

## Creating an Inclusive Workforce Where Everyone Has the Opportunity to Succeed

October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). It celebrated the contributions of employees with disabilities and recognized the value of an inclusive workforce where everyone can participate and succeed.

President Obama issued [Executive Order 13548](#) on July 26, 2010, which provides that the Federal Government, as the Nation's largest employer, must become a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities. The order directs executive departments and agencies to improve their efforts to employ federal workers with disabilities or with targeted disabilities through increased recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts.

CDC is working toward an inclusive and diverse workforce that reflects the people that the agency serves. CDC has 1,231 employees who self-identify as a person with a disability and 158 of these employees are individuals with targeted disabilities, such as deafness, blindness, missing limbs (arms or legs), partial paralysis (unable to move part of the body), complete paralysis (unable to move anything below the neck), seizure disorders, intellectual disabilities (difficulty thinking, learning, remembering, or reasoning), mental illness, or genetic (inherited) or physical conditions affecting limbs and/or the spine.

“At CDC’s Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO), we want to increase these numbers, so we work to recruit, hire and retain well qualified individuals with disabilities,” said Darlo Koldenhoven, Disability/Affirmative Employment Program Manager. CDC’s goal is to have a minimum of 2% of its total federal permanent workforce be individuals with a targeted disability.

### Inclusion works

People with disabilities bring a different perspective and a better understanding of how to meet the needs of people with disabilities in the workplace. CDC seeks to improve the health of the whole population, reduce differences in health between people with and without disabilities, understand barriers to people with disabilities in the workplace, and address the needs of people it serves. Below are CDC staff with disabilities who contribute to the workplace.

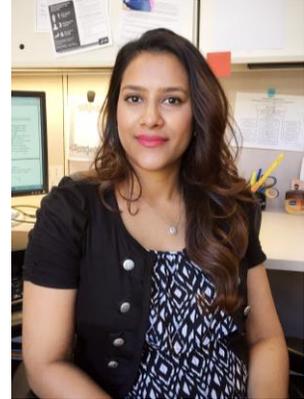


### Celebrating disability inclusion for more than 70 years

Reflecting the important role disability plays in workforce diversity, this year’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) theme was “#InclusionWorks.” Observed each October, NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and educates about the value of a diverse workforce inclusive of their skills and talents.

### ***Suhana's story***

Suhana is a Health Scientist with the Child Development and Disability Branch's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) team at the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD). The EHDI team works to identify babies who are born deaf or hard of hearing and ensures that they receive critical services needed to communicate and reach their full potential. Suhana was screened for hearing loss at birth and was found to be hard of hearing. This early diagnosis helped her parents gain the knowledge needed to ensure that Suhana reached her full potential. They accessed early services from a team of physicians, speech therapists, counselors, and teachers. Suhana works to help babies born with hearing loss have the same opportunities she had. [In this video](#), Suhana explains the purpose and mission of the EHDI Program.



### ***John's story***

John is a Management and Program Analyst with the School Health Branch in the Division for Population Health (DPH). DPH manages programs that provide cross-cutting approaches to promote health for school-age children and adolescents. John is working on a project called the [Virtual Healthy School](#). It is a school on the Web that allows users to navigate from room to room to see good examples of school health practices based on DPH's [Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community Model](#). John had a spinal cord injury as a teenager. As a wheelchair user, he brings a unique perspective to his projects. He provides recommendations to make the project inclusive and ensures that all children have access to the programs offered at their schools that promote good health.



### ***Kurt's story***

NCBDDD's Division of Human Development and Disability (DHDD) partnered with Georgia Tech's Scheller College of Business and its Institute for Leadership and Entrepreneurship through their innovative program called [Excel \(Expanding Career, Education and Leadership Opportunities\)](#) to host a student intern during the summer of 2016. Excel is a four-year college program for students with mild intellectual and developmental disabilities, leading to two separate certificates. The Excel program provides a structured and supportive educational opportunity, and it addresses the full scope of the needs of this population, including academics, vocational training, and social activities.



