Voices of Peckham
Writing Contest

National Disability Employment Awareness Month
2017
Voices of Peckham

Voices of Peckham

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is all about showcasing the power of people with disabilities. At Peckham, we see the results and achievements of what people can do at work. Each year, we celebrate NDEAM with our annual writing contest. This year’s theme is “Inclusion Drives Innovation,” and we believe a great way to celebrate innovation is by hearing directly from the voices of Peckham clients who do amazing work each day.

The stories you are about to read are captivating. I am so proud of this workforce and the powerful sharing of incredible talent, skills and overcoming barriers. Peckham is successful because of the hard work and commitment of the thousands of individuals who work here.

Peckham’s mission has always been to provide greater opportunities for people with disabilities to earn and maintain meaningful employment. There is much to do to expand work opportunities for people with disabilities, but my hope is our work inspires other employers to consider the skills, talents and valuable contributions of this amazing workforce.

Peckham remains committed to working with employers to serve as a resource and solution to build an inclusive workforce that includes individuals with a wide range of disabilities.

We salute each of our clients who continue to demonstrate the power and benefit of creating workforces that are diverse and inclusive of people with a wide range of abilities.

Mitchell Tomlinson
President & CEO, Peckham, Inc.
The Voices

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

2017 NDEAM WRITING CONTEST PROMPTS

MY PERSONAL STORY AS A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

Alejandra Konkle · Second Place  
Catherine Larrison  
Chris Kirk  

David LeVan · Honorable Mention  
Anyonymous  
Jennessa Ramos  
Jimmy Compton  
Josh Preston  
Laura Breese  
M. Bappert  
Marcus Pest  
Margaret Hurdis

Margery Wakefield · Best Short Story/Essay  
Marisa Domina  
Robin Batdorff  

Shannon Nez · Honorable Mention  
Shawnniece Dedrick  
Tennille Harkness  
Wanda Johnson  

Zaire Seals · Honorable Mention  
Zoraida Garcia
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT WORKING MEANS TO ME</th>
<th>WHY EMPLOYERS SHOULD HIRE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Klopp</td>
<td>Naomi Steffes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicet Nunez Almaguer</td>
<td>Rashaad Frazier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon Palmieri</td>
<td>Tahmina Zahid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Gathof</td>
<td>Thomas VanderLaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgina Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilberto Medina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Street</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Zimmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay Duquette · Best Poem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica V. McLarty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Moore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Laferriere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Griffen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Hampton · First Place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maudie Gates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick G. Mindiola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena Burger-Fudold · Third Place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Marrah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Bozung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peckham Mission

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.
My Personal Story as a Person with a Disability
I have heard it said that “if you believe it, you can achieve it”, and I agree with that statement. I also believe in other positive statements like “we’ve got your back”, and “remember, this is a team effort”, and of course the famous Nike slogan, “Just do it”.

Not so many years ago, I was an immigrant to America finding myself excited about my new life, and at the same time scared and insecure about my future. As I think back, I remember being afraid to answer the phone when it rang because I was not confident of my ability to communicate in English. Driving a car for the first time, writing a check, grocery shopping, and preparing for a job interview, were all times of major stress, and ultimately provided a great sense of accomplishment when done.

Today, as I perform my duties at Peckham each day I often reflect back on where I came from and how the opportunity that Peckham gave me has allowed me to grow as an individual. I have been able to find confidence, and I have a sense of security, and I am a part of a team of similar folks who have been able to establish their own independence in spite of their personal challenges. We are a team, a team of good people who get better each day at understanding “if you believe it, you can achieve it”, and “Just do it”. We have so much to be proud of and to be grateful for each day. Where else could an insecure young woman from another country, or a person trying to deal with the hand that life has dealt them, come to work, find a career, and be part of a family that “has their back” and encourages and supports their efforts? At the end of the day, we are all very lucky to have found Peckham, Inc., and in fact, Peckham is lucky to have found us.

By the way, the little immigrant girl is now a very proud American citizen; and all day long she confidently answers the phone and provides support and empathy and answers to folks who need help. Is this a great country or what?
I have lived with the knowledge that I have epilepsy since the tender age of six, but I never really considered myself disabled. There was the inconvenience of the daily doses of medications to control the seizures and the occasional seizure to remind me that I was not quite like the others. There was my inability to even strive for the freedom of a drivers license until the age of twenty-two when I had finally been seizure free for two years straight. But thanks in large part to my family and friends, I was “normal.” I played kickball, baseball, and climbed trees with my brothers, sisters, and the neighborhood kids. I was never left on the sidelines because of my epilepsy. I played just as hard as anyone else. I was not treated differently. I never really thought of myself as disabled.

I would not get a glimmer of the truth until I joined the workforce and discovered what work meant to me. When I began to work, I would have my bad days. Three days of what felt like a strobe light pulsing in my brain while my head slowly spun. Words were not forthcoming. I knew what I wanted to say but the words just stuck in my brain no matter how hard I tried to speak.

Since I could not work to full capacity, I felt I needed to call in. Because I would miss three days straight, I got it into my head that work meant only bad minimum wage jobs. There were days when I did show up anyway and it would take someone else to point out to me that my bad days were a lot better than most of my coworkers’ good days.

My work ethic had always been strong probably due to the competitive nature of my upbringing and the fact that I knew I had to make up for the bad days. I have always been able to work and never thought of myself as discriminated against. But the very fact that I felt compelled to take the minimum wage jobs to offset my disability leads me to believe my past thinking was indeed erroneous.

Today, I have a job I feel good about, an above minimum wage job with benefits. I feel part of something bigger at Peckham and that is a good feeling disabled or not.
I have learned that not all disabilities are able to be seen from the outside and that each one of us are unique and valuable in our own way. Peckham has opened my eyes and allowed me to share my personal experiences and growths with the younger disabled employees in a manner that gives them hopes of independence, wife and kids, and so much more to life than they previously imagined that they could have or offer, and you need drive to be successful in life and I believe that is something I bring to the table. I enjoy being a contributing part of society and most important to me is that I provide for my family thanks to this great place we all call Peckham Inc…Peckham helps us all see value in our lives..
In this our moment
A time of our recognition.
We want to be remembered
Not for what makes us different
But what we did differently.
Stare not at our cadence or sway.
Look more at my production that day.
Keep in mind that it’s not what we cannot do that defines us
But, instead what we can accomplish.
Everyone has their limitations
Both physical and perceived.
Measure us not on our limits but instead on our deeds.
For some our limits may not be readily seen
These are real and not a scheme.
Haunting fears that cripple us with fright.
Unwanted events both day and night.
One must be brave to face their fears.
Working beyond their limits and fulfilling their careers.
When you don’t have a diagnosis or symptoms that are easily recognized, this is how others define you. You’re lazy. You’re dramatic. If you’re lucky enough to have had parents who weren’t critical, detached or abusive and neglectful, these were the phrases you often heard. We won’t mention what you’re told when you’re unlucky. Sometimes, you’re unlucky even if you did have a diagnosis - even if the symptoms were obvious.

For some, it takes a lifetime to realize it’s not just us. We don’t complain, trying to keep up with everyone around us and失望ed in ourselves for coming up short. We attempt to work, running ourselves into the ground trying to survive. We struggle with understanding how others are able to do so much and we can barely breathe at the end of each day. Let’s not talk about the effort of taking care of children, family or anyone else.

