

## Morningside's 2021 President's Award

Morningside's 2021 President's Award was presented to the Pierce County Team. They were recognized for their collaboration, creativity, innovation, and supportive work environment. The office has experienced tremendous growth the past several years. In a challenging environment faced with the pandemic and rapid growth, the team has continued to be flexible and resilient in adapting to ever-changing environments. We continue to applaud the team's profound awareness and focus surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as the team collectively works to model and promote DEI initiatives throughout the organization.

Tabitha McMillan, Career Consultant, reflecting on the ethos of the Pierce County office said, "I would say the creativity of the team in supporting our sole focus, on client driven services and helping them reach higher goals, is paramount."

Sky Chafee, Quality Assurance Manager, said, "We have a culture of gratitude and positivity in this office. There is strong support for teammates and clients all the time. The staff was very flexible during a time when we were experiencing so many things."



Pierce County Staff: Rachel Jensen, Bianca Payne-Jones, Sky Chafee, Tabitha McMillan



Rachel Jensen, Program Manager, said, "We genuinely like each other and the work we do and we find value in connecting as a team, with the people we serve and with our communities. We see barriers as opportunities and work hard to cultivate a positive, fun, safe, brave learning environment."

Heather Evans, former Manager of the Pierce County program, currently Organizational Development Director said, "The environment was created such that staff are very innovative and exude a growth minded culture."

Congratulations to the Pierce County Team for their positive work environment and exceptional service to individuals with disabilities!

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## Outstanding Employer of the Year Award

Jonathan Pleger, President/CEO presented the Outstanding Employer of the Year Award to Derek Black, owner of NW Diesel. In doing so, Jonathan said, "You have been phenomenal as an employer including Bruce into your team and treating him like everyone else on the team.", referring to Morningside's client Bruce Voss.

Bruce began working for NW Diesel in November of 2020. He was originally hired as a part time employee tasked to perform janitorial duties, clean the workspace, and ensure the shop was properly equipped to open for business for the day. When Bruce expressed interested in learning about mechanics, Derek, without hesitation, began teaching him the basics of automotive mechanic work. NW Diesel and Derek have continuously encouraged Bruce to learn and perfect new tasks. Bruce now works full time at 40 hours a week. In addition to his janitorial duties, he now performs oil changes, differential services, fills out customer invoices, assists coworkers with their projects, and much more. Bruce has also been tasked with operating the forklift! Derek and his crew are great at providing natural supports for Bruce through mentorship and camaraderie to help guide him towards success.

Derek states, "We appreciate having Bruce here. He is part of the team. Morningside has been a great support to us and Bruce along the way, helping us to get him to this point of independence on the job. Bruce is great; he basically is our lube tech and utility worker helping with many jobs."

Derek has always been patient and dedicated to helping Bruce develop new skills. Currently, the team is supporting Bruce by helping him pass his driver's test. With his driver's license, Bruce will be able to take on more exciting tasks and continue to grow at NW Diesel. Bruce has become an important and reliable part of the team, and is on his way to having a lifelong career as a mechanic.

Derek gave Bruce a chance that others had looked past, and has played a key role in Bruce's success in the workplace. Congratulations and thank you Derek and NW Diesel!



(L to R) Jonathan Pleger, Pres/CEO Morningside; Derek Black, Owner NW Diesel; Bruce Voss, Lube Tech NW Diesel

## The Joanne Oljefski Award

The Joanne Oljefski award is named after a wonderful woman who passed away fairly early in life. During her employment at Morningside she was always positive, saw each challenge as an opportunity, and was a strong supporter of her co-workers. Most importantly, she believed in the possibilities for people with disabilities. Her commitment, caring, and respect for clients was evident in her daily life. The annual award is presented to someone who embodies the same traits, characteristics, and passion that Joanne exhibited. This award, which has been given since 1994, is in recognition and honor of her.

This year's award winner is Patty Miller-Penn. Last month, Patty celebrated her ninth year working at Morningside. Patty is the Discovery Coordinator, overseeing the Discovery Program. Discovery is a service for individuals with developmental disabilities who are unemployed and have minimal to no previous employment experience. Several of her co-workers nominated her for this coveted award.

One nominee stated, "Patty is mission driven and focused 24/7-365. Patty was recently promoted to Discovery Coordinator for her excellence in providing Discovery services, and for her excellence in providing, and supporting her co-workers in providing, quality Discovery services. Patty always makes herself available to assist her co-workers by ensuring they have the tools needed to support each client individually and problem solve difficult situations."

Another wrote, "Patty does a phenomenal job at customizing services for each client and working with them to achieve their goals. She does everything from help clients obtain their driver's license and gain independence with transportation, to advocate for clients by speaking with employers to create customized positions. Patty has shown an incredible amount of drive and initiative, especially this past year, and her unwavering commitment to her clients is inspiring, she is an outstanding example of the type of person we all should aspire to be."

Patty said, "I am honored to receive this award, because there are many at Morningside that qualify and are deserving of it." Congratulations, Patty on your commitment to your clients and the work you do.



## 2021 Ann Bolender Inspirational Award Winner

Congratulations to Blake Geyen, 2021 Ann Bolender Inspirational Award Winner! This award is given each year to a client who epitomizes determination and is an inspiration to others. Blake is a known advocate for those with disabilities, he consistently demonstrates outstanding job performance and a strong work ethic, making him an easy selection as the recipient of the 2021 Ann Bolender Award!

Blake came to Morningside in 2017, having already made significant accomplishments in his education and career. Blake attended the University of Washington Tacoma as a DO-IT Scholar, where he earned his BA in Urban Studies. While at UW Tacoma, Blake acquired experi-

ence as an Accessibility Needs Expert by assisting fellow students who were preparing their Computer Science Accessibility Capstone Projects. Blake has also served as a Data and Research Specialist at St. Martin's University Office of Public Safety and worked as a Policy Intern at Tacoma Housing Authority.

To this day, Blake is an Ambassador for the DO-IT program where he continues to mentor students and professionals with disabilities. He is also an effectual accessible transportation advocate, having met with legislators and key stakeholders to emphasize the difficulties of transiting areas without sidewalks or proper road crossings for individuals using wheelchairs.

In presenting the award to him, Jonathan Pleger, President/CEO, highlighted Blake's advocacy work, by referencing an article written about Blake in the Tacoma News Tribune, which was also presented on television news. Jonathan thanked him for assisting Morningside in analyzing accessibility during Morningside's search for a new office in Tacoma. To conclude, Jonathan said, "You have done a lot of great advocacy work through Disability Rights Washington and now at People First. You have raised the awareness of people with disabilities in the community." Mr. Geyen is the Volunteer Training Development Coordinator at People First of Washington through AmeriCorps. On receiving the award, Blake said, "I am honored to receive this award. Thank you!"

Since being chosen for the award, Blake was offered and accepted a position at Morningside, working part time as an Accessibility and Inclusion Liaison. As a subject matter expert, Blake is responsible for a wide variety of tasks within the organization. Specifically, he collaborates with clients, employers, and the community to advocate for supportive employment and self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. We are thrilled to have him here!

Blake, congratulations again for being chosen for this award. #everybodyworkseverybodywins #inclusionworks