

Glaswegian Man Wins Achievement Award

A Glaswegian man who has overcome disability in his determination to find work has won an achievement award.

Paul McNeill, aged 26, of Pollok, Glasgow, has been chosen by employment charity Tomorrow's People in its annual Awards for Achievement. The awards pay tribute to people who have overcome significant barriers in their quest to get back to work. Paul attended the awards ceremony at Plaisterers' Hall in central London Tuesday evening, where he collected his award.

Paul has won the Roger Sterba Memorial Award, which marks a client's journey to employment – where he or she has faced particular difficulty in achieving their goal. This special award commemorates the late Roger Sterba, who, as manager of Tomorrow's People in Kent, made such a difference to many hundreds of disadvantaged people.

In 2002, Paul's life changed when he was diagnosed with chronic arthritis. Before being diagnosed, Paul had worked as an apprentice with Glasgow City Council Land Services, having gained a City and Guilds qualifications in horticulture. Paul was also a member of a junior football team. However, his illness meant he relied on two sticks to walk. His employer offered him alternative employment in the computer side of the department, but mobility problems resulted in Paul being medically discharged from work.

Paul was introduced to Tomorrow's People in 2005 by his consultant at the Rheumatology Clinic he attends at The Southern General Hospital, Glasgow. The charity provides a free support service within the hospital. A specialist employment adviser works within a number of clinics, on an outreach basis, to help people with disabilities and other health-related issues who wish to get back into work, education or training.

Due to his condition, the Adviser met with Paul at his family home and provided one-to-one support and mentoring to help build his confidence. Gradually, they moved onto exploring training and job opportunities, as Paul was determined to find employment which was compatible with his disability and where he was able to use his existing horticultural skills.

Paul started a European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) training course through the Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency (formerly Greater Pollok Development Agency) which also provided transport for him in the early stages, when his mobility was limited.

Despite being hospitalised twice due to his condition, Paul never gave up on his training. Two months after his second stay in hospital, Paul contacted the Tomorrow's People



Adviser for a meeting, as his condition had improved and he no longer needed sticks to walk, although mobility is still an issue.

Paul and his Tomorrow's People Adviser continue to meet to discuss his personal action plan and, as a result, Paul returned to his training with the Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency. Paul and his Adviser also spoke about self-employment as a way to use his horticulture skills.

Paul is now liaising with an Adviser from OPENING, a user-led organisation which provides one-to-one support to unemployed disabled people in the Glasgow area; and has been designing gardens and hanging baskets on a trial period. He has also received support from the Business Gateway Development team and Glasgow South West Regeneration Agency to finalise his business plan and access available funding.

Liz Docherty, Tomorrow's People employment adviser for Glasgow said: "At our first meeting Paul had no specific aims or ambitions; he was in constant pain and effectively housebound due to his condition. Due to improvements in his condition, he has now passed his driving test and has a mobility car. This has given him independence and he and is determined to succeed with his future goals."

Upon hearing of his nomination Paul said, "It's really good news that I've been short-listed for an award, proving that, with the right support, people can achieve despite living with disability."

Tomorrow's People is a national charity, with a 23-year track record of success in helping people out of long-term unemployment, welfare dependency and into jobs and self-sufficiency.

Since 1984, the charity has helped change the lives of more than 400,000 people across the UK who had been resigned to long-term, even life-long, unemployment.

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