I was unlucky. Lazy was the nicest of the epithets I heard. To others, I was a normal kid with a strict parent. I was active, healthy; neither under- or overweight. I was quiet and any adult who stopped to talk with me said I was deeply intelligent. To my father, I was greedy, careless, ugly and a waste of brains. Long-term abuse exacerbated unknown conditions, adding to an invisible list. Conditioned to believe that I was the problem, I entered adulthood; new problems arose. I had children at 18 and struggled to survive. Unable to hold a job for long, I always needed to move - often across state lines. I wouldn’t accept help; conditioned to believe you’re the problem, you’re taught ‘help is for people who aren’t lazy.’ More than 10 years later, starting with a host of mental diseases that isolated me from society, made me nonfunctioning, I was finally diagnosed with FMS. I was told I’d had it from early childhood.

Rebuilding my life and unravelling the conditioning of childhood has been nearly impossible. I face new challenges daily. It’s lonely without a familial foundation, but I’m not alone. Others struggle too, and some are still fighting to be like those who aren’t carrying the weight of a disability. Remind each other that we cannot do everything and pain is never normal. Always remember that resting when you’re tired is never lazy.
Not again, go away, stop yelling at me,
I hate myself, everyone hates me,
Stop hurting me, I can’t take it anymore,
I’m done!! No one cares!!
If I cut myself, the pain won’t be as great as what I am feeling.
If I take my life, No One will notice I am missing.

The joys of depression and anxiety with a twist of suicidal!!
I never know what, tomorrow will bring,
Yet alone 5 minutes from now.
I try to hide my emotions, my feelings, my pain
But, it has a way of lashing out irrationally
I can be around family, with friends, alone,
At work, in a store, at a restaurant

BAM!!! POP!!! BOOM!!
There she goes again!!!

Water works, anger, blades, chest pain,
Crazy dark thoughts, clinching my fist at the world

Emotional roller coaster, has started
BAM!!! POP!!! BOOM!!
There she goes again!!!
My anxiety and/or depression
Shows up at the wrong time and/or the wrong place

I have been asked “What keeps you moving forward or motivated?”
My kids are my motivation, My moving forward,
My joy during my pain, My anchor in my storm
They are the band-aid to my cuts

I have seen better days, where I can control these “demons”
I use my experience to help those get through it
I try to find the positive in my crazy world to tame my “demons”
Find the good, in your bad moments in life.
When I first came to Peckham, I was terrified. My brain functions differently from others, which makes learning new things difficult for me. I can’t learn by being told how to do something, or in the case of KB, where to look. I have to actually do it, over and over, until I eventually learn how. That made trying to navigate KB while taking calls incredibly hard for me, until I finally learned the material and got good at it. Thanks in large part to my best buddy at work, Pravin Pullenayegem, the bald guy who sits next to me. Like many Peckham employees, Pravin took me under his wing, and walked me through the material. It was such a blessing to suddenly have the voice of KB sitting next to me when I transferred to the applicant side, and my fear was at it’s peak. Not only did he help me learn the new material, but he also helped me get over my shyness, which has burdened me my whole life. I didn’t know anyone on the applicant side, but then he started playing with me, so I immediately had a friend. Now we talk and tell jokes. He wiggles his pen and I chase it with my eyes. He predicts when a call will come through on my phone. I don’t know how he does it, but his predictions, unlike the weather man’s, are usually correct. While we were playing one day, I told my friend, “Pravin, I’m gonna write you a theme song someday, and make you into a STAR!” Then I saw a flier for this writing contest, so I figured, now’s a good a time as any. Pravin, if you’re reading this, then today you are a star!

“The Shiny Man”
(sung to the tune of “The Candy Man”)
By: Michael Morgan
Ask him any questions!
He’ll master any quiz!
Do-do-do-do-do-
He is the voice of Peckham!
He is the KB Wiz!
For questions you can’t answer,
raise your hand for
The Shiny Man!
‘Cause The Shiny Man Can!
Do-do-do-do-do-
The Shiny Man Can,
and he’ll leave you with a smile,
you can see it in his scalp!
Do-do-do-do-do-
He’s the neatest guy around!
He sorta looks like ALF!
If you gotta situation, raise your hand for
The Shiny Man!
‘Cause The Shiny Man Can!
Do-do-do-do-do!
My Personal Story as a Person with a Disability

They looked like strong hands up until 30 minutes ago; just as powerful and functional as my resolve to be the best. I had dedicated myself to learning Spanish and preaching to immigrant families on the east coast, yet despite my dedication, I feel robbed.

I can't breathe. I'm sitting in the passenger seat as my companion drives me to the ER. I call my Zone-Leaders letting them know I'll be home past curfew. I laugh about it and sound cool and collected over the phone, like I always do, yet I can feel every squeeze of my chest like my heart itself is suffocating. And my hands are weak.

To me, anxiety had always been an adverb. A mood to be felt under the weight of all the world. Yet now, it became my condition. I experienced fear every day after that night like the after-shocks of an earthquake. In two weeks, I had lost 15Lbs and all desire to work.

It's Christmas Eve. I step out of a family's home, shaking uncontrollably, and I throw up on their drive-way. Over the phone, the mission secretary tells me I need to consider resigning as a missionary and be honorably discharged to go home early. We hang-up and I hang my head in prayer asking for an answer to all the questions that plagued me. Why do I feel like this? What started these panic attacks? Can I face the shame of leaving my work unfinished?

In the late-night, the buzzing of my phone breaks the silence. Dr. White's cautious, monotone voice reaches my ears.

"Joshua, I'm calling to check back with you. Are you still feeling anxious?"

Tears well up in my eyes. "Yes Doctor. It's been two weeks with this medicine. Why do I still feel like this?"

"Well." -He clears his throat- "Be patient. It may take another week before it really kicks-in."

I take a breath and wonder if the old doctor would hear me if I started crying when, completely out of character, my psychiatrist speaks the kindest words I had ever heard;

"Josh...you are going to be okay."

Now, two years later, I really am okay. Having a disability is a great obstacle. But I have found a way to serve other people in a special way and I know that I'm more than my condition.

I am strong.
FRIENDSHIP

Laura Breese
MANUFACTURING SERVICES PRODUCTION WORKER | GREENHOUSE

Follow your heart wherever you are
Respect yourself for who you are
Inspiration goes a long way
Except life as it goes on
Notice all people can be loved
Decision is a choice to make
Serve others who need it most
Honesty is the best policy
In kindness is a way to be friends
Patiently be kind to one another
I didn’t understand until I reached my 40’s choices I made impacted my life negatively. I saw that other kids had a father and I didn’t, my father died 7 months before I was born. Having a few cousins that died as infants and children I worried about me or my four siblings dying also, I was also afraid of my mother dying. At 12 I lost a close friend who was murdered and I made a choice to not get close to anyone to not experience any more pain. In my late 20’s I started feeling very sad and was ashamed of my emotions. I started self-destructive behavior because I didn’t know how to express my thoughts in a healthy way. I had numerous Psychiatric hospitalizations and with the help of my social worker learned some Dialectal Behavior Therapy Skills. That was the beginning of choices in the right direction and I started getting jobs, this allowed me to feel like a competent person. The jobs didn’t work out for me but I still avoided making poor decisions. My daughter was in a hit and run accident and received a traumatic brain injury which inspired me to become the pillar of my family. She was not able to work and I saw that Peckham was hiring and that sounded like something I could do. I worked in the sewing department and struggled with my speed and I transferred to Quality Assurance.

