, but there’s nothing crippled about my soul. Open your heart and you shall see, a true friend; look at me.

James Compton, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

Have you ever been on the outside looking in?
Perhaps feeling all alone, like there’s no place to call your own.
I know what it’s like to be right there,
Feeling like there’s no one to care.

I grew up in an impoverished home,
My dad was a drunk and mean to the bone.
My mom, a wonderful mother, suffered so much
When dad came home so out of touch.
He would beat her and choked her, he would have killed her.
What could I do?
I grabbed our rifle, the conflict to stifle.
“Hit her again and I will shoot.”
It was a long way for me to stoop.

I had to go to court against dad for attempted murder.
He pled “guilty”. It didn’t go any further.
He paid a $20.00 fee and then was allowed to go home free.
The same day dad bought everyone else a coat,
Except for me, I was the scapegoat.

How could I combat this life I had. I felt so scared,
I felt so sad.
I was on the outside looking in.

In 7th grade I read aloud in class.
The teacher embarrassed me. Alas.

She said I was too “lazy to talk right” in front of the class.
My classmates became so mad, that they told the principal that we had.
They told him what had happened in class.
Mr Keesee taught me these sounds at last.
“rrr, th, L and s”, he was my hero the very best!

Now as an adult I understand that I’m hard of hearing
I have to be more persevering!
I wasn’t stupid, I wasn’t dumb.
I couldn’t hear the sounds like some.
From the outside looking in.

In gym class I would huff and puff,
With the others I couldn’t keep up.
I loved gym but my asthma made me different once again.
From the outside looking in.

As an adult many conditions make me disabled,
Tracheomalacia and diabetes to name a few.
Where could I be part of a worthwhile crew?
Peckham gave me a chance to work and to advance.
I don’t know of another place where I can work and keep the pace.
Thank you Peckham for including me,
NOW I’M ON THE INSIDE ,YOU SEE !

Maudie Gates, Quality Inspector
Greenhouse
I can’t hear them.
I see lips forming words I don’t understand.
The doctor keeps saying damaged and mutated.
My parents look disappointed.
Is he talking about me?

I can’t sit still.
I see my mom in the principal’s office.
The principal keeps saying hyperactive and disruptive.
My mom looks devastated.
Is she ashamed of me?

I can’t breathe.
My little brother finds me in the bathroom.
He keeps saying it’s okay and he won’t tell.
My brother looks scared.
How am I a role model?

I can’t see it.
I’m sweating nervously in an office.
The woman keeps saying gifted and potential.
The job coach looks confident.
Is this what hope feels like?

I can’t stop smiling.
The man across from me shakes my hand.
The supervisor keeps saying leader and achiever.
The man looks optimistic.
I have succeeded.

Kai Walser, NPIC Team Lead Phoenix

Seeing Isn’t Everything

I may not be able to see some things.
But I can read Braille and walk with a white cane.
Now that I’m low vision, smelling is my strongest sense.
And yes, I’m grateful when it comes to my defense!

Another sense that is near and dear,
Is my ability to hear.
To eat and drink, I must rely on my sense of taste.
And to me many of those are a disgrace!
I also use my sense of feel.
When it comes to cooking, it can be a risky deal!
So even though some things are hard for me to see,
I still love being me!

Not having this sight can sometimes be a strife,
But that doesn’t keep me from living my life!
With this challenge I’ve made amazing friends.
And to me they are true God-sends!

Lauren Heimerdinger, NPIC Customer Service Representative Phoenix
Taking Flight

Why is it the world keeps asking me to fly?  
When my walls have fallen around me  
And I cannot see the sky.  
The world stands and beckons me  
It demands me to fly.  
I crawl in the soil, writhing with lament, self-pity, indigent with regret.  
But the world is thunderous and shakes my cave exposing a light.  
Breaking me from my egg,  
Forcing truth, before blight  
A painful birth, an exchange,  
Suffering for strength  
Contentment for strain  
Clawing for freedom and dragging my chains  
An awakening with clashing rage, giving me purpose and escaping my cage  
Assigning me life, my body convulsed with the bombardment and pride  
Holding my form in the wake of strife  
Emerging from the cave anew  
Crippled and fierce, roaring with fear  
And ready to fight.  
Turning my back against the night.  
Meeting eyes with the world and taking flight.

Cassandra Pena, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Shawn

Shawn and I met in the ICST class we took together, I had seen him before around the call center, he was hard to miss zipping around in his electric wheelchair. From the very start we got on famously, we both used humor as a coping mechanism, and I found his quick humor, no holds barred wit, hilarious. After training we were assigned to the late shift, with adjoining cubicles alongside Nathan, a very experienced ICST agent. I was trying to recuperate from a minor stroke I’d recently suffered whereas Nathan has cerebral palsy and Shawn suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis. I mentioned to Shawn one day that we three should make a group, Shawn suggested we wear gang colors and call ourselves the “Crips”.

ICST members were allowed to leave the call center after everybody else was done. Many nights Shawn and I would stay in the parking lot after our shift and shoot the breeze talking about anything and everything while trying to out joke each other, Sometimes we went to his apartment and talked there. Shawn had two young children he would talk about constantly, man he loved those kids; his ex, not so much. As time went by Shawn’s health condition worsened precipitously and he was forced to withdraw from Peckham Inc., with time we sort of lost track of each other.

I was glad to see Shawn, even visiting him at the hospice where he was. It was sad to see the ravages the disease had wrecked on his body in such a short time. I recalled him mentioning one time how much the job meant to him, not so much the work per se, but rather the feeling of accomplishment and sense of independence a steady job gave him, the feeling of contributing and being needed. This point was driven home during my visit when I commented to his brother that his right foot had been amputated above the ankle. “Yes, he said, “Shawn decided to attempt this extreme procedure in the hope of returning to work with you guys.”

Shawn passed away a few days later; leaving his pain ridden body behind. Wherever he is now, I hope: he has a vantage seat to watch over his children; there is abundance of work that is fun, and jokes that are funny. It was a sincere privilege to have known him.

Patrick G. Mindiola, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
My Story

My name is Beth Wanger. I will tell you a little bit about my history. I run away when I was younger. I set fires when I was younger. I went to institutions make friends kind of. I did those things because I was hurting. Because I was hurting because I dating with a guy when I was younger and I got depressed for 4 weeks to get over it. I hurt myself couple times younger. I got family, but I don’t talk to them no more. I understand people struggle.

To help me overcome my hard days I enjoy lots of activities. I live in group home. I work at Peckham 6 years. I have a good relationship with my coworkers. I play basketball with Peckham team. I am captain on basketball team. I got 6 coaches. They taught me be good sportsmanship. Be kind to one each other. And one thing very important- be yourself. I like helping other people. I volunteer senior home and work with horses someday if I don’t run away. I make lot friends. I take walks and bike riding. I raise money for cancer for 7 years. I also like to make coasters, bracelets, and key chains. I go bowling- today I hit 100 my first game and my second game 148! I like to talk on the phone. Talk to my girlfriends. Sometime I take class at Peckham help me understand be better worker. We go to Charlotte Peckham and we going to talk bout us goals. I used to sell popcorn at CMH for .75 they give me tip if they want.

I got lots goals. One my goals is to be my own guardian. I like to move out this year Gilcrest and live on my own. I want have fun with some my friends. My goals are my dreams.

Anyways, I have a great support system. People take care me is my family. Do not hurt yourself. Do not kill yourself. Reach your goals. Be strong and never give up. And be kind to your parents because you got one parents. Safety come first and happy come first. Like, if you walk by yourself- foxes going to eat you up! My girlfriend said, if you give up you don’t reach your dreams. Follow your dreams and if you don’t you dream won’t come true. Sky is limit!

Beth Wanger, Food Service

Greenhouse
Fruit of Pain

Sixteen; fire in my eyes, the world at my feet. Some say I’ll be a surgeon, others a diplomat. Reveling in adoration, the weight of faith was my pride.

  Darkness.
  Silence.
  Loneliness.
  Pain.

November brings the cold, absences increase.

  My grades suck,
  But I test well,
  I’m smart.

So leniency is a luxury I haven’t earned yet.

More Pain.

Make up for lost time.

  Laugh harder,
  Live harder,
  Fall harder.

More Pain.

As my belly grows

Loneliness becomes helplessness.

Still, no solution, no compassion, no comprehension.

It takes brute Strength to become Light while drowning in the dark

  Strength,

Living each day with a Purpose.

  With Love.

Only little arms around your neck that mumble

  I Love You Mommy

Can give the strength it takes to master Pain.

Can give you the wisdom to turn Pain to joy.

Can leave you staggering in love of life.

