Through the years, Beacon Group has shone as a light of hope and opportunity. When we empower each other in creating opportunities for people with disabilities, a lit path forward emerges from what seems like a dark year. These stories of hope and determination are shining examples of lighting the path forward.

Karlee Egger, who after spending thirteen years in a power wheelchair as a result of cerebral palsy, signed up for a Kenpo karate class that changed her life. She is now an assistant instructor and successfully employed at a local call center.

While her path forward might have seemed dark before, now — due to her own sheer determination and working with Beacon Group Employment Specialist Dick Gribble — Karlee’s path is exceptionally bright. Her story begins on page 3.

After facing many challenges on her employment journey, Cassandra Yazzen is happy to be “back on her feet” and working part-time in Pulse® Protects production. It is Cassandra’s job to test the brake lights on one of two large proprietary testing machines, then package the product for distribution. Learn about Cassandra’s connection with Pulse® Protects beginning on page 4.
Beacon Group continues to light the path forward during these “darkened” times.

Beacon Group is lighting the path forward for people with disabilities. I want to remind everybody that we need many paths forward for employing people with disabilities. That is why we offer so many different employment options at Beacon Group. We are most successful by developing an individualized plan for each person we serve.

The pandemic has been with us seemingly forever. People with disabilities have lost jobs during the pandemic and fallen even further behind people without disabilities. As a reminder, today only 28% of working-aged people with disabilities are employed. Today’s difficulties seem to obscure or darken our overall path, but we at Beacon Group find ways to light the path forward through all of our collective efforts.

Contrary to the darkness we may feel, the reality is today there are many employment opportunities in Arizona. I’m not going to speculate why, but many employers are desperate for employees. Now is a great time to get people with disabilities employed.

As I write this article, indeed.com lists over 100,000 job openings in Arizona. Two-thirds of these are job opportunities suited for people newly entering or re-entering the job market. Now is the time for people with disabilities to find jobs.

In response, Beacon has strategically positioned programs to increase job growth for the people we serve at this crucial juncture in our economic recovery.

Beacon Group received support from generous funders to grow our mission during the pandemic. We are using these funds to employ more Employment Specialists, who work individually with the people we serve to get them jobs where they can be employed independently.

Most of the people with disabilities who our Employment Specialists work with have not had a job in years or, in some cases, ever. Employment Specialists are on the front lines of our mission. They have a truly lasting effect by working individually with clients to help them find work that best suits them and their new employer.

One of the stories in this issue of Beacon Times talks about the great work one of our Employment Specialists, Darick Wilson, is doing to create an individual path forward for the people we serve. He is one shining example of the many hard-working essential front-line workers that allows Beacon Group to successfully deliver on its mission.

GREG NATVIG, Beacon Group President/CEO

To our referral source partners in Phoenix and Southern Arizona: We have the capacity to get people with disabilities jobs. Please send referrals to us!

To employers: We have hundreds of people who want to work. We will find the right individual for your organization to solve your staffing needs.

To people with disabilities: Be resilient and continue working towards your employment goals. Beacon Group is here to support your progress.

To donors: Thank you again for your continued generosity. Your continued support helps us deliver on our mission year after year.

“Thanks to everyone who supports our organization!”
Two months into beginning a Kenpo class, Karlee Egger had finally built up enough confidence to try on a pair of roller blades. For a person with cerebral palsy and who had been in a power wheelchair for thirteen years prior, this would prove to be no easy feat.

Kenpo is a form of karate and Japanese martial arts that requires intense mind and body coordination. Karlee’s resilient ability to get back up and rise to the moment before her, despite immense physical challenges due to her cerebral palsy, is one of the keys to Karlee’s success — both personally and professionally.

“I got out of my wheelchair, fighting my way with the help of my instructor, Mr. Schierloh,” says Karlee. “On that end, thankfully I am back on my feet and have been for several years now.”

After being unemployed for a long period, Karlee originally came to Beacon Group in 2017 and began working with Ticket to Work Employment Specialist Dick Gribble.

“Karlee is a very focused and determined individual,” says Gribble. “Professionally, she has incredible drive to both find a job and to continue working. She adapts to the challenges of her disabilities and finds the right employment fit for her.”

To aid in her employment search, the pair initially focused on refining Karlee’s résumé while locating and interviewing with potential employers.

For Karlee — a proud recipient of dual master’s degrees in accounting and finance — she found her employment fit in both a local call-center as well as in a variety of roles with Kenpo University. At the University, she took on the roles of an administrative assistant and a fill-in assistant instructor — a task which required the completion of an eight-certification program.

Robert Schierloh, who is the owner and head instructor of Kenpo University, explained his approach in teaching many types of students including children and adults with and without disabilities. “So, I work with each student, even if I have a class of 20 to 30 people. I tailor each one to each individual person. Each person has a different learning level.”