I found something I was very efficient at and after 6 months I had problems with interpersonal relationships and quit. I reapplied 6 weeks later and was able to return to my previous job and I have been there almost a year. I know if it wasn’t for Peckham I would not be the strong person I am today and returning there was the best choice I have made. I have learned working for a place helping disabled people gain self-sufficiency that I am not alone and we don’t know what others are going through. I have accepted people from other cultures and beliefs, I have learned they can teach me to be a better person by listening to what they have experienced. I feel proud to convince my daughter to work at Peckham and hope she feels the same way I do about this company.
Two years ago I experienced an injury that left my left side paralyzed and caused me to be a mute. Yet I never considered myself disabled, only challenges that need to be overcome. When the doctors lost hope and told my wife I would never do the things I enjoyed again, I was motivated to get better and prove them wrong. It was a big deal just learning how to tie my shoes again. I am not ashamed of the term disabled, I now know that others deal with worse situations daily and I have grown a deeper respect for the term, and see others overcoming challenges every day. At one time I never dreamed of working again, or even working in a call center environment for that matter. I know I will always have my injury and the stigma that goes with it, but I will not use that as a crutch and limit my potential. I feel more clear after my injury and aware of the dangers in life but excited to face new challenges, I hope to give back to those facing disabilities and motivate them to face the challenges head on and not grow into depression that could be associated with the term “disability”. Bruce Lee said it best “don’t pray for an easy life, pray to endure a hard one”. Thank you.
“I am only one one; but I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do something I can do.”
- Helen Keller

When you look at me I seem normal right? A bright, high energetic, compassionate individual. You don’t see anything anything physically wrong with me, but little do you know I struggle every single day. I struggle every day with my learning disability, ADD, depression, and often debilitating anxiety.

I was diagnosed Learning Disabled and ADD in kindergarten, and it was such a struggle to keep up with the rest of my class, so the Special Education Department in Alabama placed me into the “Resource Room”. I felt instantly alienated from the rest of my peers at the tender age of 5. At the age of 16 I was diagnosed with depression, and at the age of 19 I was diagnosed with “generalized anxiety disorder”.

For the remainder of my school days most kids would say extremely taunting remarks, but I always felt like I was learning it was just at my own speed but I just couldn’t keep up with the rest of them. My junior year of high school I had the most amazing art teacher who shed some light and perspective that has still stayed with me for years to come. That teacher shed a different perspective on my disability, also gave me more courage to be myself and learn to love myself. Anytime I needed help with any other studies she would help me, she also had said many times that I wasn’t stupid or dumb. She would tell me that I am Magi, fearfully and wonderfully made, to embrace my disability and nobody was like me and to quit comparing myself to everyone else.

I have kept those words so close to my heart and they’ve helped me to learn not only about myself but others who are struggling with learning disabilities, ADD, ADHD, and mental illnesses.

When I graduated from high school I decided to join a local cosmetology school and I excelled, always passing my tests with 95% or better. For the first time in my life I felt like I fit in with everyone else. In cosmetology school I was the voice of reason and a huge advocate for the other students. We would have small study sessions, quiz each other, and give encouragement if we were struggling with a specific area. Encouragement goes for miles when you learn to support each other.

My sister told me about Peckham and what they offered people with disabilities. I decided to go for it, I’m almost done with training and for the second time in my life I feel like I fit in. It’s not just a job for me, it’s being around people that understand the struggles, encouraging each other, and to KEEP TRYING. The entire Peckham workforce has made the learning process easier for me. Any questions, they’ve got the answers. Any area I’m struggling with they offer help, it’s about being around people that care that take the time to make sure I am 100% on the same page as everyone else.

At 29 I’ve finally discovered my learning techniques, my abilities, along with my strengths and my weaknesses. Every single person struggling with a specific challenge makes them my hero.
My eyes are different from your eyes. No problem.

I weigh more than you do. No problem.

My brain is different from your brain. BIG problem, especially if I happen to have mental illness, which I do. Because I am mentally ill, I can be fired from my job, called names like “nuts,” “psycho,” “fruitcake,” “wacko,” “crazy,” “weirdo,” “loony,” and many others. So, I learn to keep it all a BIG SECRET.

I first knew that something was wrong when I was about seven years old. I was at a summer picnic at my grandparents’ house and I suddenly knew that I was different from the other kids. They were all playing and I didn’t feel like playing. Something was wrong and I called it the “shadow.”

The shadow followed me throughout grade school and high school. Some of my teachers sensed that something was wrong with me. I seemed troubled, depressed. But since we lived in an isolated part of the country, there were no mental health services, especially for kids.

It took me sixteen years to make it through college, but I finally did. Then, a strange thing happened - I started getting better.

I finished my degree and went on to get a master’s degree in social work. I decided that I would thrive in spite of the odds.

Today, I live a quite normal and happy life. I work part time in the community. I take my meds – faithfully. I have my own apartment. I drive my own car. I love music. I have written four books. I travel whenever I can.

If you met me on the street, you probably wouldn’t know that I was any different from yourself. But I am. My brain is wired just a bit differently. I have an over or under-abundance of certain neurotransmitters which cause my illness. That’s about all there is to it.

Don’t feel sorry for me because I have mental illness. It has been a challenge for me, but it has left me a more compassionate person. And for that I am grateful.

I heard about Peckham from a friend. “You should apply there,” she told me. When I first walked through the door at Peckham, I saw written across the wall in big words: “DIFFERENT IS AWESOME (DIVERSITY).”

I knew I was home.
Over the years I have had a learning disability ever since I can remember and it was very difficult for me to understand the text at school. Not only did I have a learning disability I had issues with my vision perception. As the years progressed so did my disability, it got harder up to high school. I was always being bullied because I was different than everyone else. However one day I decided to speak up for myself and asked "What kind of learning disability did I have?" My school psychologist said that it was a disability in which I could not understand the text I was reading, writing as well as my math skills. This was very hard for me to hear. I thought I would not be able to get a job. When I found out about Peckham, it was a chance for me to grow and be myself. Peckham has giving me a fair opportunity to grow and show my strength that I never thought I had. Being her is an amazing positive atmosphere and they should continue to hire people with disabilities. It does not mean we are the same are different in our own way and give our chance to shine in our own way and show our full potential to our best abilities.
True memories are painted on the walls
behind the smiling portraits.
Lift them and you’ll see:
sleepless nights,
love withheld,
cries unheard,
   lives lived in desperate isolation.

Sirens’ voices rise
   from beneath the floor,
calling me to lie down here,
press my ear to the splintered boards,
and listen to their songs ‘til my hair is long and gray,
to give myself over to the past
until I am consumed entirely.
Growing up, having a medical condition, has, and will always be a daily struggle. I do not like to define myself, by using the term, disability, although, they may have the same meaning. I feel that when you state you have a disability, it automatically labels you as being restricted and not being able to engage in regular activities, when I have so much more to offer.

My mother stated, when I was an infant, doctors told her that I would never walk, maybe never have children, and be prepared to make my life, a full time job for her and my father. But, she said, there was nothing stopping me! I was scooting around on the floor, rolling to where I wanted to be, you name it - I did it! I had many surgeries, to correct my way of moving and getting around, that my mother never doubted my life would be a challenge.

Today, I feel very accomplished with my life, and am very thankful my parents never gave up on me. I finished school, had two children, moved away from home to go back to school, taught myself how to drive and found the love of my life, who fulfilled my little family and gave me one more baby, who now grasps how to help mommy. On top of that, I actually got my driver’s license!

But, to let you know, it was very hard to find a job that was willing to work with my condition! I was turned away and was never given a chance until I found Peckham Inc., through my Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. Now I’m going on 4 years with Peckham, and am very thankful for this opportunity to know that, my life has no limits. I’m determined to do so much more. There is not one person in this world, who can tell you, that you cannot do it!

