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Youth with Disabilities Entering the Workplace through Apprenticeship

What Apprenticeship Employers Need To Know About Working with Young Adults with Disabilities



An Overview:

According to the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS), 12.8 percent of the civilian non-institutionalized population ages 21 to 64 years in the United States reported a disability — more than 22 million people. This makes individuals with disabilities one of the largest minority groups in the country. The employment rate for people with disabilities is 22.8 percent compared to 70.9 percent for people without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are the largest untapped pool of potential workers.

Many employers are reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities because they lack understanding about their abilities. In addition, they have fears about their responsibilities for providing reasonable accommodations. Yet, employing people with disabilities improves an employer's bottom line by reducing recruiting and training costs because they are productive capable workers who tend to stay with their employers longer. Also, in some cases, employers can receive tax benefits for hiring individuals with disabilities.

What You Need to Know:

Prospective apprenticeship employers should have basic information about people with disabilities, including information about their legal responsibilities to provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace. This kind of information can dispel some of the more commonly held myths that create barriers to hiring individuals with disabilities.



When asked to define what it means for a person to have a disability, many of us think of individuals who are hearing or visually impaired, or who have mobility limitations. Certainly, these conditions are included in the definition of disabilities, but the term is far broader. Census Bureau data shows that individuals with sensory (i.e. vision and hearing) and physical disabilities constitute a little over 20 percent of people with disabilities. This means that the largest percentages of disabilities are those with so-called “hidden disabilities,” such as learning and psychological disabilities.



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008, was intended to address the inequities that people with disabilities face in their daily lives and in the workplace. Under the ADA, employers with 15 or more employees must provide individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity for employment. This includes providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities who are qualified to perform the work required. A common myth is that employers must hire individuals with disabilities regardless of whether they are qualified. Employers are not required to hire individuals, including those with disabilities, who do not meet the basic qualifications to perform a particular job. The applicable criterion is whether the individual can perform the job with or without reasonable accommodations.

Reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments to the job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that enable qualified people with disabilities to perform the work. Employers must provide reasonable accommodations unless doing so would cause an “undue hardship”. While “undue hardship” does not have a specific definition, considerations include: the impact of the costs involved, the overall financial resources of the employer; and the impact of the accommodation on the facility.

A common misconception is that accommodations are costly. Two-thirds of accommodations, however cost less than \$500; nearly a quarter cost nothing. Reasonable accommodations may include:

- [Modifying the work schedule.](#)
- [Modifying existing equipment or devices.](#)
- [Installing new equipment or devices.](#)
- [Modifying how instructions are provided.](#)

Learning disabilities are the most prevalent type of disability. Learning disabilities can affect an individual’s ability to interpret what they see or hear, or impair one’s capacity to link information from different parts of the brain. Difficulties with reading, writing, doing math, coordination and attention are common. A 2007 National Institutes of Health study estimates that at least 15 percent of the population has some form of a learning disability, many of which are not diagnosed. Educational data on school age youth who have been classified as disabled show that over 60 percent have learning disabilities. Given the high prevalence of learning disabilities among the population, it is likely that many, if not most, employers already employ an individual with a disability.

Accommodations are specific to the individual. Typical accommodations that individuals with learning disabilities may need include:

- Reduced-distraction work environments.
- Computer technology for written work.
- Allowing more time to learn new job tasks.
- Instructions presented both in written and oral formats.
- Breaking information into small steps rather than providing a lot of information at once.

People with other types of disabilities will require a variety of other types of accommodations.

Public and private agencies and organizations that work directly with individuals with disabilities can help employers identify and implement reasonable accommodations. Foundations and other funding entities are sources of potential support. These agencies and organizations may also be able to provide assistance in defraying the costs of accommodations. Additionally, tax credits are available to defray the costs for small businesses to provide accommodations in order to remove barriers for people with disabilities at the workplace.



Employers also need to understand their legal obligations in the recruiting process. It is important to know that disability information is confidential, and it is solely up to the individual whether to disclose disability status. Many people with disabilities choose not to disclose that they have a disability. When interviewing an individual, an employer may not directly ask about disability status. Employers may ask questions regarding an individual's ability to perform specific tasks provided the same questions are asked of all applicants. After an individual has been offered a job, an employer may ask disability-related questions and require medical exams. However, the rule of thumb is that all applicants, regardless of a possible disability, should be treated alike and not according to any assumptions, myths, or stereotypes.

There are many sources of information to assist employers in providing accommodations and working with employees with disabilities. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) sponsors the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) to connect employers and people with disabilities to resources pertaining to job accommodations, self-employment, and small business opportunities: www.jan.wvu.edu. Additional resources are identified under "Where to Go For More Information".

Where to Go For More Information:

Visit the Department of Justice's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) homepage at www.ada.gov to learn more about this legislation.

For information from ODEP about tax incentives for providing business accessibility, visit: www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/tifpba.htm.

The Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center (DBTAC) is a national network of 10 regional DBTAC: ADA Centers that provide up-to-date information, referrals, resources, and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to businesses, employers, government entities, and individuals with disabilities: www.adata.org.

A wide variety of disability related information, including that pertaining to employment and civil rights, can be found on the DisabilityInfo.gov Web site at: www.disabilityinfo.gov.

Learn More

1. Understanding Apprenticeship Basics
2. Preparing Youth and Young Adults for Apprenticeship Programs
3. Increasing Participation of Young Adults with Disabilities In Apprenticeship Programs
4. Establishing New Apprenticeship Programs
5. What Apprenticeship Employers Need to Know About Working with Young Adults with Disabilities
6. Looking to Future Opportunities in Apprenticeship



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