



Press Release

March 2005

March is National Disabilities Awareness Month: Increase Awareness Through Your Business

The theme of Disability Awareness Month 2005 is “Mix it up.” The poster, which features four children selling lemonade at a neighborhood lemonade stand, illustrates the theme, as the children not only “mix up” their lemonade but also include children both with and without disabilities in their activity. The text of the poster reads: “Friends make everything sweeter. Working together and having fun is a winning recipe for friendship - and success.”

The goal of this year’s campaign is to encourage children to have positive attitudes about disability and to be inclusive in their everyday activities.

It is equally important that all employees in your organization or business have an awareness of people with disabilities. They may encounter business contacts, clients and/or customers with disabilities. That awareness includes understanding how to interact with and make the company’s services accessible to people with disabilities in order to maintain strong business relationships with them. This attitude projects a favorable company image not only to people with disabilities but also to the surrounding community.

In addition, understanding and awareness will help your employees adjust to and accept a co-worker who acquires a disability, and/or a new employee with a disability.

The following information offers ways your company can enhance this understanding.

INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities are people first; their disabilities come second. Proper communication with employees, customers and clients with disabilities is essential. The Governor’s Planning Council for People with Disabilities has a brochure - “Power of Words” - that explains the correct language to use when communicating with a person with a disability. The brochure can be posted on bulleting boards, included with employee paychecks, routed throughout the office or reprinted in a company newsletter. If you would like to order brochures, contact Kim Dennison at (317) 631-6400 (voice), (317) 631-6499 (fax), or kdennison@bjmpr.com (email).

ACCESSIBILITY

It is critical for persons with disabilities to have access to the same opportunities as



people without disabilities. Your building should be accessible to employees, customers and clients with physical or sensory disabilities. Other buildings where business is conducted should also be accessible. The ADA requires that businesses remove, if readily achievable, architectural and communication barriers in the public areas of their existing facilities. Readily achievable barrier removal includes any action that is accomplished without great difficulty or expense. In many cases, it might include things such as adding grab bars in restrooms or ramping steps. In addition, ADA guidelines require businesses with 15 or more employees to make accommodations for employees with disabilities.

Businesses that make their facilities more accessible to people with disabilities are allowed a tax deduction. A maximum of \$15,000 can be deducted for the tax year in which the expense was incurred. The deduction is claimed by identifying it as a separate item when reporting other business expenses on the standard IRS form. Any amount in excess of \$15,000 might be added to the basis of the property that is subject to depreciation. For more information on this tax deduction, contact the IRS office. (Refer to IRS code Section 190.)

To encourage ADA compliance by small businesses, the IRS also offers a Disabled Access Credit (Section 44 of the IRS Code). This allows a tax credit of up to \$5,000 a year, as long as expenditures are greater than \$250 and less than \$10,250. Up to 50 percent of “eligible access expenditures” can be deducted. Be sure to double-check these figures with your tax preparer to be sure they are the most up-to-date numbers available.

GETTING INVOLVED - VOLUNTEER INCENTIVES

Offer volunteer incentives during Awareness Month and throughout the year. Make a donation (\$25, \$50, \$100, \$500 or \$1,000) to a local disabilities organization for every hour that one of your employees volunteers time to the organization.

GETTING INVOLVED - HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The following information answers questions many employers have about people with disabilities and provides information to begin the process of hiring people with disabilities.

1. Productivity and Capability

The assumption that people with disabilities are unproductive is false. People with disabilities can be just as productive, loyal, punctual, educated and qualified as people without disabilities. Turnover among people with disabilities is generally low.

2. How to Locate Employees with Disabilities

Local rehabilitation agencies specialize in placing people with disabilities in the workforce, and serve as a helpful liaison between the employer and potential employee.

“Supported employment” is one such service many organizations provide to their clients. Supported employment combines job procurement, placement, training and ongoing support for people with disabilities. Job coaches work together with employers and people with disabilities to meet and match abilities, skills and needs of each party.

In Pulaski and Cass Counties, Supported Employment is offered by Peak Community Services in Logansport. Contact Jacquie Wethington at (574) 753-4104 (voice), (574) 753-9861 (fax), or jwethington@peakcommunity.com (email).

3. Incentives

Employers who hire people with disabilities should investigate the incentives available to them. With some incentives, it often costs less to employ a person with a disability than someone without a disability.

Supported employment programs provide on-the-job training, counseling and ongoing support to employees with disabilities at no cost to the employer.

The Job Training Partnership Act provides federal and state on-the-job training funds averaging 50 percent of a trainee's wages for the first six months of employment. Reimbursements for classroom training and services such as child care and transportation are also available if you qualify for the program.

This article was prepared and distributed by the Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities.