Growing up in Tucson, Grayson Stogsdill was like most other kids, except for one very important aspect... he had Type 1 diabetes. Not wanting to be different, Grayson preferred to ignore those things he knew he was supposed to be doing to maintain his health and the things he needed to avoid that could do him a lot of harm. As a teenager, he chose fitting in with his friends over doing what was best for his own sake. His “wake up” call came very early.

Two weeks after his 21st birthday, Grayson lost his eyesight. Completely. Forever. Diabetes is the number one cause of people losing their sight. It doesn’t have to happen if you follow the rules you’re supposed to. If you rebel against those rules — like teenagers often do — you will learn the hard way that diabetes can do terrible damage to your body and even take your life.

Grayson tried to reverse the damage with surgeries with no luck. He finally had to face the real facts of life. He was blind. His sight would not come back. He was still a young person with hopes and dreams, just like everyone else, and if he didn’t make changes, he would lose a lot more than his eyesight. It took losing his sight for Grayson to finally see the light.

It was 2004 when Grayson decided to accept his disability and start turning his life around. He registered with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to begin vocational rehabilitation. For four years he was part of their SAAVI Business Enterprise Program. He attended school and worked in real jobs to gain the skills and confidence he needed to be able to work and support himself.

Through hard work, Grayson got the opportunity to manage and operate a small café in Phoenix. He then got a job operating the switchboard at the 355th Communications Group at Davis-Monthan AFB. These jobs were giving Grayson valuable experience and skills he would need for the real world of work.

Grayson was receiving disability benefits through SSDI. As such, he also qualified for a program called

Former Beacon client
Grayson Stogsdill on the job at Tucson Electric Power
This is it, my final article for Beacon Times! Progressing through the CEO search process and thinking about this newsletter has brought on a wave of nostalgia for me, as you can imagine. These reflections bring to mind pleasant reminders of the Beacon purpose and mission; of the countless people who have come into my life, including those served and colleagues; and of the growth and changes that have taken place over these 37 years. Here are the highlights:

What’s been going on?

1980-2017

NAMES

We’ve had a few! When I arrived in 1980, the organization was a mouthful: RWAC was the mnemonic for Rehabilitation and Work Adjustment Center. That name gave way to TETRA in 1986 — no meaning, really — but rather a name we felt would get our foot in the door for more work. We were in the midst of growing our contract work and felt our name involving “rehabilitation” gave our prospective contractors a limited, preconceived idea of what our workers were capable of doing! In 2003 we merged with the former Beacon Foundation and we again change our letterhead. In an effort to let the community know we would retain the familiar “Beacon” mission and yet add a new dimension in linking with TETRA, Beacon Group, Inc. was chosen as the new name. It is a name we have grown into as we became a group of locations and multi-faceted businesses under one umbrella.

WHOM WE SERVE

We exist to serve with excellence, all those in need of our services. Over the years we have served — and continue to serve — people with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental illness; those suffering from PTSD and those with autism; people whose lives that have been altered by industrial accidents or other injuries; anyone who seeks to find fulfillment from work in a way not always possible in the usual conditions and workplace setting. The ages have ranged from 16 to the late 60s. Needs continue to determine the type of work and activities that are suitable.

NUMBER OF CLIENTS SERVED AND JOB VARIETY

More opportunities for more people! This growth is what Beacon Group is all about. In 1980, we were serving 37 clients with in-house assembly jobs, including hats/visors, wooden survey stakes, and redwood flower planters. We now serve over 600 people daily (more than 1,000 annually) in community enclaves, individual-supported placements, competitive community work, center-based employment, and day treatment programs. Current work contracts include the aerospace (Huck/Alcoa) and medical device (Ventana Medical) industries, packaging, internet product fulfillment (international and domestic service), document destruction (3,000 customers), collating and mailings, military facility support operations and management, fleet car washing (all Jim Click Automotive locations), landscaping, 1.5 million square feet of janitorial services (including several federal buildings), shelf stocking, I.R.S. mail room operations, and local utility companies (SWG, TEP). We have clients working at over 60 locations in the Tucson and Phoenix area, and on military installations in Sierra Vista, Salt Lake City, and Indian Head, MD. The competitive employment jobs are too numerous to mention; there are literally thousands of jobs that have been filled by Beacon employees over the years!
**FACILITIES**

Buildings, buildings, and more buildings! From the 9,000 square feet of building space, we have expanded to 64,000 sq. ft. at the Glenn site, and an additional 25,000 sq. ft. at the Stone Avenue building, plus an office building in Phoenix. These facilities expanded substantially in both 1988 and 2009 with major building campaigns to accommodate our growing number of clients and work contracts. We have recently purchased adjacent property on Oracle Road to provide adequate client drop off and pick up, staff and visitor parking, and company vehicle parking. Plans for this property also include the installation of solar panels to offset energy costs.

**MERGERS**

The more, the merrier. Over the years, it has been advantageous to combine forces with other agencies/organization that were in tune with our mission to serve people with disabilities. The first merger was in 1993 with a DDD (Division of Developmental Disabilities) program, Adaptive Aids. We joined staff and clients to build a larger voice in the rehabilitation community. The second merger joined a Phoenix-based placement program, SWBIRA, to our ranks, to expand our presence in the Phoenix area. Then, in 2003, as mentioned above in our name change progression, we merged a third time, joining forces with Beacon Foundation. Again, many clients and talented staff, as well as dedicated Board Members, came together to promote the dream of providing the best possible services and opportunities for our clients. These mergers took our operating budget from $200,000 in 1980, to our present budget of $18.6 million. And, with growth of the budget comes more staff; more staff can provide more variety of programs; more programs provide more opportunities for more people! Growth is good!

**ACCREDITATION OF SERVICES**

We strive to be the best. March 1980 was the first of what has become a series of all sorts of evaluations of our programs and practices. Since 1980, we have had reviews by CARF (the national rehabilitation accrediting body) every three years. In the most recent review, we received the highest possible rating — one with no recommendations! Beacon Group is AAA-certified for document/electronic destruction, and CIMS-certified for custodial services. Beyond our services being certified, we have several workers and staff members that hold secret clearances for our work on military bases.

**PEOPLE**

The key component to success! The years have brought us persons with bright ideas, progressive ways of thinking, and a devotion to serve our clients. These passionate people have served as staff and Board Members, involved parents, and community leaders who championed the cause of hiring Beacon clients as workers. We have grown from the vision of these people; the infusion of knowledge gained through attending national and local educational activities/learning conferences; and desire to have our organization live up to its name... to be a beacon leading the way into the future. What a blessing has been to work side by side with people who strive to provide limitless opportunities for people with disabilities!

**REMAINING THE SAME**

With all the changes and growth, is anything the same? A resounding... YES!! With each new day, each staff member hired, each merger, every decision made, every dollar invested... no matter what the name of this organization has been, our goal has remained the same: to provide the best possible opportunities and experiences for each individual client. I am thankful to have been a part of the Beacon history, growth, and mission over these 37 years. The Beacon community and experiences will forever hold a special place in my heart and memory.
Ticket To Work through the Social Security Administration (SSA). The program offers support to help SSI/SSDI beneficiaries go back to work without automatically losing their benefits. Only a few organizations are authorized by SSA to provide job development services to Ticket To Work holders. Beacon Group is the only organization in Tucson — and one of two in Phoenix — allowed to provide these services for SSA.

In 2014, Grayson was referred to Beacon for help with job development and placement in full-time employment of his own. He was assigned to Beacon Job Developer Joe Bribiesca. Joe helped Grayson with things like résumé writing, job interview skills, employment interests and job searches. In today’s economy, Joe emphasizes Job Fairs as a good place to test yourself, help focus your search and practice presenting yourself to employers.

Grayson started following Joe’s advice and started attending Job Fairs all around Tucson. Job hunting is not easy. Job hunting as a blind person is even harder. Grayson got discouraged and considered giving up. Joe helped him stay positive and keep at it. Joe has worked with hundreds and hundreds of people — all with disabilities — to help them find good jobs in spite of their challenges. He knew Grayson would find one too.

Six years ago, Beacon started an annual event here in Tucson called DREAM. It was a Job Fair just for people with disabilities. DREAM was a huge success, growing bigger every year and spreading to other cities around Arizona. Last October, Grayson attended the DREAM Job Fair in Tucson in hopes of finding an employer who would not be hesitant to hire a blind candidate. He hoped someone would give him the chance to prove himself.

Every year, many Beacon clients and other people with disabilities do find jobs through the DREAM Job Fair. Grayson wasn’t one of those — at least not right off. He had gotten better at using job fairs as a chance to make contact with employers and leave good impressions. One of the contacts he met last year was Margie Morris, a Program Manager of Talent Acquisition and Workforce Planning with Tucson Electric Power. It’s her job to find workers just like Grayson.

A large part of Margie’s responsibilities include finding veterans/wounded warriors and other workers with disabilities. It’s a strong corporate priority at TEP to hire those with challenges and give them the chance they deserve. Margie was very impressed with Grayson and very much wanted to hire him. Unfortunately, there were no openings at that time for what Grayson would qualify for. He would have to wait a little longer.

This last summer, Grayson was attending another job fair. Margie Morris was also there at the TEP table. She recognized Grayson and told him she had a job
possibility for him. This July, Grayson was hired for a contractor position as an Admin Assistant in the Human Resources Department at TEP. He works at the front desk answering phones, greeting people, scanning and filing. With just a few special pieces of technology readily available, Grayson handles all his tasks with no special help. Grayson says, “I love my job. TEP is the golden nugget for me.”

Margie Morris says, “We didn’t know how it would work at first, but now over six percent of our workforce has a disability. They really take minimal accommodation,” she adds, “and there are lots of local resources that can help with the process, like RSA, Beacon and SAAVI (Southern Arizona Association for the Visually Impaired).

Grayson agrees. “SAAVI had great training, and I wouldn’t have gotten this job without Joe Bribiesca at Beacon.”

Grayson has a lot going on in his life. He is married and has three children. His wife, Michelle, is also visually impaired. Her brother is State Senator Carlyle Begay. Grayson says he shares advice and insight with his brother-in-law on issues concerning people with disabilities and the blind.

