

## Living His Best Life Now

Growing up, there was always something a little different about Sam. He struggled to cope in social environments and was considered different by teachers and peers. Though his mother was diligent in seeking the help he needed, as he grew older and began experiencing life on his own things spiraled out of control. It was when he reached rock bottom, losing everything and everyone that mattered to him, that Sam sought the help he needed. Now at age 49, he confidently confesses that he is living his best life.



Sam has an invisible disability. Misdiagnosed for most of his life, Sam's disability was so debilitating at one point that he was unable to maintain employment or stable housing; his relationships suffered immensely. He was well into his mid-30s before he was diagnosed and properly treated for major depression and severe anxiety. With the support of vocational rehabilitation specialists, he was able to regain his footing and rebuild his life. In 2010, Sam earned a degree in criminal justice and homeland security from Strayer University. He is currently employed as an Office Automation Clerk with Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), a federal agency created by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) to protect pension benefits in private-sector defined benefit. Sam has enormous responsibilities with the agency—from handling correspondence and managing phones, to tracking educational programs for employees and managing the director's calendar. He commented that PBGC is a great place not only because of the professional atmosphere, but primarily because of his colleagues. And according to PBGC Human Resource Specialist Donald Beasley, Sam's colleagues also enjoy having him around. "Sam has acclimated well to the department and colleagues and managers always give him high marks for his work ethic and demeanor."

Though most of his colleagues are not aware of his disability, Sam offers empowering advice to people with disabilities—visible or invisible. "Don't allow your disability to be an excuse for you to settle for less; don't let it manage you, you manage it." Beasley added that employees with disabilities should not be reluctant to ask for help when needed. "Not only is the federal government obligated to provide reasonable accommodations, but the accommodations even the playing field so that people with disabilities are equipped to perform the job to the best of their ability."

Now that he is managing his disability effectively, Sam is pursuing a master's degree in public administration. He spends his weekends at Saint Francis Academy, a private all-boys boarding school in Baltimore, as an assistant house manager for the Father Joubert House, mentoring young men from underserved populations and he is preparing to buy a house. "People who have disabilities should not feel ashamed or be afraid of what others think. We and employers have to be open to the idea that people with disabilities are capable of being successful."