I was always told by my elders, that I should never feel ashamed, nor, embarrassed of my shape or form, and that I should never give up on myself, no matter how hard it gets in life. Given, the chance to live on this beautiful planet, with this special gift, is all the more, you’ll ever need to succeed and do what you came to do. I will walk in Beauty, stand in Beauty, and Beauty will be all around me.
My name is Shawnniece Dedrick and this is my personal story and experience with having a disability. I always was aware that I had a disability, even in grade school. When I would go to school I always thought it was normal to receive extra help from teachers and different support groups such as, academic success. I have a learning disability so it might take a little more time for me to understand how to do a new task. I didn’t realize how my disability affected me until I reach high school and math soon became my worst enemy. It took after school programs and plus the support at home to keep me motivated. It wasn’t easy staying focus and finishing high school, but I did it!

Entering my adulthood, my symptoms of my disability change. It went from a learning disability to realizing I also had ADHD and Odd. I realize it after having my first child at the age of 18. Fresh out of high school with a brand new baby was very changeling. In the process of her growing I learned to stop labeling myself as a person with a disability and I also learned not to look down on myself just because I struggle in some areas. Both my children helped change how I look at myself. When my children look at me they don’t see a person with a disability, all they see is Momma.

To closed I would to state. Having a disability doesn’t define you as a person. However, you being the person defines the disability. I made a chose not to say I have a disability, but being aware and knowing that I struggle in certain areas. No person is the same in any way and please know your disability is just a simply part of your personality. My struggles is what made me who I am today. This is my personal story and experience with having a disability.
I have Lupus. Lupus is a chronic inflammatory disease that occurs when your body’s immune system attacks your own tissues and organs. There is no cure for my illness. I was diagnosed 2 years ago when I began my employment with Peckham. It has been a challenge for my children and me. I was in denial. I sometimes still do not understand how I am sick. There is no one in my family with it. Since I have been diagnosed I have found a support group. We have our meeting’s once a month. They are helpful. I have met other people with this disease as well. They have had it a lot longer than I have. They give me hope that they will find a cure.

I know this affects my friends and family. There are days I do not have the energy to get up (very fatigue). There is loss of appetite. There isn’t to many people aware of Lupus. I am accepting my illness as a part of me. I am believer that there are many more great opportunities for those of us with disabilities. I believe once we learn how to live with our disability on good and bad days we will achieve our goals.
This story starts with a mental or physical insight of who Wanda Lynn Johnson is. Her survival is introduce to her when her parents introduced her to mental health in her childhood years. I’m from Flint, Michigan, but my parents came from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. I moved to Lansing, Michigan by surprise in nineteen-eighty four. I spent three months in a mental hospital because of my parents’ restrictions. And with this evaluation I must admit to the assault of a street drug used my life. However, that error came to my life I must apologize to my parents.

My personal appearance must have been seen by the public, cause I didn’t understand much of it myself. I had lost interest in high school, but I completed it. I ended up on the welfare. Welfare had placed me in a non-benefit life style where I’m financially broke. I continued to maintain my state aid check and medicade card until some how with the left over intellect I instancly found myself spending my state aid check at Mott Community College, I completed the two year program and graduated in a black rob. This assured me to keep introducing myself to daily life.

My parents pasting on was like a official leaving they just fall dead. I continued to work at Peckham comforting myself, and combining each day like a holidays. Each day is a work day and my clothing made a different now, they were like friends. I don’t want to mention talking to the dead but normally I talk to my parents leaving this earth more than when they surface this place. I now always compare myself with work which I think strengthens me and help me resist any injury that may come my way since the lost of my parents.

Now that I have stretched into working and the stress that come from the facts of life my daughter has brought home two off springs a girl and a boy. I didn’t have a boy! But things began to dawn on me and cause me to turn on my axises. This became as a new daze and a more reason to stay with working. The boy was growing faster then I could defend, and the words he began to speak stays on my mine.

The girl was like a fairy tale and faultless and this fantasy is mine. This opportunity has made me grandmother and she has brought home two addistional off springs this time two girls. Now to my surprise I find myself up in age (62) and my hair seems to be turning directly the same, I’m facing gray hair.

My life has directions and nature is a healer. I’m not married and I continue to depend on Mental health services and Peckham.
How does our society define beauty?

Growing up with a disability as a child was hard because words hurt, and I never felt I was beautiful. I was sick of tired of getting poke with needles, riding on a back of ambulances, hearing lame doctors jokes, wondering why my red blood cells are shape like a bitten chip, losing faith, and getting tease of I how look.

I felt like nobody ever was gone to feel my pain of what it's like to have Sickle Cell Anemia. Until one day I went to the beach on a hot summer day, I could hear the sound of waves colliding and felt the unruffled sea breeze grooming by, the soft white sand under my feet was paradise to me. The shimmering turquoise sea I seen, my reflection in the water that I am beautiful no matter what they say words can’t bring me down.

I said to myself with perseverance and confident,

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Beauty means to be free to conquer all things within yourself and outside yourself, meaning maintain stability which is self-control over your human/ nature with your head held high knowing your free. Beauty is not always your outside appearance beauty is inside and outside. You can have the prettiest face in the world but if your attitude is horrible now you become ugly and the beauty is not there no more. Beauty is held by SOUL!! it lies, waiting to come to surface. They call me ugly/ they call me fat big nose/little nose/you to fat/ you thin/you to sick/you stay in the hospital/you to black/ your skin is to pale/ put on some make up/plastic surgery and fix my life. [Why got be so rude don’t you know I’m human too.] “Society has a twisted mentally of the definition of beauty. What happened to loving all your curves and edges or your perfect imperfections or girl you’re just amazing the way you are. Haters are gone hate but I say this to you be WHO YOU ARE, yes sticks and stones breaks your bones but never let people words shakes you need to live without doubt. God is beautiful and so are you. We are all princes and princess like royalty so it’s true. And the definition of beauty is YOU!! Love the skin you’re in".
Whenever there is someone with unequal characteristics from those of a group, we feel the need to include him or her and act on the values of acceptance, compassion, tolerance, etc. However, sometimes we find that we can also perform this act of inclusion inversely, and the whole group can subscribe to the characteristics of the person that is “different”.

My work team is very multicultural. We know how to accept and understand each other despite language and cultural barriers. We’ve grown to discover each other’s customs, and when we speak about popular events—be they historic, social, cultural, religious, or simply culinary—each one of us contributes information about how things are (made, thought, practiced) in our respective homelands. These things make us know each other better.

Approximately three years ago, our little team increased by two. One of our “new” colleagues is hearing impaired. We welcomed her with excitement and enthusiasm, as we would welcome anyone else. However, something was missing in our interactions with her.

Communication was difficult and limited. Only one person in our team could communicate in sign language. Our primary mode of communication with her was exchanging written sentences, but this didn’t seem sufficient to establish a strong bond.

The communication barrier was also a challenge for her. There were bad days in which all she could do was collapse over her sewing machine, as if she was done with the world, perhaps because she felt we were indifferent or disinterested to her. These were times of miscommunication.

Several months ago, two of our colleagues received basic course in sign language by Peckham. Every Thursday for eight weeks, they pass on what they had learned to the rest of us. We started with learning the alphabet and kept up learning. Quickly, the barrier to better communication with our friend truly gave way.

For me, this is an example of inverse inclusion. Because all of us who can hear and speak and communicate with verbal sounds decided to learn a new skill and condition our group to fit the needs of an individual who could neither hear nor speak. I believe that our colleague felt happier after that, because she knew she mattered to us.