These are the fruits of Pain

Kira Lewis, NPIC Customer Service Representative

Phoenix
Great Skills

YOU ARE NOT BLIND
Let’s say that for some reason, natural or supernatural, powerful or divine, your vision was limited. Albert Einstein, the grandfather of seers, who saw as far as a telescope, once said that nothing is absolute and everything is relative. Then you are relatively blind, capable of doing what your eyes have not been able to do, useful, laborious, productive, capable of seeing beyond your virtual curtains. Reason, justice, crime, greed, falsehood and truth... My father once said: ‘There is no worse blind man than he who does not want to see’, and I would add: ‘He is better, the blind man who can see everything’.

YOU ARE NOT DEAF
Let’s say you cannot hear, because you are paying what others should have paid, as they were the real culprits. You hear beyond the riot, the hustle and bustle of the river and the singing of birds. You hear beyond the silence, because to love is to be able to listen to the absurd noise of war and the broken cries of the crowd of this world. You hear the same silence and listen to what many do not; what presidents and kings do not listen to, which is what they should listen to most, because there is no worse deaf man than he who does not want to hear.

YOU ARE NOT LAME
You just walk with difficulty, but you are like the rest; you go where you want, you break barriers and go beyond the crutches and canes, where your presence is indispensable and your actions necessary. You see and listen beyond the senses, directing and orienting, breaking stereotypes and myths, giving an example of the loose and faint-hearted... because you are not disabled when you run beyond time and borders.

Martha Perez Guerrero, Bundle Team Leader
Translated by Mei Bresnahan
Greenhouse
Forever and Always

Clinging to the driftwood I finally realized
Holding a ship together with spells was not so wise.
Her bow was shattered her keel was cracked,
The spell was all that held the waters back. Fighting
the waves and holding the spell,
I suddenly realized was not going very well. The
bow gave way the keel snapped,
The boat was going down and that was a fact.
I grabbed and held on to a piece of the Mirage I
knew so well, Being beaten and swallowed by each
and every swell.

Slowly my hands became numb and cold,
My arms shook violently, I began to loose my hold.
The saltwater burned my eyes so bad,
Then blindness came and I began to go mad. I lost
my grip and slipped off the board,
Said goodbye to my ship, The Mirage, I prepared to
see the Lord.

What happened next I can not say, Except
somehow help came my way. I opened my eyes,
basking in the sun, Heaven I thought, the end has
come.
But looking around it was plain to see, God must
has sent you to rescue me. For here I was laying
upon your deck, My head in your lap,
Your arms around my neck. Gazing deeply in your
eyes,

I saw that hope resides there. I had survived,
you ran your fingers through my hair, You told me
how much you really cared.

Your decks are sturdy, your ship is strong,
It can conquer troubled seas both rough and long. I
will be with you till the journeys end,
Forever and always, I will always be Your partner,
Lover,
and friend.

David LeVan, Peckham Service Desk Intern
Riverside

The Disabled: Dreams of a Super Hero

The saddest reality
About being disabled
Whether it is noticeable
With the naked eye or
Soon discovered is...
Being Overlooked
With this enlightenment
It is like second nature
To slip into my disappearing act:
Secretly, I vanish into the oblivion
Instead of being looked down upon
I am a superhero
All that I desire to do is limitless
I can see through walls
Assist the hurt and wounded
See beyond physical barriers
My eyesight no longer saddens me
Instead, changing the world

Aisha Sturkey, USDA Technical Service Representative
Grand Rapids
I would like to tell the story of my six year courtship and marriage to my lovely wife, Teresa.

We met at Church in January of 2009 where we both volunteered. Each of us had been divorced for a long time and I had hoped to meet a lady who would eventually marry me.

I was attracted to Teresa immediately but pondered about one year before calling her. We finally had our first date and hit it off.

My concern about moving forward was my disability, bipolar disorder. What would Teresa think if she learned of my mental disability? I asked a lady named Ann, a friend who was dating a man I knew, would she prefer to know that I had a disability early in a relationship or once something clicked between the two of us? She said, “Right away.” Even though that made me feel uneasy, on our next date I told Teresa the truth. After that night’s date, Teresa told me she researched bipolar disorder and its varying effects. She said what she read didn’t fit me. Upon sharing this comment with one of my sisters, she reminded me that I am medicated.

All together we dated for 3 years and were married on July 5, 2013. What makes Teresa so beautiful is that she has a wonderful heart. She is so kind, loving and caring. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and minors in French and Business from Central Michigan University. She is now in partnership with her brother and sister in two newspapers in Michigan.

I have a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Michigan State University and worked in retail jewelry sales and management for almost 18 years. As of 9/15/16, I will have worked for Peckham Inc. for eight years. We have eight children and eleven grandchildren.

What a wonderful life Teresa and I have now as we tell each other all of the time how much we love and complement one another. When decisions need to be made, each one of us contributes information that the other never would have thought about.

It is truly a blessing to be a successful Peckham employee, one who is grateful for the opportunity to work, contribute to our community, and have a wonderful wife who was unafraid to marry a man with a mental disability.

David Brandell, Supply Chain Shipping & Receiving Clerk
Watertown
The Magical Wheelchair

A long time ago, I met a little boy who couldn’t walk, because his legs would not respond. Another boy pushed his wheelchair, and they both were so happy that the world appeared to float around them. I was sitting on a park bench, rereading the pages of a poem I had written for a children’s book, when one of my papers went flying. Propelled by the wind, it landed near them.

The little boy in the wheelchair carefully observed the paper’s aerial acrobatics, and asked his friend to reach out and bring it to me. His gesture was so moving that I couldn’t help but thank him multiple times, and I asked if he would please listen to my poem. That morning I knew, through eyes, that I should try and write a book in which happiness and pain hug each other in the center of creation plaza. That day, I meditated on the necessity of a tender word which people feel. I ended on the very popular idea that poetry continues to be a beacon of hope for some, even if it is no longer created or thought of as once was. Now, I want to dedicate this poem to the little boy from the park who moved me so. Please tell him that this poem is a gift from me, and that you also want to be his friend.

I have a magical chair
And when I take a seat,
The streets of my city,
They fly under my shoes.

I like to feel the world
From my traveling chair,
Because things appear like
Ants scurrying around.

The inquisitive ask themselves,
While looking at my splendid chair:
“What magician pushes it?
To what palace does he bring it?”

But only some enthusiastic children
Approach to see
If it is truly possible
to fly above sadness.
One day, without saying anything,
When I leave school,
I am going to depart in silence,
And meet the stars.

Mounted atop my aerial ship,
Over cosmic tides, there’ll be
No arrogant building nor mountain
That I cannot defeat.

Because I know
No secret ship exists
That can fly as high
As my wheelchair!

Hiram Hernandez- Salazar, Quality Inspector
Translation Assistance by Mei Bresnahan

Greenhouse
The day I found out I had ADHD was the best day of my life, Said no one ever. Except for it really was a great day. I finally had an answer for what I considered to be “wrong” with me.

I think I may have cried, okay I guess I did cry. The technician explained to me what ADHD was and how it had affected me my whole life. ADHD stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Some people call it ADD, but ADHD is the correct name for it. I said” but I’m not hyper and don’t you outgrow that as an adult?” She explained...

There are 3 main types of ADHD: predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive/impulsive, and combined type. You have the combined type and you also have severe anxiety which is sometimes caused by the ADHD. You brain is processing information at hyper speed and you tend to freak out if you’re tired or your brain just needs a break. Anyone can have moments of being inattentive, impulsive, or hyperactive. Adults with ADHD, however, experience these symptoms repeatedly and in a way that is severe enough to have an impact at home, at work, or in social situations.

I started to think back on my life and suddenly I had answers... For example, when I was in school, I remember my teachers would review what we learned the day before or would say let’s finish our discussion from yesterday. I remember thinking when did we go over this or I don’t remember the discussion. What is everyone talking about?

Or teachers, family, even friends, telling me to try harder and pay attention. Didn’t they understand that I try? But at times it’s impossible.

“So that explains why everyone thinks I’m so weird then” I said The tech shook her head and said “I have ADHD and I understand what you mean, but I actually consider it a Gift. You’re very smart. Your IQ is above average as most people with ADHD. You process information very fast, and can multi task very well. Many famous people have ADHD including Jamie Oliver, Karina Smirnoff, Will Smith, Michael Phelps, and Jim Carrey, so you are not different or weird or disabled you are unique and that is wonderful! Don’t tell yourself you are different as if it’s a bad thing. You are you and there is none else like you in the world.!

