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Subject: Campaign to Promote Employment for People with Disabilities in Pennsylvania

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Campaign to Promote Employment for People with Disabilities in Pennsylvania

CAMP HILL, PA (October 15, 2009) - Many people with disabilities want to work, but need training and help to find a job. In addition, many individuals are afraid of losing social security and medical benefits. AHEDD, a private, non-profit agency announces the "Works for me" campaign. The initiative will expand awareness about how people with disabilities can join the workforce.



Launching in October to coincide with National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the campaign will respond to what research has found to be several of the greatest barriers to employment among individuals with disabilities - the fear and/or misunderstanding of not receiving the support or training needed to obtain a job or losing financial security and health care benefits if employment is achieved.

"People with disabilities may be able to join the workforce and increase their financial well being," according to John Miller, AHEDD Vice President. "The Social Security Administration and PA Department of Public Welfare have made improvements to policies and introduced new initiatives to promote employment. These efforts complement existing resources and services provided by the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Career Link system. There are numerous options available to help individuals find employment and increase their financial well being. "Works for me" helps individuals navigate what is sometimes a confusing system."

"Works for me" is a resource for people with any kind of disability including mental health, physical, sensory or developmental. Through a Hotline number (1-866-902-4333 ext. 192), an individual can quickly and easily connect with a coordinator to determine which program is best for them and receive the guidance they need to make a decision about employment. Information is also available at www.WorksForMe-PA.org.

In Pennsylvania, there are over 530,000 working aged individuals with disabilities (ages 18-64), and over 60,000 youth receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration. According to a National Beneficiary Survey conducted by

Mathematica Policy Research, 44% of beneficiaries reported a goal of getting a job or a better paying job within the next five years. Of these, over half were working or actively seeking employment during the prior year of the survey. This study and related initiatives contrast a common stereotype that people with disabilities can not work and will rely on government benefits for their entire life. According to Miller, "this represents a profound economic development opportunity for the state and local communities."

On an individual level, there are countless benefits associated with employment for people with disabilities. "Employment gives a sense of purpose, pride, accomplishment and becomes part of a person's identity," he explained. "It provides an opportunity to take part in the community, develop new relationships and give back to society." The "Works for me" program will encourage those who want to be employed and have the drive and motivation to join the workforce to do so without facing intimidation from complex and confusing rules and other barriers.

The "Works for me" campaign kick-offs in October with statewide television and billboard advertising in addition to the launch of a new Hotline and Web site. The campaign will share personal stories of people with disabilities who, through employment, have benefited both personally and financially. One such featured story will be that of Oni, a 50-year-old, Philadelphia woman employed as a Community Work Incentive Coordinator.

Oni is working because it helped her improve her quality of life. She discovered the WIPA program and found out what she's eligible to receive without losing benefits. "Since working, I'm getting to a point where I don't have to rely on social security anymore," Oni said. "And it's opened doors for things I wasn't aware of."

"I was scared that I would start to work and lose my benefits," she explained. "But, I found out about WIPA, and realized that's not true. I've had improvements made to my home to make it more accessible and received funding for my wheelchair."

"Works for me" represents resources that can direct you to agencies and programs that help people with disabilities in Pennsylvania get a job. We will review your specific situation and guide you to resources that will help you find a job, obtain training, keep health insurance, get assistive technology, or find other support you may need. There are many great reasons to work and, with the resources we have available, it is possible! And, contrary to what some people believe, you can work without losing your financial security or health care benefits. "Works for me" is here to help answer your questions about working!

To learn more about personal stories or obtain additional information, please contact Karen Gross at (717) 432-2468 or visit www.WorksForMe-PA.org.

About AHEDD

AHEDD is a private, non-profit agency with a mission to serve the community as a catalyst in the employment and development of persons with disabilities. Established in 1977 with headquarters in Camp Hill, PA, AHEDD serves the community by collaborating with business, government and people with disabilities. AHEDD provides employment services and community education through a field office network throughout Pennsylvania and Delaware. AHEDD has collaborated with Suasion, LLC of Dillsburg, PA to design and launch the "Works for me" campaign. Suasion is a marketing and communications firm providing

services to nonprofit and mission-based for-profit organizations such as health care providers; educational institutions; social services; advocacy, protection and education organizations; associations; and, long term and continuing care facilities.

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