2006 Disability Mentoring Day:
Career Development for the 21st Century

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is proud to present Disability Mentoring Day commemorated on Wednesday, October 18, 2006 as the official kick-off for a year-round effort. The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN will be the official launch cities for the national effort. This kick-off celebrates the wonderful participation of the US Business Leadership Network, and will take place during their national conference.

What Is Disability Mentoring Day?

Disability Mentoring Day promotes career development for students and job-seekers with disabilities through job shadowing and hands-on career exploration. With leadership, coordination and resource materials from AAPD, local communities around the country organize their own activities that bring students and employers together for informational sessions about career opportunities and one-on-one mentoring with volunteers at public and private places of employment.

What Happens on Disability Mentoring Day?

Disability Mentoring Day is officially commemorated on the third Wednesday of every October, but it is then implemented in locations around the country and internationally throughout the year. It is designed to benefit from local creativity, with each community planning activities to best suit the interests and abilities of its students, job-seekers and local employers. Although the core experience is one-on-one job shadowing, event planners may choose to open with a meeting for a group of students and job-seekers featuring several presentations and/or close with a reception where students, job-seekers and mentors can share their experiences. The type of mentoring experience depends in large part on the participants’ interests, education level, and work experience. Job-seekers can focus on specific career advice and discuss potential internships and job openings.

How Can Students and Job-Seekers with Disabilities Benefit from Disability Mentoring Day?

Disability Mentoring Day enables students and job-seekers to spend part of a day visiting a business or government agency that matches their interests and have one-on-one time with volunteer mentors. It provides an opportunity to underscore the connection between school and work, evaluate personal goals, target career skills for improvement, explore possible career paths, and develop lasting mentor relationships. History of the program illustrates that students’ and job seekers’ participation in Disability Mentoring Day can result in an internship opportunity with the host employer, function as a first interview on the way to a part-time or full-time employment offer, or even an on-the-spot firm job offer.

How Can Employers Benefit from Disability Mentoring Day?

Disability Mentoring Day provides public and private employers with an opportunity to recruit interns, tap a pool of potential future employees, learn more about the experience of disability, develop lasting relationships with disability community leaders, demonstrate positive leadership in their communities and attract positive media attention. Additionally, employers can get involved by enabling employees to serve as volunteer mentors, functioning as a Local Coordinator for a community, and sponsoring Disability Mentoring Day at the national or local level.
How Can Disability Mentoring Day Support Other Programs?

Disability Mentoring Day can be a point-of-entry for existing mentoring, school-to-work, internship and employment programs. Since many successful programs around the country require extensive year-round commitments, Disability Mentoring Day can be a way to attract new participants and then encourage them to become more involved year-round. Employers with summer internship programs can also utilize Disability Mentoring Day as a means to identify promising internship candidates and encourage them to apply.

How Do Communities Get Involved?

Local Coordinators, who play a match-making role between students/job-seekers and local employers, are the key to Disability Mentoring Day. Communities wishing to participate in any capacity – as an employer, organization, educator, job-seeker or student – should review the Local Coordinators list on AAPD’s website to see if there is already someone coordinating in that community. Individuals interested in playing a crucial coordination role should also refer to the Local Coordinator Toolkit and then contact AAPD at 800-840-8844 (V/TTY). There is no required size or timing for a successful event -- it could involve just a handful of students or several dozen, and can take place at any point during the year. Making an impact in just one person's life makes a difference and lays a foundation for subsequent years.

How Did Disability Mentoring Day Get Started?

This program started as National Disability Mentoring Day in 1999 in the White House, as a program to increase the profile of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is celebrated every October. The program was patterned after school-to-work activities and began with just three dozen participants. In 2001, National Disability Mentoring Day was passed to AAPD to administer and build; that year, participation included more than 1,500 students and job-seekers, hundreds of public and private employers, and more than 70 Local Coordinators in 32 states plus Washington, D.C. In 2002, National Disability Mentoring Day included the participation of more than 3,800 students and job seekers, hundreds of public and private employers, and 134 Local Coordinators in 41 states and Washington, DC, plus four international locations. In 2003 (the year “National” was dropped from the title, because of the considerable international participation), Disability Mentoring Day saw significant growth, with almost 8,000 students and job seekers, 175 Local Coordinators in every state plus Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and 14 other countries. 2004 had 9,000 mentees participating, 250 Local Coordinators, and more than 2,500 employer mentors.

What is AAPD’s Role?

AAPD provides leadership by encouraging employers, students, educators and organizations to get involved; supporting a National Organizing Committee; encouraging the development of State Organizing Committees; recruiting, training and supporting Local Coordinators (who serve in a strictly voluntary capacity for AAPD); developing a Toolkit on how to plan National Disability Mentoring Day activities; referring individuals to published lists of Local Coordinators and participating employers; and generating media attention.

About AAPD

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is the nation’s largest cross-disability membership organization, and is dedicated to promoting the economic and political empowerment of all people with disabilities. AAPD educates businesses and the general public about disability issues, and provides membership benefits, such as financial services and product
discounts. AAPD was founded in 1995 by cross-disability leaders to help unite the diverse community of people with disabilities -- including their family, friends and supporters -- and to be a national voice for change in implementing the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

For More Information or to participate in Disability Mentoring Day 2006, either as a mentor or mentee, please contact…

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