Unfortunately, she no longer works with us. She moved to another state, but she helped our little community see the value of inverse inclusion and overcome the barrier sometimes imposed by disability.
What Working Means to Me
Work to me means responsibility, learning and problem solving. When I work, I take my job very seriously because working for any company is a great responsibility. I am relied on to finish the most important tasks for the job, this is really important because I want to show people I can handle any task with great responsibility and complete the task without any problems or trouble. Problem solving is one of the main priorities of my everyday tasks. For example, a customer has a complaint about a certain mess that has been taken care of; to address the issue, I must ask what the problem is and deal with the issue as soon as possible. Another example of problem solving is a customer calls me and asks to speak to the manager to solve this issue. I kindly ask the customer to please stay on hold until I can find the manager and address the situation to him as soon as possible. Learning to handle any task is another important part of my job. Every day, if there is an all of a sudden new task for me and my work crew to learn about, I ask the most important questions on how I do the new task correctly. Then I know how I can finish it in the best way. Every day in my line of business, I am faced with new tasks and challenges. Sometimes I already know what to do if it is the already known to me. Sometimes I am given newer tasks for example auto scrubbing/ floor cleaning, when my manager told me I was going to get the auto scrubbing task, I didn’t know how to work the machine but thankfully I had help from my manager. He taught me how to work the auto scrubber and in only a few short days, I easily learned on how the machine works and how to keep it working and clean. This is why learning is such an important part of my job. I enjoy working at my job because it is very easy, helps keep me stay busy when I have nothing else to do. It also teaches me something new every day plus I enjoy working with the tasks I’m given every day and so by the time I punch out I make sure to remember my new skills and knowledge to prepare to tomorrow.
“El trabajo para mí tiene un significado muy importante, porque gracias a él, me siento más útil a la sociedad en que vivo; además, él me ha ayudado a formarme como persona, porque día a día uno toma más conciencia y responsabilidad de lo importante que es nuestro aporte laboral para el desarrollo de la economía del país.

Como persona con discapacidad, puedo decir que hubo un tiempo en que dejó de interesarme el estudio como el trabajo. Comenzaba a estudiar y luego dejaba la escuela, pero veía que pasaba el tiempo y no había hecho nada útil por mí, ni por el mundo en que vivía, hasta que un día decidí incorporarme a la escuela nuevamente. Comencé en una escuela para onceño grado, porque primero di el décimo grado; luego, seguí con mucho esfuerzo estudiando en las noches porque había conseguido un trabajo por el día. Cuando terminé onceño, seguí con el doce grado; me esforcé mucho trabajando pero estudiando también, porque no quería desaprobar. Al final del curso, salí con resultados satisfactorios, pues pasé del curso con buenas notas.

Después, empecé un curso de operadora telefónica y lo terminé, y empecé a trabajar como operadora (aunque anteriormente pasé un curso de Inspector a y lo terminé, pero no lo ejercí la profesión, porque me sentía deprimida muchas veces por mis problemas). Pero nuevamente decidí tener un nuevo avance en mi vida y [eso] fue el curso de Operadora Nacional, aunque digitalizaron las plantas y me quedé sin trabajo.

Más tarde, encontré un trabajo de limpieza en el hospital de personas con la enfermedad de VIH. Al año de estar en ese oficio, se desocupó un puesto de trabajo y me dieron la oportunidad de trabajar en la pizarra telefónica del hospital; y como tenía mi título, no hubo inconvenientes para ocupar este trabajo, en el cual estuve 8 años trabajando hasta que vine para EEUU.

Cuando llegué aquí, enseguida comencé a buscar trabajo. El primero fue en un restaurante elaborando alimentos, pero como este centro de elaboración presta servicios a los universitarios, cuando ellos salen de vacaciones, quedamos muchos trabajadores sin trabajos hasta que comienza de nuevo la universidad. Por esta razón, tuve que aplicar para un nuevo trabajo de limpieza en el centro de Lansing. Estando en este trabajo [de limpieza], apliqué para trabajar en la Peckham al tiempo me llamaron para este nuevo trabajo. Y me quedé solamente con el ahí; me enseñaron a operar todas las máquinas y actualmente sigo trabajando en la Peckham. “Muchas Gracias”.

Alicet Nunez Almaguer
APPRENTICE SEWER | GREENHOUSE
“Work, to me, has a very important meaning, because thanks to it, I feel more useful to the society in which I live; additionally, it has helped me form as a person, because from day to day one becomes more aware and responsible of how important our labor input is for the economic development of the country.

As a person with a disability, I can say that there was a time in which I lost interest in studying as well as work. I had begun to study and then left school, but saw that time was passing and I hadn’t done anything useful for myself, nor for the world in which I lived, until one day I decided to go to school again. I started school in eleventh grade, since the first time I had finished tenth grade; afterwards, with great effort I continued studying at night because I had obtained a job during the day. When I finished eleventh grade, I continued on to twelfth; I pushed myself working but also studying, because I didn’t want to fail. At the end of the course, I left with satisfactory scores, so I passed the course with good grades.

Afterwards, I started and completed a telephone operator course, and began working as an operator (even though I had previously passed and completed an inspector course, I didn’t practice the profession, because I often felt depressed due to my problems). But, I once again decided to have another breakthrough in my life, and it was the National Operator course, although they digitized the plants and I was left without a job.

Later on, I found custodial work at a hospital for people with the HIV illness. After a year of holding that position, a job was vacated and they gave me the opportunity to work at the hospital’s telephone switchboard; and since I had my degree, it was no trouble taking over this job, which I worked in for 8 years until I came to the US.

When I arrived here, I immediately began looking for work. My first job was at a restaurant making food, but because this processing center provides service to universities, when they go on vacation, many of us workers are left without work until university starts again. For this reason, I had to apply for a new custodial job in the center of Lansing. Being in that job, I applied to work at Peckham and at that time they called me for this new job. And I only stayed with the one here; they trained me for three months, they taught me how to operate all the machines, and right now I continue to work at Peckham. “Thank you very much”.

Translated from Spanish by Mei Bresnahan
I suppose when I think about what working means to me, I look at my life; and I try to understand what it’d be like when I’m not working. To me, I look at the future and what it means that I have this job, I’ve entertained various jobs. I’ve worked Security, Food Service, Warehousing, Audio Technician, and even a Secretary, Nursing Assistant, and as now as a Data Entry Specialist. Working in a call center doing a data entry is about as close to my ideal job as I’ve gotten. A Job to me is equal to a future, a future where I’m able to retire in the future and allow for those that follow behind me and go further beyond in the path I’ve led. I got this saying from a bookmark I once read;

May the road come up to meet you;

With the wind ever at your back.

This saying can be read another way.

"May you continue to walk towards the future, with your past experiences pushing you forward.”
I was recently asked what working means to me. I thought well it means everything. As a society that is our purpose, to work and take care of our families. But it also means more than that.

If I didn’t work I would be on a fixed income. I would not be able to afford a car. I may even have to use a government cell phone. I would fill ashamed and depressed. I would feel like a burden and I wouldn’t have freedom to come and go as I pleased. If I wasn’t able to get a job, then I would have to live with family or friends (if I was lucky) or in a government run nursing home.

So working means everything to me. I started Peckham in the spring of 2011. I was nervous and didn’t know what to expect. I thought, “how long will they keep me around, Will they really work with me the way they said they would, Will I be judged because of my disability?” The road was tough, I had bad days; I even had bad weeks. The staff supported me, they offered meditation classes for anxiety and I joined the garden club learning about growing my own food and protecting Monarch butterflies. I’m making a difference and I feel proud, accomplished, and I look forward to work with my friends. I even come in early some days to work out in the gym.