Donna Gathof, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
I am part of a team that comes to work every day thinking about how we can create more jobs, better jobs, and career ladders for persons with significant disabilities. Why? Because it matters. It changes lives. It makes a difference. When you read these stories you begin to understand the struggles that people with disabilities face in finding and keeping a job. It also becomes clear how important work is to self-esteem, confidence and economic independence.

We are so very grateful to our business customers who join us in this mission. While I can quantify and demonstrate the business value of our products and services, its through reading these stories and poems you realize the social impact as well. Thank you for helping us create opportunities.

Jo Sinha
Chief Operating Officer
Wind Beneath My Wings

I woke up one day unable to speak after a long illness; depression held me with a violent death grip. Never before had I experienced my thoughts swirling through my head like a mighty hurricane leaving in its wake, confusion and the inability to speak. I began a long six-month journey of slow recovery. My Post Traumatic Stress triggers assaulted me from every side. Motorcycles and cars whizzed by as I navigated the freeways; I reacted in fear and trembling, sometimes swerving to avoid the imaginary obstacles in my mind. Even the familiar world of Wal-Mart was a trial (and for one who loves shopping, it left me hopeless.) Screaming children echoed loudly and sent me searching for cover in the racks of clothing. I decided to go late at night, only to discover, to my dismay, that the thud of empty boxes careening to the floor sent me scurrying to the far side of the store making me forget the reason I came in the first place. And so my story begins. Impaired, but talented, broken, but alive, I searched for purpose. After all, I was highly educated, but where could I find the supports I needed to succeed?

Newly diagnosed as having a disability, I was cautious and fearful, but I knew I would never be able to succeed unless I tried. My previous year was marked by numerous failed attempts at finding the “right kind” of work for me. While interning at Goodwill Industries Career Center, I heard that Peckham had a hiring fair at a nearby location. The Human Resource Specialist, greeted me warmly and we discussed my personal limitations and strengths. She explained the Customer Service Representative position and the different supports that were available. I instantly knew that it would be a perfect place to try my wings.

Nine months have passed since that first meeting. Each day I come to work, I know with certitude that I am welcome, that I am needed, that I have all the supports to be an outstanding CSR and that with each and every call I make a difference. In my darkest moments, the team has shown me support, encouragement and kindness. I have learned to see myself through other’s eyes as one who is competent, conscientious, determined and that together, we are amazing! I am proud to be able to say that inclusion works. Peckham is more than an employer, it is the wind beneath my wings!

Laura L. Schaff, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
STRUGGLE

I look “normal”. That is far from what I feel. Some days no one can tell, others not so much. It may look like I’m just having a bad day, or in a bad mood, or cranky, or just sad. Other times I’m just not as “talkative” as usual and keep to myself. No one knows what goes on in my head. No one knows the amount of pain I’m in. The smile I try so hard to keep on my face distracts from the pain I can’t hide from my eyes. It’s difficult to be around people who just don’t understand. They don’t understand how you think. They don’t understand how you feel. They don’t understand why that look they gave you made you cry or that statement they said made you so angry.

There are times I just want to cry and cry, others I just get so frustrated with anything and everything. Life becomes so difficult. I never know when I’m going to either snap or burst into tears or worse, both. Working is one of those most difficult things to do. You can’t control your emotions, you are always in pain (emotionally and physically), and your mind is just fogged, all the time. But I look fine, there should be nothing wrong with me right? I shouldn’t struggle to get out of bed in the morning. I shouldn’t struggle to talk. I shouldn’t look like the word is crashing around me.

I know no one will ever understand this. I don’t understand it, how could anyone else? It is important to be surrounded by people who also know they will never fully understand me but accept me, as I am. Not understand my struggle but just understand I do struggle. Not understand my emotions just that I have them, and they can be crazy. Not understand the pain I’m in just know that I’m always in pain in so many ways. When I work in a place that not only understands disabilities, of all kinds, but accommodates for issues people may have, it doesn’t just make it easier but makes me feel more “normal”. I don’t need someone to completely understand me. It’s just important that those around me know I have “issues” and sometimes just need help or that simple understanding. “Normal” seems boring anyway.

Kristen Sales, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix

It has been a great time these days, it has been a good and wonderful time since my fall and seizure. I fell down waiting for my ride coming home and then about few weeks after that I had a seizure at work and had to go to the hospital. Everybody has been really great to me and I feel that the staff and everybody help me and miss me and are glad that I am back to work. I am happy that they care about me so much and they like me so much. I feel that Peckham is special to me because I am a great worker to them and make the best to do right and take my time and make it right to be good.

Marilyn Finch, General Apparel Production Worker
Greenhouse
Through the Eyes of a Passport

I was hidden in a sea of blue books.  
I was selected for service.  
I finally belonged to someone.  
I was going to see the world with my family.

I knew the responsibilities were great – 
• To never let myself be damaged  
• To never let myself expire  
• To never let myself be stolen or lost.

I found a world of information opened to me – 
• To global entry  
• To closed loop cruises  
• To visit other countries and know their culture  
• To protect the children  
• To welcome new citizens to my country through naturalization.

I could even have a sibling...called Passport Card.  
I could fly; go by sea, or land – how exciting. I knew my support team...Peckham.  

They harnessed a source that has been long overlooked. They see no age or disability; they see no limitations at all. They infuse self-worth, confidence, pride, wisdom, knowledge, and perseverance.  

They are making my journey an extraordinary experience.  
I am, PASSPORT

Jacqueline Zimmer, NPIC Customer Service Representative  
Phoenix
This a story about a pair of hands that were always busy doing something. Typing at the speed of light, knitting dresses, sweaters, coats, etc. Stitching famous Renoir pictures, brailling books, and teaching other volunteers to braille. My expertise was Gourmet cooking, building a dessert company in Los Angeles from 1983-1991, and making desserts for 70 high end restaurants in Beverley Hills, Orange County and Los Angeles as well as for a number of international airlines to their first class and business class passengers, and also working with top caterers.

Moving on to 2004 to create a business of hand made Belgian chocolate truffles selling to gourmet markets and online customers. Then in 2012 came the news that these hands were all done. The business was closed and now came the necessary adjustments to deal with the situation and having the patience to learn a new way to live. Fortunately, these hands belong to a person blessed with a happy, positive nature and the will not to give up.

It took 2 ½ years to find a job, fortunately I found Peckham. Being able to work again has enriched my life. This company is remarkable, offering unlimited help to people with disabilities and the encouragement to move ahead.

Eleanor Joseph, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
WINNING

So what I have a disability?
It doesn’t matter at my facility.
I’m accepted at my place of work
So I can perform my job with a smirk!
At my job disabilities are desired
Which makes me inspired
(And this is a confession)
To be dedicated to my profession!
With a welcome all decree,
Of which I must agree,
Employees can operate with rapture
Making quality services easy to capture.
My company offers helpful support
Providing me with a valuable rapport
With my co-workers, who become friends,
Therefore, we all win in the end!

Krysta McFarland, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix

“The Peckham Cheer”

Let’s give a round of applause for
Peckham Stars we have fun but we
Work hard, with excellence and
Promptness in demand. We rise to
The occasion we take our stand, we
Do our best because we believe we
Can, so clap your hands and stomp
Your feet we’re Peckham stars and
We can’t be beat.

Lynette Dillard, Environmental Service Technician
Greenhouse
May 13th, 2014 started out as a beautiful morning. The weather was nice and calm, flowers were in bloom, and I had the day off to spend my birthday with my husband. We made a special trip to Siegi’s, a German butcher and delicatessen, and a pair of the best steaks we’d every purchased awaited us as our dinner. It really couldn’t have been a better day, until the phone call. For the past 6 months, my extreme dizziness as well as a pronounced sensitivity to light and heat led us to believe something might be the matter. Later that day we would go to the doctor’s office, as they don’t provide test results over the phone. It was official. I had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

The ensuing months were a frantic period. What medication would I take? What, if any, side effects would there be? Maybe, most importantly, how would my husband and I afford it? After repeated appointments with my neurologist we settled on Copaxone. Unfortunately, at roughly $60,000.00 a year, Copaxone has a price tag out of reach for most without health insurance and prescription coverage. So, when I am asked what working means to me the answer is simple: Life. Without work and without health insurance my health would be in shambles. I once went three weeks without Copaxone, after one prescription ended, and before the next started. Those three weeks were unequivocally miserable. Nausea, dizziness, visual issues; it was all I could do to take in enough calories to make it through the day.

Outside of any benefit to myself, I am doubly grateful to work for Peckham, an organization which understands and celebrates the unique skills and needs of the disabled. Not everyone is fortunate enough to work for a company that takes the time and effort to ensure their employees success, no matter the challenge. With that in mind, it is my sincere goal to one-day work in a position that would allow me to promote the proliferation of further vocational rehabilitation efforts for the disabled. Everyone deserves a chance to shine and I can’t wait to help others get their chance.

