

Disability Mentoring Day 2010- A Banner Year!!!

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Inspired by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Disability Mentoring Day came together through the partnerships of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), the U.S. Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration and the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. Matthew Sapolin, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and his staff worked "fast and furiously" to put on Disability Mentoring Day, now in its 11th year. The structure of the day involved a breakfast meeting to kick off the event, followed by mentees watching, learning and assisting their mentors on the job, and ending with an evening reception of testimonials and networking to wrap things up.

The breakfast kick-off, held at the New York Times building, began with keynote speakers and networking. Chairman of Disability Mentoring Day Eric Jackier led with an inspirational speech, stating: " Today is a great opportunity to explore as a community and shine despite whatever obstacles there are... no obstacle can't be overcome... ...people with disabilities can make the same contributions anyone else can."

The program reportedly doubled in size from last year. Mentors were specially trained on the importance of being a mentor to potential employees with disabilities. Mentees were afforded the opportunity to "shadow" their mentors to learn about jobs in their respective fields or areas of interest in a variety of industries. There was representation from: financial institutions, hospitals, universities, cosmetic and fashion industries, pharmaceutical, hospitality, medical centers, various city agencies, real estate, museums, transportation and more.

At the same time, employers gained increased appreciation of the talent represented by people with disabilities and a better understanding of how workers with disabilities can help them in meeting their workplace needs.

For the small percentage of mentees for whom a match could not be found, they were provided with the opportunity to take part in job readiness workshops. The day's events culminated with a reception including speeches, testimonials, musical performances and networking. A special treat included a speech and performance by Daniel of "Daniel's Music Foundation," whereby Daniel himself told an inspirational story of his journey recovering from an accident, leaving him disabled and ultimately leading him to music. He offers free music lessons to anyone with disabilities using a variety of instruments and tools, including piano, guitar, chorus, and acting to name a few. Some of his students performed with him and showcased their talents and joy for the art.

It was noted by Eric that "judging by the testimonials, this was one of the best years we've ever had!" The program was hugely successful, as new relationships were forged and follow up measures were taken to cultivate the valuable connections.
