



# DEEPENING OUR IMPACT

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION | 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



# MAKING PROGRESS THROUGH LISTENING AND ACTION

In Pierce County, our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is an ongoing journey. Building a community where everyone belongs is more than a goal—it's a responsibility Pierce County takes to heart. This year, we focused on deepening the impact of existing programs and broadening access to our services, guided by the principle that inclusion makes us stronger.

Across departments, teams have worked to open doors for those who've historically faced barriers, provide innovative solutions to bridge gaps, and strengthen connections to ensure everyone feels a sense of belonging. While progress is ongoing, we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow through this work.

As we share the stories behind this year's DEI initiatives, our hope is to highlight the partnerships, programs, and people who inspire us daily. These efforts are not about accolades but about a shared commitment to shaping a more inclusive future. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

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## DEAR COLLEAGUES, PARTNERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

It is with great pride and gratitude that we present the 2024 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Annual Report: *Deepening Our Impact*. This report reflects not only the progress we have made but also our steadfast commitment to building a Pierce County where every individual feels a true sense of belonging and opportunity.

In 2024, we took deliberate steps to broaden the reach of our programs and deepen their effectiveness. From empowering neurodiverse employees and enhancing language access to creating pathways through supported employment and celebrating cultural heritage, our efforts are aimed at embedding DEI into the very fabric of our community. These accomplishments are not merely milestones; they are testaments to the hard work and collaboration of countless individuals dedicated to creating meaningful change.

Highlights of this year's journey include the growing impact of our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). In addition, we've made great strides in our work to ensure our hiring efforts are inclusive and equitable from the very start of the process, allowing us to hire the best candidates to serve our community. Additionally, the launch of the Indian Child Welfare Court underscored our commitment to culturally sensitive and community-centered services.

At the heart of our DEI strategy is the recognition that diversity is not just about numbers—it is about people. It is about hearing voices that have been silent, ensuring equitable access to opportunities, and fostering spaces where creativity, innovation, and collaboration thrive.

None of this would have been possible without the tireless efforts of our DEI working groups, the support of our employees, and the contributions of our community partners.

As you explore this report, we invite you to reflect on the stories, metrics, and programs that illuminate our path forward. These pages are more than a summary of our achievements; they are a call to action to continue striving for a more inclusive, equitable future for all.

Thank you for your support and shared commitment to this journey. Together, we are creating change.



With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce F. Dammeier".

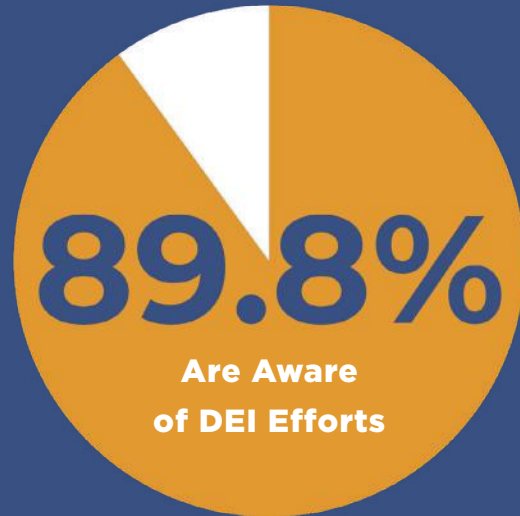
Bruce F. Dammeier  
Pierce County Executive



# STRIVING TOWARDS OUR GOALS

Pierce County believes in transparency and accountability in our DEI journey. We track key metrics to measure our progress and identify areas where we can improve. Here's a snapshot of our current data:

# EMPLOYEE OVERVIEW:



*Up from 85.3% in 2023*



*Up from 76% in 2022*

## Diverse employees:

**23.7%**

*Up from 20.5% in 2017*

### Veteran employees:

**10.2%**

*Above our goal of 10%*

### Female employees:

**49.7%**

*Approaching our goal of 50%*



“

WE WANT OUR OFFICE

**COMMUNITY**

AND IT STARTS WITH

**EVERYONE HAS SOM**

CE TO LOOK LIKE THE  
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”

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*Gayle Robbins, HR Manager*

# NEURODIVERSITY



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM](#)

# RECOGNIZING AND VALUING COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

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“DEI is not just about identity or skin color,” shares Melissa Arnold, Assistant Director of Human Resources. “There are so many layers and aspects to it, and the more we can identify, explore, and support, the better it is for all of us.”

This understanding has led Pierce County to focus on neurodiversity, recognizing the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodivergent individuals bring to the workplace. Melissa, who is neurodivergent herself, has played a key role in raising awareness and advocating for supportive resources.

So, what is neurodiversity?

“Neurodiversity, to me, simply describes the different ways people’s brains work,” Melissa shares. “It’s about recognizing that everyone thinks and processes

information differently. Embracing these differences can lead to incredible creativity and problem-solving.”

The County is in the early stages of this work, focusing on raising awareness and providing tools to both neurodiverse employees and their teams. From ergonomic accommodations to supported employment and task management assistance, we are learning how to create environments where neurodiverse individuals can thrive.



**MELISSA ARNOLD**

*Assistant Director  
of Human Resources*

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“EMBRACING THESE DIFFERENCES CAN LEAD  
TO INCREDIBLE CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.”

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# INCLUSION IN ACTION

## MEET THE EXPERTS: TARA AND CHARISSA

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Supported Employment is a nationwide initiative that helps individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) find and maintain meaningful employment. At Pierce County, we've begun embracing this program as a way to build a more inclusive workforce that reflects the diversity of our community.

"We're not just filling roles," explains Tara Zink, Social Services Program Specialist. "We're creating pathways for talented individuals who might not have been seen through traditional hiring processes. This is about equity and inclusion in action."

HR Analyst, Charissa Hudson, emphasizes that this process is "not groundbreaking or unique—it's just

good hiring." She continues, "We want this to be seen as an ordinary process, not an exception. The goal is for departments to see this as a smart, logical way to connect with highly qualified candidates."

Through partnerships with community organizations and dedicated job coaches, the program provides support and training to help individuals thrive in their roles.

### **TARA ZINK**

*Employment/CI Program Specialist*


### **CHARISSA HUDSON**

*HR Analyst*

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THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM IS A WIN-WIN FOR EMPLOYEES AND THE COUNTY. IF YOUR DEPARTMENT IS INTERESTED IN LEARNING HOW TO BRING A SUPPORTED EMPLOYEE TO YOUR DIVISION, PLEASE REACH OUT TO CHARISSA HUDSON FOR RESOURCES AND GUIDANCE.

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# SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT



## INCLUSION IN ACTION

### MEET NEKKIA AND SAVANNAH

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Savannah Longaker, a Supported Employee in Aging and Disability Resources, joined the team under the guidance of supervisor Nekkia Jackson. Formerly working at a job that felt unfulfilling, Savannah now thrives in a role where her attention to detail and drive are celebrated.

“Knowing that I’m not just helping and improving myself but also others makes this so fulfilling for me,” Savannah shares.

For Nekkia, this was her first experience hiring a Supported Employee, and she has been thrilled with the results.

“Savannah has blossomed in her role,” says Nekkia. “She’s one of my best workers—detailed, reliable, and a joy to have on the team.”

Savannah’s job coach has also noticed her growth, describing her as confident and motivated to take on new challenges.

#### **NEKKIA JACKSON**

*Case Manager Supervisor*

#### **SAVANNAH LONGAKER**

*Supported Administrative Associate II*

## MEET BAMBI AND ZACH

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Zach Peterson works with the Procurement & Accounts Payable team, where his efficiency and positive energy have made him indispensable. Tasked with managing and filing packages, Zach excels in streamlining processes, especially during busy periods.

“I honestly don’t know how I ever lived without Zach,” shares Bambi Dyer, Procurement Accounts Payable Manager. “He’s always smiling, ready to help, and has truly lightened the load for our team.”

For Zach, the role offers personal and professional growth. “This is a great opportunity,” he says. “It pushes me, gets me in the workforce, and lets me do something good for others, too.”

### **BAMBI DYER**

*Procurement Accounts Payable Manager*

### **ZACH PETERSON**

*Supported Administrative Associate II*

## MEET GAYLE AND SAVVY

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Savvy, a Supported Employee in the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, excels in technology tasks and brings a friendly and eager spirit to her work. “We were interested in Supported Employment from the start,” says her manager, Gayle Robbins.

“It just starts with recognizing that everyone has something to offer,” Gayle explains.

“This program has opened doors for us to connect with talent we may not have accessed otherwise.”

### **GAYLE ROBBINS**

*HR Manager*

### **SAVVY VINDIVICH**

*Supported Administrative Associate*

# INDIAN CHILD WELFARE COURT

# PRESERVING HERITAGE, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

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The Indian Child Welfare Court, launched this year, represents a significant step toward addressing the historical injustices faced by Indigenous families. Guided by the Indian Child Welfare Act, the court prioritizes placing children with families or within their tribal community.

“The Indian Child Welfare Act is about preserving heritage and ensuring that Native American children remain connected to their culture and communities,” explains Judge Joseph Evans, Presiding Judge of the Pierce County Juvenile Court.

The newly established Indian Child Welfare Court is a testament to the County’s commitment to serving Indigenous families with sensitivity and respect.

“We’re ensuring that the children’s ties to the Native community remain strong,” says Judge Evans. “This

means providing access to culturally appropriate resources, treatment programs, and support systems that honor Indigenous traditions and values.”

The court recognizes the importance of family and community. “We work collaboratively with tribes to ensure that the child’s best interests are met, while also respecting the sovereignty of tribal nations,” explains Judge Evans.

By placing children in culturally appropriate homes, the court works to ensure better outcomes for Indigenous families and preserve the families heritage.



**JUDGE JOSEPH EVANS**

*Presiding Judge of the  
Pierce County Juvenile Court*

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“WE’RE ENSURING THAT THE CHILDREN’S TIES  
TO THE NATIVE COMMUNITY REMAIN STRONG.”

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# REDEFINING HIRING PRACTICES

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Diversity starts with hiring, and Pierce County's Legal and Effective Interviewing Training ensures those involved in recruitment are equipped to lead inclusive and equitable processes.

"This training goes beyond compliance," explains Recruitment Manager Lindsay Derrick. "It's about empowering hiring teams to make thoughtful, unbiased decisions while building stronger, more diverse teams."

The training addresses key principles such as understanding unconscious bias, using structured interview processes, and focusing on candidates' strengths. Managers leave with practical tools, including a step-by-step hiring toolkit, and the confidence to navigate modern recruitment practices effectively.

One participant shared, "This class made me think differently about how I approach interviews and what I

look for in a candidate. It challenged my assumptions and gave me actionable steps to create a fairer process." The course also incorporates updates on evolving laws, ensuring hiring panels remain compliant while aligning with the county's DEI goals. "It's about doing what's right for the community," adds Lindsay. "This training reinforces our responsibility to build a workforce that reflects the people we serve."

With plans to roll out refreshed content and additional tools in the coming year, Pierce County is committed to ensuring every hiring decision contributes to a more inclusive workplace.



**LINDSAY DERRICK**  
*Recruitment Manager*

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“THIS TRAINING REINFORCES OUR RESPONSIBILITY  
TO BUILD A WORKFORCE THAT REFLECTS THE PEOPLE WE SERVE.”

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# LEGAL AND EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

# EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM](#)

# BECOMING AN ERG SPONSOR

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“I’ve always believed in the power of diverse perspectives,” shares Jen Tetatzin, Director of Planning and Public Works and a proud Employee Resource Group (ERG) sponsor. “When we bring different voices and experiences to the table, we make better decisions, create more innovative solutions, and build a stronger, more inclusive Pierce County.”

Jen’s decades-long commitment to DEI stems from her own experiences as a woman and a veteran in the male-dominated field of engineering. “I know firsthand the importance of representation and having a supportive network,” she explains.

Jen currently sponsors two ERGs: JUNTOS, which supports Hispanic/Latinx employees, and the Veterans ERG. She actively works to remove barriers, provide resources, and advocate for their needs.

For the Veterans ERG, Jen leveraged her military experience to help the group get off the ground. “I understand the challenges veterans face when transitioning to civilian life,” she shares. “I wanted to create a space where they could connect, share their experiences, and find support.”

“For JUNTOS, I was able to secure a small budget for Hispanic Heritage Month, which allowed them to host a series of fantastic events,” Jen explains. “I also helped them connect with the local art museum to display artwork by Hispanic artists in the County Building.”

Jen believes that ERGs play a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and welcoming workplace culture.

“ERGs provide a sense of belonging and purpose,” she explains. “They allow employees to connect with colleagues who share similar backgrounds or experiences, find mentors, and develop their leadership skills.”

She also sees ERGs as a valuable tool for achieving the County’s DEI goals. “By empowering employees to organize and advocate for their needs, we can create a more equitable and inclusive workplace which benefits everyone,” Jen says.



**JEN TETATZIN**

*Director of Planning and Public Works*

# CELEBRATING CULTURE

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In 2024, JUNTOS, formerly known as the Latiné/Hispanic Employee Resource Group (ERG), continued its mission of creating a welcoming space for Hispanic/Latinx employees and allies in Pierce County.

“JUNTOS means ‘together’ in Spanish,” explains Joy Sauer, a Civil Engineer and Chair of the JUNTOS Employee Resource Group (ERG). “It reflects the spirit of our group, where we come together to celebrate our shared heritage, support each other’s careers, and create a more inclusive workplace for Hispanic/Latiné employees.”

For Hispanic Heritage Month, members collaborated to host events and initiatives that brought Hispanic culture and history to life across the County. From recruitment drives to educational newsletters to art exhibitions to a lively potluck, the group brought employees together to learn, connect, and celebrate.

“The feedback we received was incredible,” shares Joy. “People were so appreciative of the effort we put into highlighting our culture and creating a sense of community.”

JUNTOS is also making strides with its mentorship program, launched this year to support career

development for members. Mentorship pairs are helping Hispanic employees navigate workplace challenges, connect with opportunities, and find inspiration.

“We want to help our members achieve their career aspirations,” says Joy. “By providing mentorship and creating a network of support, we can empower our employees to excel in their roles and contribute their talents to Pierce County.”

JUNTOS also plays an important role in advocating for the needs of Hispanic/Latiné employees and raising awareness about issues that impact their workplace experiences.

“We’ve been able to bring concerns to leadership and contribute to positive changes, like the expansion of language access services,” explains Joy. “It’s fulfilling to see our efforts making a difference.”



**JOY SAUER**  
*Civil Engineer 2*



# JUNTOS EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP

# LANGUAGE ACCESS



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROGRAM](#)

# BRIDGING COMMUNICATION GAPS TO BUILD TRUST

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In a county as diverse as Pierce, language is more than a means of communication—it's a bridge to trust, belonging, and equitable access to services. This year, the Human Services Department took a significant leap forward in breaking down language barriers with the development of a comprehensive Language Access Plan.

The initiative builds on a longstanding commitment led by the Aging and Disability Resources (ADR) team, which currently serves clients in 26 languages. “We’re proud of our history of hiring bilingual case managers and tailoring services to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of our community,” shares Kim Peterson, ADR Program Manager. “But we knew we could do more to create consistency and expand access.”

The impact of communicating with clients in their preferred language is profound. “We’ve seen firsthand how language access can transform lives,” says Kim Peterson. “When people can communicate in their preferred language, they’re more likely to access the services they need, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging.”

For Trixy Petaia, a bilingual case manager serving Samoan clients, the work is deeply personal. “It’s about more than translating words—it’s about meeting people where they are, understanding their culture, and making them feel valued. When I can speak with clients in Samoan, I see how it puts them at ease and makes the process truly person-centered.”

“It’s a privilege to serve our community,” adds Stefanie Love, Human Services Coordinator. “I don’t want people to look at language access as a burden, but as the right thing to do as service providers to our communities.”

## **STEFANIE LOVE**

*Human Services Coordinator*

## **TRIXY PETAIA**

*Bilingual Case Manager Specialist*

## **KIM PETERSON**

*Aging and Disability Resources Manager*



**WHEN YOU BRING DIFFERENT  
GET CREATIVE, EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS  
CREATING PATHWAYS FOR OTHERS  
TO WATCH PEOPLE**



**PUT VOICES TO THE TABLE, YOU  
SOLUTIONS. THIS WORK IS ABOUT  
THEM, AND IT'S SO FULFILLING  
PEOPLE THRIVE.** ”

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*Jen Tetatzin, Director of Planning and Public Works*



# IN PURSUIT OF CHANGE FOR PIERCE COUNTY

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