Tonya Patrick, CIC Customer Service Technician
Battle Creek
What working means to me

I am an individual with a disability. I am also a human being with a job that I love doing. I work for Peckham, Inc. as a Customer Service Representative. I began working here nearly a year ago, and it seems like only yesterday that I started training.

My life has been rather interesting, which is not always a good thing, nor always bad. I grew up in a major city in the state of Michigan until my family moved to Oregon in 1991. I then traveled all up and down the West Coast – from California to Washington, and back to Oregon. I worked most of my adult life from the age of 18 until around the age of 32. That was when I received my SSDI judgment. I decided to go back to school full-time. Though, I was not the most successful student.

After a while, I just stayed at home, and did very little. I felt like less than a whole person. My self-worth was in the gutter, and I could not find another job for several years; about 6, in fact! Once I found a new job, it did not last very long – due to not being a good fit for me or the employer.

Finally, last year, I got a tip from my job coach that Peckham was hiring. I thought I would give it a shot, because why the devil not? I got an interview, a tour, and a sense of difference from Peckham. No one else had looked at me like a human being in a long time – at least not employment speaking! I started orientation and training with the company, and the more I learned about the people here, the more satisfaction I got.

This job has given me not only a better standard of living with the paychecks, but also a greater appreciation for the fact that I am who I am, and that is a whole, healthy (within limits) individual. I could never have gotten to where I am today without this job, which I STILL love doing! Further, I have helped others here at work achieve their potential, by mentoring them, and helping to train them for success. I am thankful every day for Peckham and their vision for me and my fellow workers!

Donald Vinton, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Working with a Disability and My Recovery

As a person with a mental disability, I am grateful that I can still hold down a job and make my own money. Our society is becoming increasingly an equal-opportunity society, but my opportunity at Peckham was unthinkable even as recent as twenty years ago. I appreciate the fact that at Peckham, I don’t need to hide my disability for the fear of losing the job. I believe that working part-time has given me a chance at full recovery from my illness, which means a lot to me. Work was a giant step forward toward my goal of becoming self-sufficient, and my sense of wellness and confidence has grown tremendously since I started working for Peckham in February of 2016.

After I started working for Peckham, the word spread that I have a disability, and Social Security Administration that specifically hire people with disabilities contacted me with a job offer. With all these opportunities popping up, I saw this as a good sign that I will now able to maximize my potential more than thought possible. However, things weren’t always so rosy in the past. Ever since I was diagnosed with a mental disability, I struggled to find my place in the world, and most of the time, I felt limited and helpless when it boiled down to what career I should choose. Being mentally disabled is just as real as having other conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, etc. And it is especially a cruel disease because it afflicts people precisely at critical periods when they sincerely start making effort to race and compete with one another in achieving success. After my experience at Peckham, that helplessness feeling is finally gone.

Along with my educational pursuit of getting a master’s degree in Economics, working has helped me feel like a positive, useful contributing member of our society. My vocational rehab counselor once told me that working can be a form of therapy, and I cannot agree with her more. Working has made me feel more confident, and after about six months working at Peckham, I have built a healthy routine that I look forward to every day. I have also built stronger stress tolerance that will come handy as I move toward a better future. Work has indeed made me a happier and positive person, and with Peckham’s help, I expect a full recovery from my condition in the near future.

Rosa Robacker, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Darkness to Light

Darkness sent me into a deep abyss,
Where I stayed so long I felt lifeless.
No longer could I do what everyone else does,
Mental illness became a part of who I was.

The darkness spread throughout my entire life,
My pain was deep as though cut like a knife.
Complete isolation my life began to be,
I wanted a way out but I couldn’t find the key.

What’s my diagnosis, I needed to know,
So I could find out why I felt so low.
Take this med, take that med, and let’s see what will work,
I tried so many I finally went berserk.

I really needed help, but I was out in the cold.
‘Til I got well I had to put my life on hold,
I’m so tired, I don’t know if I can go on,
I tried to take my life so that I could be gone.

But God must have had other plans for me,
He saved me from dying, and now I’m free.
I can begin to start off trying to get well,
I will work hard so that I can come out of my shell.

The following years my hard work paid off,
Yes, I am better, now no one can scoff.
What can I do to believe that I can make it?
It’s easy because I know I won’t ever quit.

The proof was shown with the first job that I got,
I was happy I was given a shot,
Being able to work I was first filled with doubt,
Eventually I believed that it would work out.

I get to help others, which feels so good,
Before I was hired who knew that I could?
I now have faith in myself because I was given a chance,
To show that my effort could be seen at a glance.

My job has greatly improved my self-esteem,
So that I’ve finally fulfilled my dream.
I worked so hard to get here, with all of my might,
My efforts have allowed me to move into the light.

Gina Boyer, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Peckham Therapy

Hello, I’m here to tell you about my disability, and what has helped me to continue in life feeling that I have a purpose.

It started 3 years ago with physical pain in my back. I didn’t want to walk, get out of bed, then depression struck. Due to depression I was hospitalized.

Now this is when my real disability came, while I was in the hospital my 33-year-old daughter, who was my best friend, companion, and roommate passed away from a heroin overdose. I was overcome with grief, for 1 year I laid on a couch, not bathing, tangles in my hair, eating every second, smoking every chance I could, and wishing I never wake up. Gradually, after 4 hospital visits I was able to think.

I knew I needed to stay busy, get out of the house, so my friend told me about Peckham. I applied, it took all the strength I had to fill out the application. The day I was called and said I was hired was the beginning of my therapy.

Let me tell you, each day I come to work I’m thankful for each employee and supervisor. I watch as my peers come to work, I see determination, I see pain, I see smiles, I hear laughter, I see friendship, I see kindness, consideration and helpfulness. I’ve come to a place that gives me life again, I have a purpose, meaning, and most of all I know I’m not alone. Each of us have our own disabilities seen or not seen, each of us struggle to get up, to get dressed, to function, to smile.

Because of Peckham I have a purpose, I have a paycheck, I have new friends, I have a reason to live life again. Thank-you Peckham employer and employees.

My daughter would be proud  
- Dedicated to Hannah Kostishak

Betty Albertson, NPIC Customer Service Representative  
Phoenix

I woke up one morning with weakness and pain  
Unable to balance I needed a cane  
Doctors were puzzled, my symptoms unclear  
Mobility compromise gave me great fear  
My hands wouldn’t work my writing impaired  
How could I manage so helpless and scared  
I knew that I needed a place for employment  
To challenge my skills and offer enjoyment  
I searched many days for a place I would fit  
And finally discovered that Peckham was it  
I’m grateful each day for the chance to succeed  
And hope people out there will follow my lead

Jane Keever, NPIC Customer Service Representative  
Phoenix
The Journey

I have concluded, after being here on earth over fifty years, that life imitates nature. Just like nature has it’s seasons so do we. In the spring of life everything is good and blossoming. I was strong, bright, quick, invincible and assured that all my dreams would come true. I guess that is where the old saying ‘Youth is wasted on the young’ comes from.

Next we have summer, when we are celebrating our accomplishments and blessings. I actually was able to do whatever I set my mind to, unfortunately I did not realize that there is a cost to all that we do. Physical activity was part of my life before work, doing and after. Of course, in the process of living life it never occurred to me what a gift it was that my body and my mind worked together in perfect harmony.

Alas, enters the fall; the fall of my health, finances, dreams and youth. The physical occupation as a Mail Carrier that I loved so much caused so many injuries that I was forced to retire on disability. I mean I am literally torn up from the floor up. It was quite an adjustment for me to learn how to; be still, accept my limitations, and adapt to my new reality.

Winter was exactly how it is in nature; cold, harsh and unforgiving. Yes, the season when I seemed to lose all the things I worked so hard to accomplish. A season when my injuries got worse because I could not accept my present reality.

Ah, but seasons change, spring does come around again and it came in the form of Peckham. Who would have thought that there was actually a company that was looking for people with disabilities. The interview gave me hope that I would once again be able to contribute to something bigger. The fact that they actually hired me knowing all the things that limited me brought tears to my eyes and joy to my heart. Being able to get out and meet people and learn again is priceless. It is hard to feel sorry for yourself when you come in contact with people that are adapting to much worse circumstances than you are. Then we have the community itself; management that is genuinely interested in your success and works with you to make sure you achieve your dreams. We were not designed to do this by our self, it is a gift to be part of Peckham that recognizes the need for all to be the best they can be right where they are.