Grayson is also using his unique experience and abilities to help others at TEP and out in the community. He did attend the DREAM Job Fair again this fall, but this time he was there as a representative with the HR team from TEP! He is active in TEP’s Health and Wellness Program as a liaison and a speaker. He is also active with the American Council for the Blind. He is hoping to get a guide dog in May, which will give him more independence.

“You’ve got to try to find out what you can do,” says Grayson. “You don’t need eyes.”

Beacon, RSA, Ticket To Work, SAAVI and now TEP all know that. They just needed Grayson to “see the light.”

Do you want to go back to work, but are worried about your benefits?
WE CAN HELP!
Do you want to learn how to possibly keep some of your benefits?
WE CAN HELP!
Would you like a support system (résumé writing, interview skills, etc.)?
WE CAN HELP!
Are you between 18-64 years old and get SSI or SSDI?
WE CAN HELP!
Phoenix Rising!

Beacon Group is developing community worksite groups in the Phoenix area that will provide job opportunities for people with disabilities. A year ago Beacon Group had only one community worksite in the Phoenix area — a Walgreens setup crew for StarMaker. Beacon recognized that the Phoenix area does not provide as much opportunity for people with the most significant disabilities to work in the community.

To address this need, Beacon Group embarked upon a plan to develop community worksites in the area. We received grants to start up our effort. We hired a Business Development Manager, Louis Lujan, for the Phoenix metro area to generate new community worksite locations. Louie has deep experience in sales and marketing to local government organizations. Earlier in his career he served as mayor for the City of La Puente, CA.

These community worksite groups are Beacon Group employees who work within other companies or government organizations. They provide a positive impact on the culture of the company, and also provide a valuable business service.

Our efforts will be rolled out over the next several years with plans for dozens of community worksites in the Phoenix area, all providing employment opportunities for many people with significant disabilities.

If you know of any organizations that may benefit from a Beacon Group community worksite, contact:

Louie Lujan, Business Development Manager
Direct telephone: (480) 725-9416
email: LLujan@BeaconGroup.org

To date, we have started the following new worksites:

- **Internal Revenue Service** – mailroom operations, two PWD, three people total employed
- **Bureau of Indian Affairs** – custodial services, one PWD employed
- **Bureau of Reclamation** – custodial services, one PWD employed
- **General Services Administration, Phoenix Federal Building** – custodial and landscaping services, five PWD, seven people total employed
- **Waste Management (three sites)** – debris removal, four PWD, seven total employed
- **StarMaker** – warehouse operations – two PWD employed

In addition, we are working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to add landscaping services to our current contract.

Business services represented include:

- Landscape maintenance
- Warehouse work
- Stocking
- Mailroom work
- Custodial services
- Vehicle washing
- Recycling
- Specialty problem-solving crews
Beacon announces new Program staff

Audrey Kaye is a new Program Manager. She is a Tucson native and a graduate of NAU with a Bachelor’s degree in psychology. Audrey has significant experience working in rehabilitation with people with disabilities and the elderly. She has served as a Care Technician in two rehabilitation centers as well as two local nursing homes. She was also a Care Coordinator for an in-home agency.

Susan Hart is also a new Program Manager/Employment Specialist. Her emphasis will be finding competitive employment opportunities for clients in the community. Susan has a background in special education. She also has worked with adults with mental illness both in Tucson and Phoenix. Specifically, she worked with clients to increase their skills and to find employment and housing.

Todd Weber is also a native Tucsonan. He has a BS in Business Management. He joins Beacon as an Employment Services Specialist for the Ticket To Work Program. Todd has a strong background in sales and operations management. Todd’s daughter is a Beacon client working in one of our landscaping crews.

We congratulate Susan, Audrey and Todd in their new roles and wish them the best of luck!

The 6th Annual D.R.E.A.M. Job Fair was held Wednesday, October 12th inside the Tucson Convention Center’s Ballroom. This new, larger venue welcomed no less than 375 eager job seekers and 42 potential employers.

At least five hires were reportedly made on-the-spot that day, and a number of follow-up interviews most certainly resulted in even more new positions filled. Congratulations to all the new hirees!

For yet another D.R.E.A.M. success story, check out this issue’s cover feature with Grayson Stogsdill.
Great News... The Arizona Tax Credit has doubled! Donation limits to qualifying organizations (including Beacon!) have doubled this year. Single donors can now receive a direct tax credit of up to $400, and married couples up to $800 on their Arizona tax return. You can get direct dollar-for-dollar back on your state taxes up to these amounts.

You can make a sizeable contribution to one of Arizona’s most effective non-profit organizations basically for free! More importantly, you have a chance to see that more of the thousands of people with disabilities in our community can find a job and help support themselves.

The “gift” of self-reliance, independence and feelings of self-worth are priceless prizes that many people with disabilities never benefit from.

Gifts to Beacon can be mailed, or made electronically with a credit card. This can be done by phone or online at www.beacongroup.org. For more information, please call Lish Silver at (520) 622-4874 extension 121.