

Disability Inclusion Training



No matter how experienced someone is regarding disabilities, there is always something new to learn. New statistics, new technologies and new treatments for diagnoses are always challenging us to keep up with the latest information from every aspect of human ingenuity. There are new discoveries every day in science, technology, psychology and even new ways to communicate those ideas. There is the old-fashioned handwriting, e-mailing, texting, tweeting and Skyping, all of which we can use to promote the concept of disability inclusion.

In December 2009, two staff from the Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) and two Kentucky AmeriCorps Disabilities Inclusion Advisory Council (KADIAC) members attended a specialized training in Albuquerque, N.M. The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP), a Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) training and technical assistance provider, presented the training as part of its efforts to expand the concept of disability inclusion in national service and community volunteerism.

Among the participants were representatives from CNCS's AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, Learn and Serve programs, and several non-profit organizations from across the country. In order to be eligible to participate in this training, attendees had to be responsible for the management and implementation of inclusion at a volunteer agency, national service program, commission, or be responsible for addressing requests for reasonable accommodations and overseeing its implementation. Increasing the knowledge of disability inclusion and the ability to impart this knowledge to others, whether it is basic or more complex, is a critical part of a disabilities coordinator's or an inclusion manager's job.

Disability Inclusion is "the ongoing process of creating an environment that respects the dignity and value of all individuals", according to Tom Wirtz, a conference attendee and the training/disability inclusion officer for the North Dakota Department of Commerce. Many of the conference attendees have adopted Wirtz's definition considering it one of the best definitions of disability inclusion to date.

Because of the wide range of experienced and inexperienced attendees, NSIP divided this training into two levels of expertise. Level I consisted of basic training techniques and activities that targeted national service and volunteer inclusion managers with little or no experience conducting disability inclusion trainings. Level II consisted of advanced inclusion training activities that targeted more experienced inclusion managers who were graduates of past NSIP Training-of-Trainers workshops or similar learning experiences. It also included those who already possess a basic understanding of disability concepts, or those who have had previous experience in responding to requests for basic technical assistance regarding disability inclusion.

The training encompassed many old and new ideas for those of us in positions to conduct presentations to groups promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities. Kentucky's four attendees now have a wider range of tools, techniques and strategies to draw on when conducting presentations. Among the topics addressed were inclusive recruitment and outreach, position descriptions, legal requirements, volunteer management and retention and work incentives for government benefits.

With so many programs available that provide necessary human services, and thousands, if not millions, of assistive devices available, the only thing remaining to be fully inclusive of people with disabilities is to make everyone aware of the concept of inclusion. We simply need to change our attitudes toward interacting with people with disabilities and realize that even the individual with the most severe disability can be an asset to society rather than a burden. This training is the beginning of that change. Remember, inclusion is an attitude, so keep it positive.