



SPECTRUM NEWS 13

Orlando nonprofit connects blind, sight-impaired with often out-of-reach job opportunities

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ORLANDO, Fla. — One local nonprofit has been empowering people with vision loss through employment for decades—and they’re now hiring.

Lighthouse Central Florida has openings for call center agents, who field calls for various places, from Universal to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity.

It’s a job Christopher Ortega, who is blind, said that he’s really enjoyed doing, and it has led to new, recent opportunities.

“I worked as a claims support specialist for a year and some change, until I got the promotion, two weeks ago,” Ortega said.



Ortega explained that he grew up in the “seeing world,” after losing his eyesight as a child to retinoblastoma. He goes through much of his day, from making breakfast to securing a ride to work, through memory. Much to the dismay of mobility instructors, he often leaves his white cane behind.

“I’ve been doing this since I remember. Whenever I get comfortable with a place or I’m confident where I’m at, I have the tendency to not use it,” he said with a shrug.

When Ortega began working at Lighthouse a year-and-a-half ago, he quickly gained confidence he would be equipped to do the job required of him. Technology like screen readers and Braille displays aid him in inputting data on his computer from phone calls.

In his new role as team lead, Ortega is charged with tracking scheduling, attendance, payroll and performance of several employees.

“The trust and belief in people who have disabilities, understanding we can do a good job, just as good as anyone else,” he said of the nonprofit.

Lighthouse Works has other work programs as well, including supply chain and contract management, and improving digital accessibility for other companies.

According to Lighthouse’s website, the nonprofit has connected more than 100,000 sight-impaired people and their families with education, life skills and job training since 1976.

According to the American Foundation for the Blind, the employment rate of those who are blind or have difficulty seeing has been on the rise. In 2017, that rate was 44%, while the employment rate for those without a disability was 79%.