Six years later and I’m thriving. I was able to see a doctor and finally receive a diagnosis that explained my problems. I was able to receive therapy and I’ve made tons of friends. I even purchased a new car and went on a vacation to Canada. In the spring of 2016 I was approved to bring my service dog Angel to work with me and I’ve come even further since. She allowed me to be able to work my full shift without feeling so anxious. While every day is a challenge and customers can sometimes drive me crazy, I’m incredibly thankful to be working. The fact that it’s working for a great company like Peckham is even better. I look forward to many more years working and I know as long as it’s with Peckham, I’m going to thrive.
Working used to mean that I could put food on the table and a roof over my children’s heads. I have an extremely hard time interviewing for jobs so I would stick with work that didn’t have a huge interviewing process such as temporary work.

The unfortunate truth is that I had been working through a temp agency bouncing from employment to employment for the past 6 years; and making minimum wage or just a little bit more.

A few friends of mine had been working for Peckham and they recommended that I try to get hired in. After much consideration and research I decided to give Peckham a try so I filled out the paperwork. Slowly but surely I went through all of the steps that are in the process of working with Peckham and the government. Finally I got the email that I could start work!!

The first day of work I was very nervous and didn’t have a clue what to expect. Within the next six months a good portion of my classmates and I was able to not only pass all of our testing, but to become certified!!

Every day at work for me now is a blessing and gives me a sense of achievement. I always found fulfillment in my life with raising my kids and I still do that; but work has always been more of a means to an end. Now I feel like I am part of something bigger, something more. I feel that I can be proud of the work that I do and feel a sense of accomplishment when I walk through those doors at night to head home.
I thank God for giving me the opportunity of finding Peckham in my life. It is an amazing company that propitiates the freedom to work, without allowing incapacities, race, color, origin, language, sex, or age determine anyone’s eligibility.

In my case, someone of old age, with cardiovascular problems, and disabled to perform any task that requires physical strength, Peckham has made me feel utile. Here, I am productive and able to provide for my family, without being a burden to the government. All of this, thanks to Peckham, for being an inclusive company. All in all, Peckham is a blessing from God.

Translated from Spanish by Gilberto Medina
At the point I’m at in life, threats to my mental health come, not from my parents or doctors. No, those people understand and try to help, but rather the frustration comes from dealing with the well meaning but frustrating people who have no competence in this field. I’ve had overzealous preachers say I was possessed and my friends? As much as they care, you can’t trust people who likely don’t use better logic than you. When a doctor tells you that it’s just a chemical imbalance and you just need medication for it, it makes all the sense in the world. But when people usually not much older than you try to rack it up to you needing to get sex, that it’s all in your head, or that I was just depressed because I was running from possibly being gay, you get frustrated.

Frustrated because as time goes on, you come to realize that there were things that you wanted to accomplish in your manic states that would have helped you, but rather than ignoring the issue or self medicating, maybe there was help. This is where companies like Peckham come in.

As time goes on, priorities change. The reason the accusations annoyed me was because I told everyone upfront why I struggled in my latter years. Sure, I wasn’t popular with the ladies, but eventually time shifts your priorities. Girls aren’t everything and either new responsibilities show such as being a parent or getting married, or, hopefully you just want more from life. And it is that desire that leads you pondering life with a therapist or questioning if there’s something stronger to make you stop thinking.

Jobs like the one I have at Peckham help because it brings stability to an unstable mind. It is far easier to think and figure out what to do with my life when financially I’m much more stable. Fact is, I’m at the point in my life where having all the free time in my life but having to scramble to pay my bills is exhausting and ultimately does a number on your mental health. But these days, it’s much easier to wake up, even if it’s everyday before the sun.
Working to me means independence and not having to depend on anyone but myself. Getting back to work was really hard for me. After two bad injuries that resulted to me having major surgeries. While healing I decided to go back to school because my career goal had changed. I graduated with a certificate in Human Services and I also plan to go back and get my associate’s degree. It took me five years to get to where I am now. It has been a long journey but I have made a lot of progress.

There were so many different plans I made before I came to this fork in the road. It is amazing how your life can change in a split second. A car accident and a fall from a crack in the sidewalk caused me to change my plans. As a result my whole outlook on life has changed. Through my struggle I had only one person I could call in my time of needs my mother, who left me in the middle of my journey. She used to say that “The Lord will never put on you more than you can handle.”

When I feel like giving up, I can still hear those words ringing in my ears. Now I put my life in God’s hands. I know that God will guide me in the right direction. Whether it’s looking for the right job or a place to live. I know that God will place me where I need to be. I knew that I needed a job that would understand me and my disabilities. A workplace that would allow me to be productive and self-sufficient. I found it right here at Peckham. God opened this door for me to walk in.

Today my life is finally back to normal. I still have bad days but when I’m at work it somehow fades away and turns into a good day. Working keeps a roof over our heads, my bills are paid and food on the table. I have told my family and friends that Peckham has been a great inspiration to me. Through them you can accomplish many goals, all you have to do is put your heart in it! Peckham helped mold me into a stronger and better person making a decent and honest living.
Who was a man named Peckham?
A man with a vision
A man who made a contribution to humanity
A man who created a company that revolutionized hiring practices in the workplace forever
A man who tapped into a human resource
That had been sadly overlooked
A man who redefined the word “Disability”
A man who found a niche for those who were classified “unemployable”
A man who was a motivator to thousands he employed…giving them a sense Of worth, dignity and pride…no matter their disabilities
He turned Can’t into Can
A man whose vocabulary did not include “Disability”, but rather “Ability”
To this man Peckham I proudly say; "Thank you"
You opened a door and let me in
And now I can proudly say “I am part of the Peckham Clan

Jacqueline Zimmer
NPIC CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE | PHOENIX

THE BEGINNING
I am like a leaf-eating dinosaur, the last of a dying breed.
Or, the blacksmith watching a Model T spray dust
In my aging face—
Trained as an office equipment technician.
Repair, sales and service; an IBM Selectric typewriter
Technician, self-employed all my life, deemed too old to hire
by many. In this twenty-first century
Provided a opportunity by Peckham because of a long forgotten
Service connected disability.

Now serving as a technician of truth, for passport services.

Freedom—that's what working means to me! A sense
of accomplishment shapes my days now.
Excited about finding work that is enjoyable and being prideful about the products being inspected, I am renewed of spirit not only for the military of the U.S., but I am also grateful to have a part in an integral process of supply and demand. There is an engrained yearning for long term employment to accomplish longevity and some of my goals are already being accomplished. There is also the refreshing of skills that pose themselves important again, so my sense of self-worth is also receiving a new reflection. Getting back to work is rewarding and allows me freedom to help sustain my future. When I started working at Peckham I was living in the homeless shelter to provide the security of my daily needs. I am slowing gaining back what I used to earn before job loss, and before the financial strain of the economy that kept bills from getting paid. I paid too much for rent and didn’t get paid enough. Now I have caseworkers supporting my work, my home and my financial intrigue. This help comes from cooperative partners working strongly together and it works out to keep blessing me here in a welcoming work environment that shares its fruits with the employees. Here I gain opportunities to communicate and receive greatly from excellent case management results that made a difference in so many areas to help improve my whole life.

Returning in places
Visions flowed through me again
Pure clarity comes

Thank you Peckham for helping me rebuild.
My working career began at age 15, when I had my first job. I am now 43, and have been working since then. My parents instilled the work ethic into me at an early age, showing that hard work pays off. However, after being diagnosed at Mayo Clinic with Fibromyalgia in 2014, and working for an employer that really did not care about people with disabilities, I moved on. After one month of working with Michigan Rehabilitation Services in Clinton County, I found employment through Peckham Inc.

So, what does working mean to me now? It means stability, support, encouragement, and self-sufficiency. I now feel my feet on the ground, support from my fellow co-workers, encouragement from my managers and Vocational Services Specialist, and self-sufficiency from myself. I now feel that I can talk to anyone within Peckham about my struggles with having Fibromyalgia and they understand and can accommodate me. My coworkers understand chronic pain and offer solutions that they have tried.

Since receiving my Bachelor Degree in Human Resource at Baker College Online, this is what I strive to relay to companies outside of Peckham to understand and implement. That management, Human Resources, supervisors, and coworkers need to understand the value of having an employer with a disability and what they bring to the workplace...their expertise.
What working means to me is I can get out into the community and work with and for people that have some sort of disability. Everyone works for money but I use my paycheck to buy things I need to live on and also to pay my bills. I also work to meet others with disabilities; some are obvious and some you cannot see. Educating others that we are not very different than they are, we all have a disability. I also work to understand what it feels like to work with a disability. Working with a disability is sometimes hard because a lot of people get treated differently because of their disability. Everyone should be treated the same way even if they don’t have a disability. Working means to me that I can build self esteem and self-confidence. It also teaches me how to communicate with various personalities and adapt with changes. It also teaches me how to get along with others with disabilities. Working teaches me how to be more independent in life. Working means that you learn to live and work alongside people that may or may not have a disability. Working also means going to a job that helps people that do have a disability with what they don’t know how to do somethings. Working also means that I can do something I love and I can meet other people in my job that may or may not know what I have or do. Working also means I learn life skills for outside in the real world. I learn communication skills and more. Working with my disability teaches me that I can do anything I put my mind to in the long run. While working I deal with a lot different disabilities. I also learn to deal with a ll sorts of people and cope with a ll different attitudes in the working world. Working also means getting up and going to a job that pays me for doing what I love to do. I make friends and enemies but that’s what working also to me. Working means that not everything is sweet and full of rainbows. It can also mean thunder and bitterness. Working means the world to me some people hate their jobs but me I love working. I feel like I am married to my job.

Kayla Laferriere

FOOD SERVICE I GREENHOUSE
Personal attention to your needs, and mine
Employment, regardless of disability
Changing every one's mind about hiring disabled workers
Keeping employees happily employed!
Having pride, being independent, working & earning own money
Able and willing to accommodate your needs
Measuring your abilities, to qualify you for Upward Mobility
Independence and striving for knowledge
Noticing ones abilities, mentoring and improving on skills
Calling on each person to do their best, then providing all the tools
for US to do the rest!!
I have an interview today.
I hope it goes ok.
I'm worried because of the past.
At previous interviews I got picked last.
Not hiring because of a disability is against the law.
From my experience that is not what I saw.
“Oh we thank you for coming in today.”
“We may call you back, but we can't say.”
The look in your eye already tells me the news.
There is someone else that you'd prefer to use.
It always feels like tiptoeing on a wire,
Hoping that I'll be the one that you hire.
Do I try to look as normal as I can be?
Or do I try to be proud of being me?
Should I showcase my disability?
Or should I only display my personality?

Even when I am lucky enough to be hired,
It's clear that my issues tend to make people tired.
Dealing with my problems does require extra time.
Nobody wants to spend extra effort on their own dime.
After a while employers tend to lose their patience.
Small things, turn into bigger things that bug their conscience.
“We like you but...”
AKA “You're kind of a nut.”
“It's really not about you, ya know...”
“But we would like you to go...”
“I know we said you could stay,”
“But it's time to be on your way.”
Round & round the same thing is on repeat.
Over & over feels like a dog that people beat.

But maybe today's interview will be different.
I know my wife will want to know how it went.
Peckham was introduced to me by a friend.
Hopefully this interview isn't the beginning of the end.
“Welcome to Peckham,” they say.
“This is a place we hope you'll stay.”
“We all have issues here, so everyone is free,”
“To be whoever they want themselves to be.”
“We don't judge each other & try to be nice.”
“Health & Wellness is set at a good price.”
“To reach your potential, we'll help you fly.”
“There's no limit, not even the sky.”

Getting the job, I feel so high.
I can look my wife & daughter in the eye.
It gives me a chance to live with dignity & pride.
It feels like Life has its arms opened wide.
Opportunities are available to me.
Now I can try to be the best me I can be.
If I could paint a portrait
Of what Peckham means to me
I’d paint it large and beautiful
With its many activities

From its humble beginning in 1976
To now 41 years later
It’s created quite a mix

Rehabilitation and human services too
Was the firm foundation
Of peckham’s builder’s view

Mitchell Tomlinson at the helm
Navigating businesses stormy seas
Has safely led peckham to harbor
Through fluctuating economies

A collage of many cultures and disabilities
Paints peckham’s portrait with reality
Not prejudice but accommodating actions beckon unto me
“come and be a part of our community”

Upstanding in our community
We can hold our heads up high
We are not ashamed and
I can tell you why

We are hard workers and dependable too
We really appreciate our jobs

I know you know it too
That’s why we are good employees working hard for you!

Give us an opportunity
Put us to the test
We will work with pride
And do our very best

Hire us we’ll make you proud
Regardless of our disabilities
We will stand head and shoulders
Above the rest of the crowd

We all contrive to make Peckham thrive
Sewing, trim and turn, quality inspectors too
Packing and shipping, we’re all a part of the peckham crew

Environmental services, kitchen workers too
Forklift drivers and supervisors comprise Peckham’s crew
Farmers, phone call reps, warehouse workers too
Office personal and managers, not a few
Uniquely merge together to become Peckham’s crew

Needless to say, we are all Peckham’s portrait
I think that I can say without shame
The world’s largest lumber mill could not build Peckham’s frame
What Working Means to Me

Patrick G. Mindiola

NPIC BILINGUAL CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE | RIVERSIDE

I like my job.

I know, I know, in these cynical and self-serving times, statements like this one are rare, unusual and seldom uttered out loud, if at all. But it is true! I do like my job, but not with the unreserved and unconditional affection of a puppy, but rather the tempered measured familiarity of old friends. Of course, I do not love, or even like my job all the time, that would be insane. You see, I work at a call center; all day I take calls from anybody and everybody that dials an 800 number in search of answers to questions regarding a particular process. Sometimes, when the calls threaten to be overwhelming, be it because of the large volume of calls, the vicious proclivity of the callers or the drudgery of the repetitive questions, you can yearn strongly for the end of your shift.

The job is stressful and demanding albeit not in a physical sense. In most situations we refer, for guidance, to a data base (KB) that tries to cover all possible scenarios and advise the Customer Service Representative (CSR) as to how to proceed. It is not, however, a mindless job, many responses are affected by many factors, and even though there usually is a standard procedure for most situations, sometimes this is not the case. Many times it comes down to a judgment call on part of the CSR. Often the decision on what path to follow is a result of a combination of common sense and understanding the procedures and processes involved. It is a fairly difficult job where a great degree of responsibility is placed on our shoulders; to avoid carting some of these pressures home; not taking the job home, can be challenging. The easy camaraderie with my fellow workers and attempting to find humor in any situation keeps me grounded, and may account for preserving my sanity as well.

Occasionally, not as often as I would like, I am able to help someone; somebody who is in dire straits, who needs a little guidance on how to proceed or what steps to take to solve a situation. Many times the help is appreciated, and a tone or comment suffices to feed a feeling of satisfaction for a job well done. This in a nutshell is the reason why I like my job.
Some days, I want to do it all.
Make friends. Crack jokes.
Tell stories. Go for adventures.
These are the easy days.
The days everyone can be on board with.
The days people can handle.
Some days, I see no reason for any of it.
Waking up. Getting out of bed.
Being friendly. Putting in effort.
These are the hard days.
The days no one knows what to do. What to say.
How to help. How to “handle” me.
These are the days I am beyond grateful
To work at Peckham.
Beyond thankful that such an environment even exists.
These are the days that, despite my disability,
Despite this malfunctioning brain,
I have a job.
A place where I feel almost normal.
For once in my life.
Almost... neurotypical.
I can’t speak for everyone with a disability.
I can’t even speak for everyone with depression,
Or anxiety.

