

July 31, 2023

PERSONAL VIEW

At anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act, more needs to be done

Last week marked the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. As then-President George H. W. Bush explained, “It will ensure that people with disabilities are given the basic guarantees for which they have worked so long and so hard: independence, freedom of choice, control of their lives, the opportunity to blend fully and equally into the rich mosaic of the American mainstream.”

He also noted, “Together, we must remove the physical barriers we have created and the social barriers that we have accepted.”

Thirty-three years later, we are still removing social barriers. At Solutions at Work, Inc. (SAW), we work relentlessly to show employers the competency and passion adults with developmental disabilities bring to the workforce. While the Americans with Disabilities Act provided more accessibility, inclusion and belonging are key.

Today, nearly two-thirds of the 22 million working-age Americans with disabilities have been left out of the labor market, according to the National Council on Disability's 2020 Progress Report on National Disability Policy.

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The problem is twofold. According to a 2023 HR Trends Report, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) does not make HR's top five priorities “due to time constraints dedicated to DEI efforts, lack of resources and funding, disparate strategies, low data to guide efforts, and low executive buy-in.”

Even with an active DEI initiative, an often-overlooked population is that of the disabled, and specifically adults with developmental disabilities.

We understand the intense number of responsibilities on HR departments, and having an expertise in understanding adults with developmental disabilities is rare. That's why SAW is here to be an extension of your team — providing solutions.



Judy Carey is executive director of Maple Heights-based SAW Inc.

SAW's Vocational Habilitation relieves the burden on an HR department and provides the bridge for true diversity, equity and inclusion. We champion our individuals, preparing them for employment. We witness, every day, the success.

Often, the jobs that are hard to fill or retain employees in — because some workers may find the repetition tedious, or not challenging — are jobs that are completed accurately and held for long periods of time by SAW enrollees. People with disabilities stay in jobs longer than individuals without disabilities — 62% stay three years or more.

What President Bush said when the ADA was instated still holds true today: “You've called for new sources of workers. Well, many of our fellow citizens with disabilities are unemployed. They want to work, and they can work, and this is a tremendous pool of people. And remember, this is a tremendous pool of people who will bring to jobs diversity, loyalty, proven low turnover rate, and only one request: The chance to prove themselves.”

We should have an ultimate goal in Northeast Ohio to create a win-win scenario. Individuals receive the opportunity and training necessary to be competitive in the workforce. Employers get a loyal, reliable workforce. We have seen this reality come to fruition and want more of Northeast Ohio to take note. And are grateful for organizations including the Cleveland Clinic, nVent, L'Oreal and more who have partnered with us and made inclusion a reality.

Fostering independence, confidence, and the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities enhances the entire population socially and economically. Just like different races, religions and cultures make our communities stronger, diversity in abilities can also contribute to our communities in positive ways. People with disabilities bring unique perspectives and skills that can benefit everyone.

Disability inclusion benefits not only people with disabilities, but also their families, friends and communities. We all benefit from a more diverse and inclusive society.

On this month's anniversary, let's really think about inclusion.