For Karlee, the decision to begin a course at Kenpo University and eventually work there has been life-changing. Studying the martial art itself has helped her with body coordination. Her biggest challenge was learning to adapt movements with the left side of her body which is more affected by her cerebral palsy.

Karlee also credits Kenpo with lifting her overall mental health. “Kenpo has improved my overall spiritual well-being and emotional happiness,” she says.

As a result, during this past year of an unparalleled tough job market, Karlee has maintained both of her positions at the local call-center as well as Kenpo University where she took on tasks that included rewriting technical manuals or having them translated into eight languages. When courses eventually resume at full capacity, those efforts will bring a greater appeal and accessibility to the school by attracting a wider variety of students with diverse backgrounds.

Regarding her own employment and personal journey, Karlee’s advice to other people with disabilities is simple. “It doesn’t matter what you have, anything is possible as long as you are willing to allow yourself to find a way to make it work.”

Her words serve as a reminder that, during times of adversity, it is best to light the path forward. Imagining new possibilities is sometimes the first and most important step!
Beacon Group and Pulse® Protects began their mutually beneficial business partnership in 2007. At the time, Pulse® was a budding start-up with one very bright idea. They had patented a safety device for a vehicle’s third brake light that creates a rapid pulse four times in 1.2 seconds when the brake pedal is depressed. A fleet study conducted by Pulse® has shown this safety feature leads to an over 30% decline in rear-end vehicle accidents.

Beacon was hired to provide turnkey service in multiple aspects of their business and scale with Pulse® as demand for their product increased. Dave Johnson, Vice President of Operations at Beacon Group, describes what Beacon does for Pulse®:

“After receiving products from their manufacturing facilities, we inspect and inventory the various pieces. We rigorously test the electronic products on a custom-designed testing machine to ensure quality. Finally, we package the Pulse® product in preparation for shipping to their supply house.”

As shown with Pulse® Protects, Beacon Group’s business model allows it to scale with business partners’ demands. Regardless of how much product is received from manufacturers, Beacon Group has the capability to deliver on goals with reliability and effectiveness. Beacon Group’s production workforce of people with disabilities are often cross-trained on a variety of tasks, and they can be quickly reassigned based on customer need.

Cassandra Yazzen, a person with disabilities served by Beacon Group, works in Pulse® Protects production nearly every day. It is Cassandra’s job to test the brake lights on one of two large proprietary testing machines.

“You start clamping them on all of the machines and then you plug them in. They are color coordinated, so you plug them in there and it takes about 90 seconds,” says Cassandra.

Once she finishes testing the Pulse® product, she initiates the packaging process.

“You put them into the bags, and you get the books. There’s the wires, the books, the stickers, and the zip ties and then you’ve got a few extra of the ends right here and then the barcodes on top,” Cassandra concludes.

Cassandra has faced many employment challenges, intensified by her poor vision, her need for public transportation and the ongoing pandemic. She is happy to be “back on her feet” and working part-time with hopes for full-time employment. Earning minimum wage while working on higher skill production tasks supports Cassandra’s job growth and long-term employability.

Brad Dorsey, President of Pulse® Protects, lauds people with disabilities such as Cassandra who serve an important role in the Pulse® business.

“If there is a product issue from the manufacturer, it’s critical that Beacon finds it,” he states.

Not only does Beacon Group’s production team provide superior and cost-effective services for Pulse® Protects, the team has also contributed to a higher quality end product. Dorsey recalls a few years prior when Beacon workers caught an irregular number of defects in their product that led to quality control changes at the manufacturer.

“It had us re-examine the factories and helped in my decision-making process to actually switch factories,” says Dorsey in retrospect. “You know that was a great catch by the employees, and it was significant for our business.”

Consequently, there are much fewer product defects even as Beacon Group continues with the same rigorous testing protocols.
Pulse® Protects also sees the social impact benefit of building a partnership with an organization like Beacon Group that creates opportunities for people with disabilities.

“I think it’s really important to help the less fortunate in society — to be able to give them a sense of purpose and accomplishment,” says Dorsey. “There’s always a sense of goodwill coming from that, and it reflects well on our company.”

Pulse® Protects has utilized Beacon Group’s services for 14 years as their business has progressed. In recent years, they have made significant donations and become a sponsor of Beacon Group’s annual Holiday Festivity.

Now with hundreds of installation partners located across 43 states, Pulse® Protects has grown considerably since 2007. Beacon’s production support has played a critical role in this growth, and Dorsey finds comfort in the fact that he can focus on growing the business knowing that Beacon can meet their needs, regardless of pace.

“Beacon has done a great job,” says Dorsey. “Whenever we’ve needed them to step up and do something, they’ve always been there for us and done the job.”