Janis D. Taylor, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
In a train-the-trainer session we were asked to share one supportive and one work-on comment for each of our co-workers. Brandon said to me, “With all your experience, why do you not think you could not train?” I had been a trainer and a classroom teacher for 7 years. I answered, “That’s why I’m at Peckham.” My view of myself was overshadowed with self-doubt and negative thinking. The comment rang back, to my sister asking the same sort of question of me, “Why don’t you think you can water plants at Home Depot?” At Home Depot, I was at an all-time low. I realized that didn’t have an answer for Brandon, let alone for myself. I put it aside until recently, but now it was time to explore the why of it. It was my thinking and I had to start, again, to think about my thinking—based on experience.

It has been five months and I was a facilitator training others to be General Information CSRs. I realized again, that things had indeed changed now both for myself and others. It was the process of being able to teach again, and help others to obtain work that was satisfying. Today, I look at myself very differently than I ever have. My confidence has been developed—truly developed—self-esteem built on what I can do and be. The foundation has been set.

These thoughts are grounded in my experience of worth and need. Worth because my work is good and worthy. Need because I felt needed in both my contributions and abilities. Although the training season has come to an end — it was a successful run, of which I was a part. Challenges were met and overcome and successes celebrated. Personally, I feel more connected with whom I work, learning at a different level that my bipolar experience has been like another’s—disruptive to life’s goals and dreams, yet dreams still can be accomplished because I am able to work. By connecting to others, I’ve developed as a person so it’s not just the work, but the camaraderie.

Given an opportunity to work – we build our confidence, are counted on, are needed, and contribute to Peckham and NPIC. A trainee commented that he’s never worked at a place where people were so happy, as he smiled. I realized that I was smiling too.

Donna Kurgan, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
What Peckham does for and means to me and my
dreams. (Song/poem)

We all get that our lives will have its ups and downs.
Each new part opens new doors, and build strength in our hearts.
People always say, come on... don’t cry.
Every time we fall in our lives.
But my undrying tears... fall from my eyes
As I stand up through the pain.

Real dream chasing is never easy.
We will fall down and scrape our knees.
Real Dream chasing, is worth it all.
Once you catch up you’ll forever stand tall.
Even when we fall. Get up and stand tall.

In my life, no matter how fast I ran through each passing day.
It seemed no matter what I do, my dream only gets further away.
I fall and my dream tells me good bye.
Then it keeps climbing toward the sky.
It shines so bright, even at night.
My job helps me find wings to catch it.

Real life changing my path each day.
Peckham, helps me pass obstacles in my way.
Always changing, it’s so great.
I’m making way in the world and I’m free to chase.

With them I’ll when this Race.
Every dreaming each day.
Hey, now I got so much to do. Thanks to you I feel like I can’t lose. Now I’m making may own way and I can leave my heart in the hands of fate. I’m no longer scared, I like I’m feel prepared to live my own life. Hey Peckham, you’re helping me survive.
Each day brought me new pain, my dream chasing seemed in vain. Now that I can work, I can see and I can reach out for my dream.

Real dream chasing is never easy.
We will fall down and scrape our knees.
Real Dream chasing, is so great.
Once I catch up I’ll forever stand tall.
Even when I fall, it will be worth it all.

Tiffany Foley, NPIC Customer Service Representative

Phoenix
Peckham is for Dreamers essay

All the while I have dreamed of being something different, something above myself to set a goal I must have that backup plan, Peckham is that backup plan but I have been working for Peckham to make a difference for myself and it truly has shown I believe that people with disabilities have a right to dream they have a right to dream of working and making money. But that’s not what I stand for working for money I work to make a better person of myself but I need money to live but I understand things differently but what Peckham stands for is giving a chance for people with disabilities have a chance to reach their goals and dreams if they have any. My dream is to be a music conductor but right now I believe that Peckham suites me just fine it give me friends a good work ethic and it gives me good skills. But one day when my time is right I will reach that dream but right now I work with my co-workers enjoying the day. But those other workers with disabilities should take pride and work until their dreams are accomplished weather it is something different or if it is something extraordinary all I have to say to you is keep believing in your dreams and your dreams will come to you.

“The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were and ask “why not?” John F Kennedy

Darren McAdams, Label Lab Support
Greenhouse

Ups and Downs

For those who get the blues and get down about who knows what can happen, can it be good need to look forward to the ups and feel the love.

What a way to say I’m in the mood for ups, not the downs of life at any place of work, no matter where it’s located can be a good thing, we all try our best at what can be accomplished in the workforce.

What a blessing it is just to know how to look up not down, never look down to the blues because of what it can do to others, working in that mood can bring the frown upside down.

Laura Breese, Manufacturing Services Production Worker
Greenhouse
WORKING WITH A DISABILITY

Mental Illness has been a struggle for me for more than thirty years. I have had jobs lasting at the most for 2 months at a time. I gave up trying thinking I couldn’t be successful at being employed permanently. I live with my daughter and 2 granddaughters so we can support each other financially. Over a year ago my daughter received a traumatic brain injury and unable to work. I had to think what I could do to resolve our situation and when I read Peckham was hiring for apparel construction I applied. I was interviewed 3 weeks later and drove there during a winter storm, motivation was my inspiration. This was the beginning of my employment at Peckham Industries.

I completed two weeks of training and was placed on the grid drawers line sewing the legs. This was a challenge for me because the speed required for manufacturing caused much anxiety although I am a skilled seamstress. I had 90 days to increase my speed and the anxiety I experienced was slowing me down. I was having trouble seeing the measuring tape accurately when I was taking the measurements I needed to record. Frustration was taking over my confidence and I told my trainer that if I made another mistake I was leaving and not coming back. She told me “No you’re not.” She had confidence in me I needed to have in myself and that was the start of my employment at Peckham.

Working has given me more than I could ever imagine and working at a place made for people with disabilities has made a huge difference in my life. I have gained financial independence and has my self-esteem has gone to the highest level it has ever been. I have been able to be more social with my peers which has allowed me to improve my interpersonal skills which has been a problem for me in the past. I make enough money I am financially independent to pay bills, purchase food, household items, and clothing. There is money left over to buy things for my hobbies. Working allows me to feel complete and be a part of the community like other people do.

Margaret Bappert, Quality Inspector
Greenhouse

The Journey for Consideration

When there’s a journey, there’s a path. When there’s a path, there’s a passion. To complete that journey, what does it take to get there? Dedication and time work well. Although there’s no perfection, completing this journey step by step is the key. An individual has a unique way of their own ideas. Consideration is one way, when there’s a way there’s a will. The value of this purpose is to take consideration by giving a chance for an individual to have the opportunity to continue a journey, leaving behind a great history. Day by day that individual will look back and say look how far I made it. And along with that journey are those who took their own path and made it to the same destination. Without even knowing they are working as team, no matter where they’ve been.

Crystal Hall, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
I have now been on the passport specialist side for over a year. My 1st team lead on the passport side was Laura Balderas. She helped me to be patient about getting my QA scores.

Since end of last year October or November though I have had the same team lead Sharon and she has helped me come so far as a team lead and CSR passport specialist.

When Sharon first started as my team lead, I did not have much confidence at all. She has helped me to learn to have confidence in my work. I do know though I still have work to do to increase my confidence but with Sharon being my team lead, I know it will continue to get better.

An example of my growing confidence is when the ICST position for Phoenix Peckham became available, I decided to apply for it. At any other job I would not have tried to get a higher position because I knew I would not get if I tried.

So, I applied and even got asked to do an interview for the position. I was both nervous and excited about getting interviewed. Even though I did not get position, Kim and Andrew told me what I could do to improve so next time the position comes available I can apply and hopefully get the position.

Also, because of both my disability and things in my past I do not always trust my team lead Sharon and the people walking when they do help me with my calls and start arguing without realizing it. My team lead Sharon is patient and is working with me on not arguing.

Most of the other jobs that I have worked at, I was fired because of my autism and anxiety which got in the way of me being a good employee.

It means a lot to me that the staff and team leads do not want to see me struggle and want to work with me every day on being a better employee and not letting my disability get in the way of me working.

I want to personally thank all the staff at Peckham for helping me and especially, my team lead Sharon.

Amanda Patterson, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
My name is Donald Anderson I am 24 years old and I have a disability I am learning disabled I learn slower than others and I have a anxiety disorder I been working since I was 15 years old and all my life.

I have been treated very different some was good and some was bad and some by far worse than anyone should deal with I started working at my high school as a volunteer food sever from freshmen to senior year I had no trouble with my coworkers we all respected each other and worked as a team it was the best time of my life.

