

Business Journal - Students with Disabilities
ESBLN, Jackie Gast, Sept 2005

Students are back at school and the grind is in full swing for all those affected by the school systems. As business people, you become inundated with requests from all sorts of worthy educational causes and clubs. Some can result in short and long term employee recruiting benefits such as those from the High School/High Tech and Project Transition programs, The Division of Rehabilitation Services and Holly Community, Inc. These are some of the organizations that assist students with disabilities in transitioning from school to the world of work.

An upcoming date to mark on your calendar is October 19, Disability Mentoring Day. Disability Mentoring Day started in 1999 in the White House with just three dozen participants and has grown to 9,000 participating mentees in 2004 and more than 2,500 employer mentors in 15 countries. When a program grows that fast, there must be something to it. A large part of Disability Mentoring Day's success is due to local coordinators which are Holly Community, Inc., Salisbury, MD on the Lower Eastern Shore and The Benedictine School, Ridgley, MD on the Upper Shore.

According to Andrew Imparato, American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) President and CEO, "Economic empowerment is at the heart of civil rights for people with disabilities. By building relationships between mentees and mentors working in fields that interest them and building a year-round career exploration program, Disability Mentoring Day helps to create a pipeline of qualified workers and gives people with disabilities greater direction and motivation."

Also from the AAPD web site, "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."

Local events are being planned as this article is being written. As noted in a previous ESBLN article, in a 2003 study by the Wicomico County Board of Education, there were over 600 students, age 13-21, with a wide range of disabilities in our public school system. Some disabilities are imperceptible while others, more apparent. Will you help us, as well as your business, by mentoring a student for part of the day on October 19th? If the 19th doesn't suit, other date arrangements can be made. For more information, visit www.dmd-aapd.org or call Holly Community, Inc., at 443-260-0822.