Pulse® Protects and Beacon Group, working together, have created safer roads and greater opportunity for people with disabilities — a thriving partnership that is sure to last for years to come.
As Ashley Davis pushes her cleaning cart, a wide smile comes across her face. Always affable and happy to work on the custodial crew at Air National Guard and a Homeland Security facility, Ashley keeps a quick pace as she wipes down sinks and mirrors, ensuring each area is spotless before moving on to the next task.

Her enthusiasm for her work is a shining example of the dedication and innovation of the people with disabilities that Beacon Group serves.

“I’m proud of my work. I’m proud of coming on time, and never ever calling out,” says Ashley.

Prior to coming to Beacon Group, Ashley worked at the dining hall at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. When the dining hall closed, she and her family began searching for new opportunities. That search led them to Beacon Group where she has focused on custodial work for the past 18 months.

During her time at Beacon Group, Ashley found an employment fit in Group Supported Employment, a program where a small group of two to six people with disabilities work with and are supported by a Job Coach, who provides work task guidance and direction as well as assisting in developing soft job skills like work attendance and staying on-task.

Throughout her time at Beacon, Ashley has built a strong bond with her job coach, Laurie Campos. This has led to satisfaction and success in her job.

“I stay on-task, and I don’t ask what I do next... I just go right to it. I make Laurie proud!”

Taking great pride in her work, Ashley has made significant progress in recent months.

“Ashley has come a long way,” Campos notes about her journey. “At the beginning when I first had her, I provided a lot of guidance on tasks, but now, she works much more independently. She’s awesome and has grown so much in her work. I’m teaching my clients how to strive. I want them to be excellent and they are getting there.”

Ashley is the type of worker that employers look for when hiring permanent staff. She is genuine, dedicated, helpful and loves her job. She has received praise from both Beacon staff and customers, with one recent customer making a financial donation in honor of her custodial work crew.

Looking towards the future, Ashley has her eyes set towards working on her own more independently but understands that for her, the journey to get there will take her more time and depend on her own comfort level.

“I wish I could work on my own, independently,” she admits. “But not yet.”

Right now, she is happy with her custodial work crew support system at Beacon.

“I improved working hard. I like working at Beacon. It’s a good, awesome job!” she concludes.
In 1992 at a local Boys and Girls Club, high school freshman Darick Wilson began his non-profit career caring for and empowering young people. Wilson, now an Employment Specialist in Beacon Group’s Employment and Transition Services, has a considerate and engaging personality that is obvious to anyone he meets. He has an immense desire to serve and an unrelenting drive to support people with disabilities in their employment journey, finding and securing work opportunities that fit their unique needs.

Following high school, Wilson provided group care services in a residential setting, caring for people with developmental disabilities, serious mental illnesses, and behavioral health needs. He then spent 10 years working for the Arizona State Hospital, primarily in high acuity units before moving up to project work and learning about outpatient services. This transition in his career ultimately led him to Beacon Group in 2017.

“Beacon gave me the opportunity to focus in on one subject and support people with disabilities in that one way versus having so many things on the table,” says Wilson.

In contrast to his caregiving background, Wilson likes that Beacon Group gives him the platform to engage in a positive manner. He is proud to be able to help people with disabilities grow and find greater independence through employment.

The pandemic has challenged Wilson, but he is quick to point out the successful strides that have been made by Beacon Group as it continues to serve people with disabilities.

“I think we did a great job during this pandemic while trying to meet the needs of our clients and staying engaged,” he offers.

He also notes Beacon’s quick implementation of remote delivery of service as well as the ability of the people with disabilities Beacon serves to quickly adapt to technological innovations during the pandemic.

“I think it’s changed to where it’s sped up the technology aspect,” Wilson continues. “They’re trying to get work in a technology age to where you’re clocking in over a computer, phone and email, so it really helped us speed up the platform of technology that our clients are going to be using.”

Wilson’s excitement and dedication to serving people with disabilities is recognized by his supervisor Nichole Walla, Beacon’s Senior Manager of Employment Services.

“You can often hear Darick’s voice across the office,” says Walla, “but that is because he is so passionate about what he does and what he believes in. Darick is a team player and always steps up to help with other programs when his peers need assistance or should they be on leave.”

Over the past four years at Beacon Group, Wilson has found comfort in his job and pride in the services he can offer people with disabilities. During that time, he has experienced growth, change and challenge while recognizing the benefits of working for a well-established organization with a long history of creating greater opportunities for people with disabilities.

“I understand Rome wasn’t built in a day, and I firmly believe that. It takes diligence and time,” he emphasizes, “but I think we’re on the right path.”

Darick Wilson
Focused and Engaged!

Darick (second from left) with coworkers Jessica Cummings, Gloria Garza, Nichole Walla and Ali Mahdi.

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