Completing the symphony through inclusion in Uzbekistan

Hudoykul Hafizov is a soft-spoken, locally recruited UN Volunteer serving with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Uzbekistan as a Disability Inclusion Specialist. He is often amazed by how resilient, ambitious and steadfast human beings can be, especially those like him with disabilities.

Hudoykul grew up in Urgut district in the Samarkand region of Uzbekistan. He said that as a child, he learned to always put in that “extra effort” to “fit in” so that others would accept him. And he did fit in – excelling at most subjects in national and international law at university.

After his studies at the Samarkand State University, Hudoykul worked for the government in the Regional Customs Administration, focusing on setting up a new chemistry lab. Following that, he worked for British American Tobacco, first as a quality control associate and then, as a product development designer.
When he left his job, Hudoykul decided to emigrate to the United States of America and found a job at an engineering company as a Production Quality Associate. Despite his exemplary performance, he faced an accessibility barrier. Due to impaired vision, he couldn’t drive a car and lack of public transportation caused challenges. Following the advice of his friends, he moved to New York City, which has a great public transportation system. There he found a job at Silver Rod Pharmacy in Brooklyn as a pharmacy technician.

“When I realize that people have a disability, I often can relate to aspects of what they went through and that encourages me to get more involved. Whenever they express their gratitude for the assistance, it is one of the best feelings in the world.” -- Hudoykul Hafizov, national UN Volunteer

For Hudoykul, this was a totally different chapter in his life. "It gave me a chance to explore different aspects of my personality, and required me to be in the public with patients and persons with disabilities," he says. "It allowed me to learn various aspects of patient care, customer service and essentials of disability inclusion."

Although it was an entry position, he dedicated a considerable amount of time to on-the-job training on healthcare system fundamentals and, five years later, due to the extra effort he always put in everything he did, he was promoted to the Head of the Specialty Department. In this capacity, his co-workers and those who reported to him admired and respected him. He even got the nickname Dr Cool (which matches the pronunciation of the second part of his name - Kul).

Hudoykul draws his inspiration from the belief that volunteerism is a powerful tool for engaging with people in tackling developmental challenges. His life experiences have also motivated him to volunteer and assist others to consider and pursue every opportunity.

He currently serves with UNDP in Uzbekistan as a Specialist on Disability Inclusion. His assignments include providing policy and procedural consultations on disability inclusion, accessibility and an inclusive working environment.
environment for persons with disabilities. This includes ensuring fair hiring processes and providing accessible and conducive workspaces. Hudoykul admits that the COVID-19 pandemic and consequential lockdowns have added challenges and this reality necessitates more creativity, patience, and perseverance.

When he started volunteering at UNDP, Hudoykul felt a sense of genuine and full inclusion in the workplace, for the first time in his life.

“Life is dynamic and there are always new aspects to learn or to improve. Despite challenges, I witnessed countless times that if we create the right environment and conditions for persons with disabilities, they will participate at the same level as everyone else in every aspect of life. We only need to take appropriate measures to ensure the full development, participation, advancement and empowerment of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with their peers. --Hudoykul Hafizov

Hudoykul’s favorite quote is from Hazrat Inayat Khan, a 19th century philosopher and a professor of musicology who is often credited with bringing Islamic Sufism to the West: "Life is a symphony, and the action of every person in this life is the playing of his particular part in the music," he once wrote. And indeed if we do not include the notes of people with disabilities, then the symphony will never be complete.

This article was originally published by UNDP Uzbekistan.

- Persons with disabilities
Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals