



Employment Brief

Disability Mentoring Day Hawai`i - 2006

Prepared by James D. Brightman

National Technical Assistance Center

www.ntac.hawaii.edu
Tel: (808)956-3648
Fax: (808)956-5713
TTY: (808)956-2890

Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

Based at:

University of Hawaii at Manoa, Center on Disability Studies

In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for Independent Living

Hawaii Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division

Funded by:

U.S. Department of Education
Rehabilitation Services Administration

This brief is one of a series of briefs from the National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities. The briefs provide information on employment strategies and avenues to employment for individuals with disabilities. Mentoring is one of the avenues. This brief discusses the value of mentoring and describes participation in Disability Mentoring Day in Hawai`i in 2006.

Mentoring

A mentor is an experienced guide who is acceptable to a less experienced person [and] who helps ease the transition to adulthood [or work] by a mix of support and challenge (Hamilton, 1991). Mentoring—from a Greek word meaning “enduring”—refers to a sustained relationship between a mentor and the person being mentored (mentee). Through continued involvement, the mentor offers support, guidance, and assistance as the mentee goes through a difficult period, faces new challenges, or works to correct earlier problems. For the National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), the mentoring relationship is developmental, through which a mentee is inducted, or introduced, into the world of work. A primary objective of mentoring is to help a mentee secure gainful employment, earn income, and even pay taxes on that income. At the NTAC, mentoring is a key step in inducting individuals with disabilities into the world of work.

One example of a widely known mentoring program is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. The mission of this non-profit organization is to help children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships. While Big Brothers Big Sisters of America helps induct children into the world, disability mentoring can help the millions of individuals—college students and older job seekers with disabilities—enter the world of work. Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and disability mentoring embrace similar thinking: mentors can change lives.

Disability mentoring can be especially helpful to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Evidence shows that, while individuals with disabilities in the majority culture in the United States may utilize Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to help them reach their career potential and overcome barriers caused by a disability, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are historically underserved by VR for a variety of reasons. Hence, mentoring may be particularly impor-

tant for this population. Simply introducing a potential Asian American or Pacific Islander employee to an employer just might be the most important piece of the job-search puzzle for an Asian American or Pacific Islander with a disability who is making the transition to employment.

Disability Mentoring Day

Disability Mentoring Day is an annual nation-wide event that provides mentoring for individuals with disabilities of all ethnic groups. Nationally, Disability Mentoring Day is sponsored by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD). The AAPD is this country's largest cross-disability membership organization; it promotes economic and political empowerment of the more than 50 million children and adults with disabilities in the U.S.

The AAPD was founded in 1995 to unite the diverse community of people with disabilities, including their families, friends and supporters, and to be a national voice for change in implementing the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Despite passage of the ADA—a law often touted as the Civil Rights Act for individuals with disabilities—the ADA has not completely “leveled the playing field.” Although the ADA supposedly guarantees equal opportunity for people with disabilities in employment, only 56% of people aged 21 to 64 having some type of disability were employed in 2005. The employment rate for persons with disabilities ranged from 82 percent of those with a non-severe disability to only 43 percent of those with a severe disability (ADA, 2006).

Match Making in Hawai'i

In Hawai'i, Disability Mentoring Day is sponsored by the National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (NTAC-AAPI) with disabilities. In Hawai'i's 2006 Disability Mentoring Day, eight college students and six other job-seekers with disabilities were matched with mentors in their chosen fields. Seven of the mentees spent the day with the U.S. Coast Guard. Although several of those seven had asked if by being mentored by the Coast Guard meant they could spend the day on a boat, they actually performed logistical and administrative tasks in the Federal Building on Ala Moana Boulevard in Honolulu.

The Coast Guard's support for Disability Mentoring Day reflects a directive by the U.S. government that government agencies must not only be strong advocates for hiring individuals with disabilities, they must practice what they preach and create more federal employment opportunities for those individuals. The Coast Guard, like all the armed services, is not only providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities, they are actually beginning to recruit them, too.

As described by Captain Steven Harris (2006), the Equal Opportunity Advisor with the Coast Guard in Honolulu (in an email following Disability Mentoring Day), “Each student was given a package of information concerning employment opportunities with the government as well as spending one on one time with the mentors.” In his evaluation of Disability Mentoring Day, Captain Harris thought the best part was merely having an opportunity to share. The commitment of members of the Coast Guard and their willingness to contribute were evident as several officers volunteered to be a mentor for the day. Captain Harris added that he hopes to maintain contact with NTAC-AAPI and help with future Disability Mentoring Days.

Other members of the Honolulu community also contributed significantly to Disability Mentoring Day. Mari S. Nakamura (2006), an Instructor of Developmental and Remedial Studies who helped recruit several Community College students, said, “Thank you for giving us the opportunity to explore possibilities.” In her evaluation of DMD, she expressed gratitude that the Community College students gained information re-



James Brightman (left), VR Coordinator, awards Certificates of Appreciation to members of the United States Coast Guard in Honolulu for their participation on Disability Mentoring Day, October 2006. (Photo by David Baker)

garding their available options. Of the students who spent the day with the Coast Guard, Mari wrote, “The students were very impressed, and a bit intimidated, with the professionalism of the officers involved.”

Not all mentees chose to spend Disability Mentoring Day with the Coast Guard. Seven mentees spent the day at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa—three with professionals who work at the Center on Disability Studies; two at the Curriculum Research and Development Group, University Laboratory School; and one each with the College of Education and the Pacific Basin Rehab Research and Training Center/Social Science Research Institute.

Following Disability Mentoring Day in Hawai‘i, mentees evaluated the event as “wonderful, informative, [and it] gives us opportunity.” Also, it “opened my eyes.” A mentee who worked with a mentor who has a disability said it was “nice to know that other people are in my situation... meeting others with disabilities.”

From our national database of individuals with disabilities with Asian or Pacific Island heritage in the U.S., four individuals were referred to their local coordinator of Disability Mentoring Day. In addition, two high school Special Education teachers on our neighbor island Maui plan to contact two agencies of the armed services on Maui to arrange for their students to tour facilities and hear presentations about potential civilian career opportunities with the government.

Advertising

Advertising for Disability Mentoring Day in Hawai‘i involved a bit of luck. Courtney Baum (2006), a Public Information Officer at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, picked-up the story and promoted it to Hawai‘i Public Radio as well as publishing it in the University’s Faculty newsletter.

Additional Support

The Social Security Administration and Darden Restaurants, Inc.—the world’s largest casual dining restaurant company in the world (Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Smokey Bones, and Bahama Breeze) (Darden Restaurants, 1998-2007)—partnered with the AAPD in sponsoring Disability Mentoring Day. The Red Lobster restaurant on Ala Moana Blvd. in Waikiki—just down the street from the Federal Building—kindly offered to provide lunch to the NTAC-AAPI organizers and several mentors in Honolulu. Their generous offer was happily accepted.

How You Can Get Involved

If you are an employer or job seeker interested in participating in Disability Mentoring Day 2007, or at any other time, please contact James D. Brightman at (808) 956-3648, or email him at jamesdb@hawaii.edu.

For more information on Disability Mentoring Day, visit www.dmd-aapd.org. To get in touch with your local Big Brother, Big Sisters of America agency, please go to their website: <http://www.bbbs.org>.

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Author Note

James David Brightman, a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, earned a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, a specialist's degree in Adult Education, and has completed coursework for a PhD in Rehabilitation Counseling.