



Peckham Provides Entry-Level IT Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Grand Rapids, MI - Peckham Inc., a nonprofit that provides training and employment opportunities to individuals with significant disabilities, has partnered with Goodwill of Greater Grand Rapids to offer entry-level careers in the IT industry.

The new opportunity has given a renewed sense of independence, confidence and freedom to agents like Jonathan Krieger, 31 who began in January. Krieger, who has cerebral palsy, came to Peckham with an unfulfilling work history – most recently working customer service at a cash-advance facility, and before that unemployed.

“Finding companies to accommodate a disabled workforce is very hard. They think people with disabilities are more of a burden than a future success story,” said Krieger. “At Peckham, your disability is not a barrier to you receiving gainful employment, and the positive work environment allows you to be as successful as you possibly can.”

Peckham earned the work through AbilityOne, a federal program that provides jobs to people who are blind or have other significant disabilities. With the unemployment rate of people with disabilities hovering around 70%, through AbilityOne, organizations like Peckham can continue to create meaningful work opportunities for thousands of individuals with disabilities each day.

“There was a time, where because of my mental challenges I didn’t think I could do anything else. I didn’t think I would be able to learn anything different,” says, Dan Zandstra, 39, who joined Peckham in February.

“Without a place like Peckham, it would be very difficult for me to work. There have been times (in work), when my anxiety/depression has been so paralyzing, it has made me just as paralyzed as someone who can’t physically move,” said Zandstra. “Peckham supports you in reaching your highest goal and working through your challenges. It feels like a family.”

The work is challenging yet rewarding. Agents go through a 15-week training course to earn their COMPTIA A+ Certification. After completion of training and certification, they can begin their work – providing quality technical support to federal agency employees.

“It feels good to be a person with a disability who can get up and go to work every day. I am in a job where I don’t require support from others and I feel valued as a person,” Krieger adds. “Having a program like AbilityOne and Peckham working together to create jobs for people with disabilities, allows people like us to overcome those barriers and become a valued member of society.”

