

Transforming Lives Through Opportunity

Having equal employment opportunity is a challenge, more so for Persons with Disability (PWDs) whose skills and unique abilities are often overshadowed by their conditions. But the world has become progressive and progress begets prospects. Now, more companies are opening their doors to PWDs, who need work, and can make contributions in the workplace just like everyone else.

Joining this movement for workplace inclusion is South Star Drug, which recently hired 14 persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities through Project Inclusion, Unilab Foundation's employment program for PWDs. The new employees, young adults with autism and Down syndrome, work eight hours a day in administrative and in-store positions.

The effect has been life-changing. Ma. Eloisa Maxino Ramirez had been thinking of emigrating with her family so her son, Anton, could have more opportunities when he found a position in South Star Drug's San Roque Antipolo branch in January of this year. This newfound productivity has revitalized him. "He is so proud of his work and has been bragging to everyone, even mere acquaintances, that he is working now," says Ramirez.

"I will not get tired of saying thank you for giving PWDs [jobs]," adds Ramirez. "It's not only the monetary benefit but also the increase in self-esteem and self-worth."

"It was such a rekindling experience of hope for so many families to witness their children sitting in an Employee Orientation room for the very first time," says Bunny Gonzalez Joaquin, MA.Ed, CAS, director of Shine Intervention Center. "The look of excitement and pride on the faces of my students with autism and Down syndrome was a long-awaited experience. Thanks to South Star Drug, which has granted PWDs their equal right to gainful employment, they now have the opportunity to be productive members of society."