I can only speak for myself, and hope that
Someone, anyone
Will find my words relatable.
Take them to heart.
Maybe even find inspiration.
What I can say, is all I have ever wanted
Is to be appreciated.
Understood.
Despite, what I’ve always felt, the most
Negative aspect of myself.
Peckham understands.
Here, I am appreciated.
I am understood.
I am the majority.
And it’s so breathtakingly wonderful.
Refreshing.
A shock to my tired, battered mind.
I am so thankful for Peckham,
And Peckham is thankful for me.
What Working Means to Me

Working to me means discovery, discipline and dignity. From babysitting in high school to working currently at Peckham as a Customer Service Representative with the U.S. Department of State; each working environment brought its own unique discovery:

"You want me to clean the baseboards and change diapers for 50 cents and hour"? I thought. (No, thank you!) However, I enjoyed working at the local Big Boy restaurant as a car-hop and I earned enough money to pay my own way to Germany as an exchange student.

As an exchange student, I fell in love with the culture and couldn’t wait to go back. The day after I graduated from high school, I flew to Frankfort to work as a nanny for a family living in a small village near Nurnburg. Expectations and cultures clashed. I was let go. (Good thing I had made friends the year before!) I should have utilized an agency; rather than arrange a position as au pair for myself. This is a prime example of "working to me means discovery!"

As years progressed and I struggled with my disability, I discovered my limitations as a college student, and later; out in the "work world". I worked in many job setting before I came to Peckham: work means to me discovery as to what I am suited for and what I am not.

Working as a parent, although at times a daunting responsibility, is a lifetime of discovery; and certainly the most satisfying job I have ever experienced.

Working to me also means discipline. It’s a sacrifice to get to work in the morning; but working helps meet our family’s expenses. Work also means to me the discipline of striving to achieve excellent customer service. Peckham, partnering with the federal government; holds high standards. Peckham provides excellent support staff to assist me in reaching my goals as a Customer Service Representative for the U.S. Department of State. I flex my mental muscles every day at Peckham!

Working to me means dignity. My disability often led to zero self-confidence. Landing a job always gave me a sense of purpose, and restored dignity. Jobs with more responsibility, seemed to hold more dignity. But over the years; no matter the work: I discovered dignity comes from within. Discovery, discipline and dignity; they intertwine to make up meaning for me in the workplace.
Worker for Peckham means a lot to me. I get my own paycheck. I do pay bills, put gas in my car and lawnmower, and pay for grocery, and pay for fun things. I go to movies and baseball games with friends. I take vacation with my sisters or by myself. I love to help other people out and meet new people at work. I get out of the house for work and keep me busy so I lose fat faster. I don’t want to gain weight back. Working keeps my mind busy, makes people happy and makes myself happy too.
Why Employers Should Hire People with Disabilities
Employers should hire people with disabilities not just for the common good but to give people a chance to be successful in life and work towards bettering themselves and others. Peckham makes me feel confident and strive to be a better person everyday. Without the opportunity of working with them my life would be completely different. Especially when your body is limited to accomplishing tasks that may be easier for others but not yourself. Not all employers are as understanding as they should be to accommodate their employee’s needs to be successful in their line of work.
Sometimes People See Me, and Only See Some Fragility, without Understanding that Other Parts of Me Have Greater Agility. for this Reason, They Can't See How I'm Happy with a Disability, and That is Because I Know, it Should be Classified as “This Ability”.

Rashaad Jamal Frazier
NPIC CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE | PHOENIX

MORE THAN ME: A SHORT STORY
As a person with a disability, I find it very important for employers to hire people with disabilities. There is a false image that a person with a disability is someone who is unable to walk, talk, or partake in "normal" activities. Although this is somewhat true, disabilities can come in all forms and shapes. These disabilities can also have many benefits in the workplace. Looking past what an individual cannot do, employers find that disabled individuals have developed strong focus due to physical limits. When perceived from a broader view, employers realize that disabled individuals limitations only serve to strengthen them in the long run and make them greater assets to their business.

The daily struggles that a disabled individual must overcome is what makes them the persevering, hard working, and skillful employee that employers are looking to hire. With the help of generous organizations such as Peckham, both the employer and the individual with a disability can benefit.

Individuals with disabilities overcome daily challenges which in return makes them stronger and exceptional at dealing with challenges in the workplace. Dealing with obstacles daily can lead to the development of complex and creative ways of thinking. This is another reason employers should not overlook disabled individuals because, in numerous cases, they are the ones that are most eager to work. Often times these individuals have fewer opportunities to work and once they get their opportunity they take advantage of it by being the most hardworking and loyal employees. Making accommodations for disabled individuals in the workplace makes them even more likely to stay loyal to the business. Hiring disabled workers also boosts the reputation of the business because these honorable actions help the workers remain independent and get treated fairly instead of getting turned down for a job for reasons out of their control. Therefore businesses like Peckham, remain the beacon for hope for many workers and set an example for businesses to follow in order to succeed.

Overall hiring disabled workers has multiple benefits. These individuals are hard working, loyal, and critical thinkers. Companies like Peckham play a vital role in society. They enforce the message that a disability is what someone has and not what someone is and therefore remain leaders in society. Hiring disabled individuals not only benefits the employee but also the employer.
Disability stars with D, but so does diversity. In the workforce, some people think those with disabilities are defective, but we bring different perspectives, outlooks, and talents. Diversity strengthens the workforce by bringing together disparate people and uniting their divergent abilities. Employers who overlook potential employees because they're disabled are putting themselves at a disadvantage.

Every day at Peckham, many differently-abled people come together in one place. They work together to achieve success. Peckham wouldn’t be the same without them. If Peckham can achieve monumental success by employing a many employees with disabilities, then it stands to reason they’re doing something right. And if those people with disabilities can unite to achieve great things at Peckham, it proves that other employers are missing the unique blend of diversity and inclusion that makes Peckham great!

Ability diversity encourages people to try new things and think in new ways. It’s a potent blend that benefits employer and employee. Employers need only to open themselves to the possibility that employees with disabilities can be just as good as those without disabilities. It’s not just visible disabilities, either. Employees who aren’t neurotypical find it easier to “think outside the box” and devise innovative solutions. In some ways, having a disability isn’t really a disability at all—it’s just a different ability. Employers who don’t recognize this are missing out on the unique skills that a diverse workforce bring to the table.

Why should employers hire people with disabilities? An ability-diverse workforce can’t be underestimated. Anyone who does is misjudging us.
Peckham, a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1976 to provide job training and competitive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The name honors former State of Michigan Rehabilitation Services Director, Ralf A. Peckham.

Today, we have grown to be one of the largest vocational community rehabilitation programs in the state of Michigan. Our clients are a diverse group from many partnering agencies.

We offer more than 30 different rehabilitation and human services programs from art to career planning, pre-employment screening to facility based training, youth programs to organizational employment and residential services.

Peckham is committed to assisting job seekers secure and maintain long-term employment, allowing for job upgrades and career advancement. A wide range of services are offered with a focus on job readiness skills, career exploration, resume development, interviewing, guided job searches, as well as developing interpersonal and coping skills to enhance job retention.

We provide people with physical, cognitive, behavioral and socio-economic challenges, a platform to demonstrate their ability, learn new skills, participate in work and enjoy the rewards of their success. Greater self-confidence and improved self-image are gained as clients strive to reach their full potential. Peckham provides opportunities so clients can experience meaningful employment growth.