



Communications Office
News Release

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Habitat for Humanity Embraces Workers with Disabilities

PASCO COUNTY, FL – Habitat for Humanity is known worldwide for reaching out to low-income families. They are also committed to giving people with disabilities the chance to work. One local affiliate is going above and beyond when it comes to offering job opportunities to those who just need a chance. “Habitat for Humanity of East and Central Pasco County is an organization that serves the local community,” says Crystal Lazar, Chief Operating Officer. “Hiring a diverse group of employees is another way Habitat can stay connected and serve the people of Pasco County.”

The Dade City office has seven employees with disabilities on staff right now. That means nearly half of their staff have some type of disability. “Habitat has a staff that comes from various backgrounds,” Crystal says. “When we combine our diverse staff, and a culture that enables the best ideas to bubble up to the top, we can grow our building capacity and serve more families.”

Robert Manrique is one of those employees, although you’d never know it if you just looked at his success on the job. He works at Habitat as the ecommerce coordinator, and uses a wheelchair to get around. He says his disability doesn’t impact the way he’s treated by anyone at Habitat. “Working with a disability just hasn’t come up at Habitat,” Robert says. “It just isn’t an issue. They are very appreciative of what I do.”

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) helped successfully partner Robert and Habitat after Robert completed his bachelor’s degree. VR provided Robert with counseling, guidance, and a job coach. “I wish all my clients were like him,” says **Jose Sostre**, Robert’s VR counselor. “VR helped pay for his degree and multiple wheelchair repairs. I’m impressed by the dedication he’s shown since, to find and maintain employment.”

Robert is grateful for the support from VR. “VR helped me a huge amount,” he says. “I only have good things to say about VR.”

While his dedication to the job is just one of the qualities that makes Robert a great employee, a strong work ethic and pride in their jobs are some of the many traits an employer can expect from a person with a disability. This is a resource Habitat for Humanity of East and Central Pasco County has realized, and they have a rich history of embracing people with disabilities.

MORE

Habitat for Humanity of East and Central Pasco County Florida was one of seven businesses recently honored as a statewide recipient of the Florida Exceptional Employer Award. The Habitat affiliate has hired more than 11 people with disabilities in the past year and a half.

Florida's Vocational Rehabilitation program is committed to helping people with disabilities become part of America's workforce. Our employer-focused website, **FLJobConnections.com**, allows businesses to search at no charge for employees who are ready to go to work, as well as to post available jobs. VR has 80 offices across Florida, and last year helped 6,071 Floridians with significant disabilities find or keep a job. For more information about VR and its services, call (800) 451-4327 or visit **Rehabworks.org**.

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REMINDER FOR MEDIA--When reporting on stories about people with disabilities, remember to use language that puts the person first, rather than the disability. For example, use phrases such as "people with disabilities" (instead of "the disabled") and "person who uses a wheelchair" (rather than "wheelchair bound"); and "people with a mental illness" (rather than "the mentally ill").