

National Disability Employment Awareness Month

October is the month in which we pause to recognize the challenge and the potential for people with disabilities to achieve employment and with it, the opportunity for more self-directed choices, productivity and ultimately, equality.

The numbers of people with disabilities in the workplace from the 2020 Census have not been reconciled yet as a function of COVID-19 related data challenges but will be provided during November. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/disability-employment-awareness-month.html>. The available data indicates even more of a challenge than in the recent past, also attributable in part to the impact of COVID -19. In 2020, 17.9 percent of persons with a disability were employed, down from 19.3 percent in 2019, while for persons without a disability, 61.8 percent were employed in 2020, down from 66.3 percent in the prior year. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>

For CPCS, as for everyone in our society, it is important that we consider and appreciate the people with disabilities who we work with, represent and even advocate against. For the individuals in this community, employment discrimination risks are manifest, starting with lingering doubts to their ability to perform work, or employers making inadequate reasonable accommodations that support performance and do not simply expose a disabling condition. Too often these doubts and failures to make reasonable accommodations cause people with disabilities to be rejected for employment or have less than equal experiences in the work place, including being diminished by co-workers who are ignorant to their rights. We are fortunate to work in an agency that strives to learn, understand and tirelessly support the needs of colleagues with disabilities, starting with our Human Resources department.

We all have the opportunity to be more inclusive, supportive and understanding of the people with disabilities in the workplace and in our lives. Our society functions at its best when all have the opportunity to contribute, earn and live productive lives. This is an important component toward building empathy and respect for each other. Please take a moment to consider the challenge that presents for people who have different ability to do the work because of mobility, vision, speech, hearing and/or mental disabilities. There are countless stories of people who have achieved great things regardless of disability and we need to do better to recognize the possible and question our doubts – the data makes this painfully clear, and our commitment to equity, inclusion and diversity requires nothing less.