Kurt, a second-year student in the Excel program, joined DHDD this summer to combine his interests: working with information technology (the study or use of computers for storing, receiving, and sending information) and helping others. Twice a week, Kurt worked with DHDD's policy and communications

teams to help produce health communication products, and catalogue and summarize publications before their release. He attended and presented at weekly leadership meetings to understand how the office worked. Ken Surdin, Director of the Excel Program at Georgia Tech, added, “I was particularly impressed with the importance CDC’s staff placed on providing Kurt with a meaningful internship experience, and the effort DHDD put into making sure Kurt was provided with challenging assignments, continuous mentorship, and the appropriate level of job coaching in an intelligent, nurturing and supportive environment.”

Kurt’s favorite part during the internship was conducting informational interviews with multiple people in NCBDDD to understand how they got to CDC, their public health interests, and the roles they play on their teams. He attended a [CDC Winnable Battle](#) meeting, toured the [CDC Museum](#) and [Emergency Operations Center](#), and attended the Joseph Mountain Lecture with guest, former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg. At the end of the summer, he relished in “knowing that the work I did helped someone and I can contribute to the Division regardless of my disability.” Georgina Peacock, Director of DHDD said, “Kurt’s inquisitive, quiet way made for many interesting conversations. His assistance in helping us develop documents and web content, incorporating his unique perspective, improved our final communication products. We are grateful to have had his help this summer.”

Kurt is Excel’s first participant and the first Excel intern to work at CDC. DHDD plans to continue supporting the Excel program and will seek more interns in the future.

### **Building a disability inclusive workforce is everybody’s job**

“If we don’t provide assistance or make changes that will enable employees with a disability to do their jobs, they won’t be able to participate and fully contribute to the workplace,” said Darlo, who works to make sure employees with disabilities at CDC have access to their facilities and receive the [accommodations](#) they need to perform at their best.

Suhana and John have benefited from accommodations. Suhana receives Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) services for her hearing loss through CDC’s OEEO. “Thanks to CART, not only is Suhana able to fully participate in team meetings, but also we can obtain transcripts of meetings that can be shared with participants,” said her supervisor Marcus Gaffney, EHDI Team Lead. John can move around campus in his wheelchair and not worry about being able to access the buildings where he has meetings. However, several years ago, when his Division moved to another campus, he was disheartened that there was not an accessible restroom in his building. But after talking with his supervisor and contacting OEEO, he quickly received assistance. “It is important to speak up early to get any accommodation you need and not assume that you won’t get it.” John continued, “If it’s a reasonable accommodation, you’ll get it. If it’s something they can’t do, they will help you find an alternative solution.” He encourages supervisors to ask their employees occasionally if everything is working because the person with a disability may be hesitant to speak up, especially if he or she thinks it will incur extra costs. “Often, little



tweaks can make big differences in terms of adapting something for someone with disabilities,” John said.

“We are making progress,” Darlo said, “and thanks to federal policies, such as the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), people with disabilities have better access to buildings, transportation, and employment. However, there is still work to be done and we all play a role in creating an inclusive environment, not only for our own employees, but for all our partners and the communities we serve.”

### **Creating inclusive communities outside CDC**

Approximately 1 in 8 (22.6 million) working-age adults have a disability according to [a recent article published in \*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report\*](#). Adults in the labor force with disabilities are twice as likely to be looking for work compared with those without disabilities. Public health professionals, employers, and communities can address barriers that may keep people with disabilities from finding a job and obtaining the social, economic, and health benefits that employment offers.

CDC helps people with disabilities gain access to programs and resources to improve their health and well-being. The Disability and Health Branch at NCBDDD’s DHDD supports 19 State Disability and Health Programs and two National Centers on Disability.

[State Disability and Health Programs](#) inform policy and program activities at the state level. These programs ensure that individuals with disabilities are included in ongoing programs within the state to prevent disease and promote good health.

[The National Centers on Disability](#) develop, implement, evaluate, and report on activities aimed at reducing health differences between people with and without disabilities. The Centers also focus on improving the health of people with mobility limitations (such as difficulty walking or climbing stairs), and/or intellectual disabilities (such as difficulty thinking, learning, remembering, or reasoning) across their lifespans.

### **You can also commit to inclusion**

You can help build inclusive communities where people with disabilities have access to the resources and programs they need to succeed. Learn more about how you can be part of the [disability inclusion](#) movement.

To learn more about CDC’s Office of Equal Employment Opportunity please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/eo/>

To learn more about disability and health, please visit [the Disability and Health Website](#).

This article was written by Claudia Gaffney with contributions from Brita Bergland.