Then I graduated high school and things started to turn for the worse I started working for McDonald’s as food sever but mainly as maintenance they treated me so badly to where I couldn’t talk to the customers nor even be anywhere near the dining area all due to my disability I couldn’t make enough to even pay rent on time at all.

I left my career at McDonald’s and started working for the Peoria school district as supposed to be a food sever but they mainly wanted a garbage man and I it was much worse than the last job I couldn’t give my

Best customer service to the kids and my hours cut due to my disability. I decided I had enough with people wanting me to clean garbage and not being a my job to do so I left the job and worked for Walmart for almost a whole year which was the 2nd worst place I had ever worked for they didn’t train me or take the time even know my name they bullied me all of my time at Walmart then I was fired for my disability and for being too slow which crushed me.

Then I worked for a call center for DirecTV which was the worse place I had ever been to they bullied me and called me names I could take it anymore. Then I found peckham which saved not only my family but my life peckham does do what they say they do help the people who have a disability when I look at my life back then and now I’m more than happy to be apart with a place that loves different and helps people too.

Donald Anderson, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
This year’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month theme #InclusionWorks resonates with the work we do at Peckham each day. At Peckham we always want to create an inclusive environment, one in which everyone’s ideas, opinions and contributions are considered. This approach is all about making more “insiders” than “outsiders,” – it is ensuring everyone is respected and they feel as though they matter. Peckham is constantly striving to ensure everyone in the organization feels they have ownership. The more we continue to focus on people’s strengths rather than weaknesses, the more we can rely on each other.

We are constantly working to strengthen the culture of Peckham, and the continuous work of including everyone at the table helps us to create more diverse solutions, and an inclusive environment. Peckham is proud to continue making inclusion work inside and outside the workplace.

Scott Derthick
Chief Human Resources Officer

Artist, Hui Li
When it comes down to it, life is all about choices. After the first few years, we begin to understand there are choices to be made and consequences to be faced. We start slowly with guidance from our parents, but as we age, we begin to understand some of our choices are easy and quick: should I mind my mom and get praised or should I defy my mom and get punished; and some take commitment and time: should I study hard in school and get good enough grades for college or should I party my youth away?

Some choices are good, others bad; some are difficult, others easy, some are inclusive, others foster exclusion. Each positive choice we make strengthens the fibers in the tapestry of our character. When we make good, inclusive, accepting choices, our tapestry binds together with strength; we become more joyful, more caring, more encouraging, and a better person. When we make bad, exclusive, or mean spirited choices, our tapestry begins to fray, and it weakens our character.

It seems to me our society, as a whole, has taken a step in the wrong direction. We seem to have lost sight of what we used to recite in elementary school “One Nation Under God...” “One Nation” includes everyone who is a member of this great nation. It does not exclude because of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. If you are a member of our nation, able bodied or someone with a disability, you should be included as a member of our society. “Inclusion Works” Inclusive choices foster Team Work and Team Work fosters success. It’s true for everyone: those with a disability and those who are able bodied. For those of us who have a disability, our choices may be fewer, more restrictive, and in some cases more difficult to make, but they are our choices, and we have to make them. Let’s strengthen our own character and positively impact Peckham with positive, Inclusive choices.

I have come to understand that my past choices made me the man I am today, and the choices I make today will build the man I will become tomorrow. We all have choices. Let’s make inspiring one and build a tapestry that others will admire, and one that we can be proud of.

Charles Smith, Contact Center Team Support
Phoenix

Inclusion Works

Differently-abled people may think or move in a unique way. We all want to be heard, listened to and have a sense of belonging. We all matter. Look beyond the obvious and discover the capable and confident person that maybe your next successful employee.

Melissa Marvin, Apprentice Sewer Level 2
Greenhouse
Inclusion Is The Best Policy
#Inclusion Works

For anyone who has ever been the last one picked for a team, or the only person not invited to a party, they know what it feels like to be left out. For those who have never had the “opportunity” to experience this, it’s not a pleasant feeling. You feel hurt, embarrassed, shamed, angry, betrayed, unloved, & unwanted. There is this feeling of it being your own fault that you weren’t included, even though on some level you know that it was someone else who made the decision to leave you out. For those folks who have disabilities, our first reaction is to think that maybe it is our differences that led that person to not let us be part of whatever the event was. Sometimes, the internal turmoil that comes after the humiliating experience, follows along the lines of, “Do they think I’m damaged in some way?” Or “Is it something that I did that upset them?” None of this self-evaluation in these situations is productive, because really there is nothing that the offended person can do to make things right, other than try to confront the offending party, which generally does not end well.

What people should realize is that when someone intentionally does not include them, it really is their own loss because they will miss out on getting to know that person & won’t have access to any of their knowledge, experience, suggestions, ideas, stories, personality, spirit, etc. The fewer the people in a group, the more that group is diminished. It is lessened because there are less people to participate & contribute their 2 cents along with everyone else. Especially in problem solving or brainstorming situations, where you really need people to think outside of the box to find a solution to a challenge, having people in that brainstorming group who have actually overcome great challenges, can only help. We all have different paths in life so it is a good thing to have people with different backgrounds interacting together because a privileged individual has information & connections that can help a person who has struggled their whole life & vice versa. The character that gets developed by overcoming hurdle after hurdle can be a great example to those who have not had the same issues in their life. This world can be a better place for everyone.

Mark Hampton, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
#InclusionWorks

I feel like employers should be more prone to hiring people with disabilities because regardless of their situation people need to work to earn money and feel like they belong. I am glad Peckham employs people with disabilities because it gives us a place where we belong and not be judged for our differences. Yes, we may have different disabilities but we are all the same in the sense we are people with disabilities. Employers should not deny nor restrict people with disabilities. It is wrong to be discriminated because of your current situation that you have no control over. I love being able to work and feel like I belong in the workplace and that is what it is all about.

**DeVante’ Kyle, NPIC Customer Service Representative**

**Phoenix**

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Inclusion is a great way to describe Peckham! “The act of including, or the state of being included”, “The act or practice of including people with disabilities in regular jobs or workplaces.”

Peckham is a great place to work, with no discrimination, encouragement to learn and be the best you can be, helping you to realize your dreams, and providing the resources and employees that can help you to reach them!! Community involvement and referrals for outside of Peckham employment and accommodations for anyone to help them get and keep a job, as well as be an independent person. Having a disability does not mean just sitting at home. Peckham helps everyone to see their potential, and to feel important as part of the work force.

Peckham is the family that you work with, helping and caring for each and every one, watching and providing the skills for self-worth and self-esteem. The general feeling is that with Peckham on your side, anything is possible!!

**Laura Griffin, NPIC Customer Service Representative**

**Riverside**
As you read through these pages, it is my hope that you are able to digest the words of each of our employees and understand the power of people with disabilities. In my previous military career, I witnessed firsthand how important the desire was to find meaningful employment for those wounded returning to civilian life. This is a desire regardless of our ability, that we all share. Everyone wants to be a positive contributor to our community and to society as a whole. People with disabilities want to and deserve the opportunity to work in inclusive and accessible work environments where they can let their talents shine.

Why should employers hire people with disabilities? The answer is simple. People with disabilities are an amazing workforce with untapped potential.

Stuart Muladore
Chief Business Development & Marketing Officer

Artist, Steve Sergent
Why hire “persons with disabilities”? Why not?!?

The word; “disabled” directly translated appears to imply the individual is “unable”, it’s a word that comes with inherent bias. I would never write unable anywhere on an application. People with disabilities may internalize this bias, if they cannot obtain and retain employment, removing themselves from the workforce indefinitely. This is bad for companies, the country, and the individual. Falsely believing they’re “un-able” also precludes other positive attributions, and contributions that come from working.

The disability individuals have is but a facet of a whole person; such as, worker, shy, articulate, spirited: it isn’t the defining factor; nor does it scratch the surface of what that person has to offer an employer. Assuming the contrary eliminates a large pool of valuable potential from employers offering it to other companies.

All people are “unable”. People possess a totality of attributes: skills, strengths, gifts, and weakness. Prospective employees are complete unique people. Individuals bring their bring their ABLE, their assets to their workplace.

Being a contributing member of a workplace instills immense pride and gratitude! Employers are repaid for their investment with loyalty productivity and dutiful investment in them. With inherent challenges surmounted incorporated into the fabric of daily life; instinctively we strive harder as employees, not in spite of, but inspired by the disabilities.

Inspiring individuals inspire others fostering a more productive workforce. Integrating disabled and demystifies the “unknown” creating tolerant workplaces as well as boosting the public image of the company.

Companies that fear hiring disabled individuals, as less-able miss a valuable opportunity for unconventional insight inherent to navigating life with disabilities. Diverse perspectives make workplaces work and companies excel.

In life, and work, we utilize our strengths and master them. If were truly gifted we manage to master our weaknesses wielding both to our advantage and the advantage of others. Employers should regard the individual as a whole, and consider the considerable possibilities! Consider Stevie Wonder, John Forbes Nash, others.

Steven Hawkins endures debilitating ALS; a severe disability. He’s also a man of extraordinary intellect who manages both challenge and genius with humility, grace, and impact. Employers won’t miss the potential in prospective employees such as him if they see the abilities not “a disability”.

To hire an individual with a disability is to hire an individual. We return your investment with every ounce of our ABILITIES.

Anonymous

Lansing
Why employer should hire people with disabilities

The reason is that you are make them feel like they not worth living and that they are just pain in the neck when it come too other people because they think that they cannot do nothing on this earth and that they need someone to help with job and everyone that start a new job need to be training and that they cannot do it with their disability and people think that you are getting disability check that you should not get a paycheck that you should stay home but I give Peckham a lot check and help people out and they are make people happy that they get a paycheck and earn there one money just like anybody else

Teresa Bozung, Bundle Team Member
Greenhouse

Courage

Why should employers hire people with disabilities? That’s a common question. I’m sure people could see this from the perspective of employers and how it would affect their business. However, is it ever seen from those who want to be hired? As someone with a disability myself, I knew I had to function in the world with a job. What exactly does it take? Courage.

Courage is evident in those who want to work, but are aware of their struggles. Sometimes they don’t feel confident because they’re different, but that doesn’t hold them back. Not only does it take courage to walk through the doors with a resume and speaking to the boss about their strengths, it takes courage on the disabled behalf to admit they’re different. Not to mention giving the bright qualities on why they suit the career.

What employers should recognize is that disabled people have courage when it comes to having a job. It doesn’t stop there though. It takes the employers’ own mustering of courage to hire them. They have courage that the person will do an excellent job and will be a good benefit. With that, hiring people with disabilities has one thing in common on both sides; courage.

Melanie Wheelen, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Meaningful Work and Recovery

Although you will encounter roadblocks and setbacks on the road to recovery, working at something that is meaningful to you can bring you a sense of purpose that will anchor you. Meaningful activity expands your sense of self-worth by adding to your skills and helping you accomplish your personal goals and feel good about yourself. Meaningful activity which includes school, volunteer work, part-time work, and full-time employment, also enables you to meet new people and make new friends.

We all need some form of meaningful activity in our lives and a means of supporting ourselves. Having a mental health condition can be an obstacle. Mental health conditions impact different people in various ways. Some people with mental health conditions may never stop, others find that their condition interrupts their career, and still others may be able to do only limited work. As people recover from a mental health condition they also face various challenges in relation to work. Some people with mental health conditions find that they are able, with minor accommodations, to work in the same way they did before. Others, may have to re-enter work gradually. And people on disability will need to observe back to work rules when employed.

No matter the situation and hurdles you face, hold on to your goals for yourself and strive to incorporate meaningful activity into your life. In the past, people with mental illness were often discouraged from working. But today, we understand that work is not only a possibility but it can also play a vital role in recovery.

It’s true, however, that having a mental health condition can pose some practical barriers to working. Such as having breaks in your career, feeling unsure of yourself, or needing to ask for an accommodation. Such as time for doctors’ appointments. You can figure out strategies to work around these barriers often with the help of friends, mentors, or an employment specialist. Don’t give up!

People with disabilities deserve the chance to build a life for themselves in the communities where they choose to live.

In our society, we identify ourselves in many ways. One way is the work we do. People often ask what do you do on your job? This gives us a sense of importance on having a job, working with people in the community.

What is disability? Disability is complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested over recent decades. The disabled peoples movement.

It is the desire of every person in this world to perform some extraordinary task. People try their best to do the best thing or act during their life. It is normally said that it is a great achievement for any man or woman to perform extraordinary acts, but this becomes of more importance when this is done in the presence of a major disability.

Brittney Olive, General Apparel Production Worker

Greenhouse
Why employers should hire people with disabilities...

A disability isn’t noticed until you really get to know that person. From child hood to adult hood a person with a disability are the persons that have been through much more than a person without any disability. For example, when a child starts attending school that is when they are more noticed by other students. They can be made fun of in many ways like name calling, acts by other kids such as making faces and being laughed at in public. It can be fun and games to for the kids making fun of the person with the disability until an adult stops it.

Being made fun of can leave emotional scars and humiliation on the person being made fun of or even being bullied. They don’t want to be around that person again. Damage can be done to them without even being known. Everything starts from childhood and it can even be from home also. The victim that has been through many of these types of events throughout life can be the wisest ones you’ll ever meet. Sometimes it’s too late but if we can help the person when it’s early, you can make a huge difference in that person life.

Giving the chance of an interview can even change a person. Companies that give opportunity to individuals with any type of disability can prosper in many ways. A candidate with a disability must be given a chance to prove themselves that they can perform the same job as a regular person. When given the chance that’s where they shine. A person can change and perform the best of their ability when given a chance. Companies want to hire the best candidates for any position within their business. Companies can also win awards and be well known for assisting and hiring individuals with disabilities and many people would like to work with that certain company. If a company wants to stand out, give a person a chance to prove themselves. They can outperform other workers that do not have any disability at all.

Some of us that have a disability see it as just being normal because we have adapted being the way we are. We just want to be accepted everywhere they are and try the very best at work. If they hire individuals with disabilities outperform, Companies win also.

Isidro Guillen, NPIC Customer Service Representative  
Phoenix
Disability Employment and the American Dream

October is Disability Employment month and during this month we strive to help find solutions to the many issues that people with all forms of disability may face. The need for greater awareness about disability employment is growing. As the number of people with disabilities increase, so does the demand for businesses to accommodate to their needs within the workforce. Data shows that currently the number of disabled workers is nearing 3 million, but this number is quite deceiving as nearly 70% of the people who have been afflicted with a disability either choose not to work or have quit looking for employment based on the fact that they can’t find the appropriate services to help them.

The simple truth is that when given these slight accommodations, many, if not most, people with disabilities are every bit as productive as those workers without a disability. Consider my Uncle, Breck, for example. He has worked at Robert Sinto Welding for most of his life, many of those years as a manager. An avid hunter, Uncle Breck became paralyzed after falling out of his tree stand fifteen years ago. Many people would have given up on welding career after an accident like this, but not my uncle. With some assistance from a rehabilitation clinic, including an accessible vehicle that they donated to him, he is still able to drive to work every day. Despite his paralysis, Uncle Breck’s job duties haven’t changed much. Many of the accommodations he needed, such as ramps for his wheel chair, were already in place at the business, because they were compliant with the ADA. As for on-the-job accommodations, his boss simply assigns him the welding jobs that can be done from a seated position.

While some workers may need an accommodation or two, most of these have minimal budgetary impact and that is lessened by the dedication and hard work of an employee who, despite his or her disability, is no different than any other worker. I feel very fortunate to work for such a wonderful company such as Peckham. They have taken the time to work with me, provide me training at my own pace, in a comfortable setting with all accommodations I may require. We all want the same thing: to use our talents and skills to be productive citizens working for our own little piece of the American Dream.

Travis Covert, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
Hiring People With Disabilities

No one asks to be disabled. Disabilities come in many forms. There are both Mental and Physical Disabilities. Some are born with a disability, some have an injury or accident that caused their disability, and for some as age progresses they become disabled. You have to deal with what you have and try to move on. From my own experience being disabled can be very challenging both emotionally and physically. Many of time I wish I could do the things I could do before without limitations. For the longest time for me being disabled meant I was useless. I had a hard time finding a job with having limitations. I have learned that just because a person is disabled it does not mean they are totally useless. I may be useless at some things such as running a Marathon, but not everything.

Currently I am working as a CSR answering questions for people. I do not think of my job as being work. I think of it as being an accomplishment. I enjoy what I do. When I talk to someone on the phone at work and they tell me I have done a good job, and they are no longer worried and that they understand things a lot better. That makes me feel good. But most of all when they tell me they are so glad that I was the person they got on the phone, that makes my day. It is not the paycheck to me, it is the ability to make someone happy, because for awhile when I am working it takes away my problems. Sometimes I think becoming disabled was meant to be because knowing I have made someones day makes my day. Working has given me back a sense of accomplishment, happiness and fulfillment. All the things I had lost and thought was gone forever.

Most people with disabilities may not be able to do some things but they may excel at other things, so give them a chance. Let them see what they can accomplish. Not only would you be helping your business you would be helping them achieve their goals as well.

Wanda Murphy, CMS Customer Service Representative
Iowa
My name is Emily and I have a disability. There are many types of disabilities let them be psychical, emotional, or mental. Some illnesses are not able to be seen from the outside. Which is my case: I am Manic-Depressive or Bi-Polar. Working is a hard task for me.

There are many ups and downs. I never fully understand when my moods, emotions, will change or what will cause them to change. More times than I can count I have quit a job with no real reason or notice. I have always had a huge amount of shame associated with my illness. I know I have plenty to offer as an employee, but being able to show this is hard. Working at Peckham has allowed me to see the things people can do with all types of disabilities. I believe that others are judgmental of people who are different themselves. Basing their opinion on the way a person functions. More companies should hire people with disabilities. Just because a person is disabled does not mean you are not able to do the task at hand or go the distance to complete what is needed.

When most people find out I am Bi-Polar their views of me changes; I become some crazed lunatic that is totally out of control. This is just not true. Being in an environment where I am expected to be different is an experience that is simply amazing. I would love for more people to have the same experience I am receiving. It feels simply superb to be able to earn money to provide for my family. I am not receiving some disability check. It is the uttermost feeling of excellence providing for myself and family. I love and feel honored to be a person with disabilities; since I have been at here at Peckham. Peckham has giving me the opportunity to be and feel like a productive person of society.

Feelings like this never happened working anywhere else. People with disabilities should all be allowed the opportunity to feel and be part of the workforce. We should all have an opportunity to better ourselves. Thanks to Peckham I have learned that I am no different than anyone else. I love being this new person: not just a person with a mental illness.

Emily Seymour, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
Everyone has a voice that needs to be heard, and once it is heard, and someone is
listening we can look way beyond our disability with the help of others. Although it is a
process in achieving the fullest life potential by creating new opportunities for the way
we are living, loving, sharing, working and learning way beyond the way we think of
ourselves, and way beyond the way others think about individuals with disabilities. By
empowering and enhancing your ability to live to the fullest, people who are physically
challenged with a disability can turn their pain and struggles into victory.

Years ago, I was physically challenged in my body and although sometimes people want
to give up on their dreams, but I was so determined to pursue my dreams and move
forward into my destination. It is so important that we stay positive and believe that
there is hope whether a person is being physically challenged or not. Many people
reached out to me because of the skills that were embedded inside of me and the
challenges that were ahead of me. Friends and family begin to do research to make
sure I stayed encouraged.

By looking and seeing way beyond my disability, I begin to press toward some
unbelievable career opportunities with major companies. One of the companies was
the State of Michigan that hired me as a Return Processor in the tax department. Time
went on, and my body begins to heal and I no longer needed a wheelchair or a walker,
but I still had minor issues but non-life threatening.

Faith and hope is what kept me strong and the love and support from family and
friends. It does not matter if a person is physically challenged or not, we are all
still human being. There are so many individuals who are physically challenged
daily around the world, and we do make a big difference in achieving our dreams
for employment, acceptance, and independence. Employers should hire people
with a disability because businesses benefit from hiring individuals with a disability.
People with disabilities have untapped resources of skills and talents that increase
workforce morale and make good, dependable employees. Working allows individuals
with disabilities to achieve their ultimate goal that creates an inclusive society that
recognizes a person’s unique talents and skill sets first and physical challenges second
in the world today, yesterday and tomorrow.

Darlene Hardy, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
Why should employers hire people with disabilities? There are many answers to this question and as someone with a disability I know them firsthand. Working with a disability I can tell you that trying to find a job out in the community can be challenging as not everyone is willing to work with your strengths and work around your weaknesses. Many seem to miss the fact that people with disabilities are great members to any team. Hiring those with disabilities not only helps them but also those who don’t normally work with disabled people. By hiring those with disabilities it makes others more aware of the disabled and what they go through. When a person with a disability gets a job it helps them become part of society, it gives them freedom since they learn how to work and deal with those who live in the community around them.

Working with others can help those with disabilities show improvement at work and can help them get along with others.

People with disabilities are hard workers and while they may be limited in some ways they are gifted in others. There are many types of disabilities, from people that need wheel chairs to move around to those who can’t see. While the disabled may be different from others, everyone deserves a chance to work. Just because you have a disability doesn’t mean you have less rights than others and by hiring them it teaches others to respect those who have a disability. Working with disabled people helps others get used to them and see them as people too. Everyone can get along, because those of us who have disabilities want to be seen as normal too. Being able to work makes us happy, it gives us a chance to see that there are others like us and that we can all work together.

Andrew Lynn, Manufacturing Services Production Worker
Greenhouse
Why Employers Should Hire People With Disabilities

Frank Abagnale Sr. once said; “Two little mice fell in a bucket of cream. The first mouse quickly gave up and drowned. The second mouse, wouldn’t quit. He struggled so hard that eventually he churned that cream into butter and crawled out.” Now I don’t mean to compare anyone to a mouse, however I do intend to say that some Americans with disabilities have the willpower of that second mouse. Nearly 1 in 5 Americans have a disability, that’s over 50 million people in America alone. These people lack the ability to have a completely normal life, but there is one thing that can make their life seem a little more normal, and that is work.

People with disabilities are more prone to depression. A job would give these people an opportunity to strive, an opportunity to interact with other people and to forget about their struggles and conditions. Everybody has skills, but they cannot put their skills to work if not given the opportunity. There should be more open minded jobs with workplaces open to everyone. Not hiring someone because they have a disability can be considered discrimination. They deserve the opportunity to be able to prove to themselves and others that a disability doesn’t take away one’s desire to be successful.

For most of us work can be considered obligatory and a burden, but for someone with a disability a job is much more than that, it is a privilege and a blessing. It should not be required for someone with a disability to work, but for those that have that willpower to churn the cream into butter, there should always be a place ready to welcome them and give them the opportunity to do so. America works best, when everybody works, and that is why I believe employers should hire people with disabilities.

Daniel Pineda, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Phoenix
Are you looking for a hard working employee? Someone who not only works hard, but also brings excitement, a smile and so much more! Employees with disabilities are such great people who deserve a chance to work for the money they want or need. Having a disability doesn’t mean stay home and get social security, if you have a disability and you would like to work, nothing should be getting in the way of that. Having job opportunities for those with disabilities allows people to get a chance to live in the real world and grow as a person. Having a disability doesn’t mean you’re not human, everyone should be allowed a chance to work if they have the skill. People with disabilities can be very smart and outgoing and they can work just as hard as someone without a disability. As a community, we should allow those who are willing to work for earning’s without it being handed to them, to do so. Let’s bring awareness to those with disabilities, open job opportunities for them and learn how our community can continue to make people of all kind feel as an equal.

Shaniqua Baker, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside

WHY HIRE DISABLED?

Well, because the disabled have a deep held desire to work, to be of service;
Yes, even a need, financial or otherwise, to

Hold onto their dignity and achieve their independence with earned income. Being responsible for their own livelihood is not always easy, for them or their employers, but it pays

Dividends beyond measure. A handicap
In some ways makes people excel in others,
Shoring up their many other talents. So, the disabled are superior achievers. With accommodations they become more dependable and always eager to
Learn when given the chance along with employment opportunities. Society is Doing the right thing in this employment partnership.

Jay Duquette, NPIC Customer Service Representative
Riverside
Why Employers Should Hire People With Disabilities

There are many reasons that employers should hire people with disabilities. One of the main reasons is because they are still people and if they can do the job, as well as do it effectively, then why not?

We live in a society full of stereotypes, many of those stereotypes aren’t positive towards individuals with disabilities, and when that is coupled with the fact that the media puts so much emphasis on vanity and certain body types as a way to categorize others on how desirable and valuable they are in society, individuals who don’t fit those molds can easily feel ostracized if they don’t measure up to those standards. That feeling can be applied to those without a disability alone, so imagine the feeling of someone with a disability. There aren’t many positive representations of those in the media with disabilities, so that feeling of not being able to measure up within society can easily be magnified.

By employers making the decision to hire those with disabilities, they are not only showing them that, despite their disability, they are still valuable, functioning members of society, but also that they aren’t looked at as anything less than a human being. By hiring them, it’s reaffirming to those individuals that their skills can be just as much of an asset to the company as those without a disability, and that within the company their disability is not a factor.

Shauna Gibson, CIC Team Lead
Battle Creek
Peckham, a community vocational organization, is a unique business and human services agency which values quality, diversity and performance. Our mission is to provide a wide range of opportunities to maximize human potential for persons striving for greater independence and self-sufficiency. We embrace collaboration, effective resource management and innovative approaches to achieve world class excellence.

3510 Capital City Boulevard
Lansing, MI 48906
517-316-4000
info@peckham.org
www.peckham.org