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A Newsletter by Disability Network/Lakeshore

“Working with DN/L has been a great benefit to this Herman Miller team. It has broadened my scope of how a company like Herman Miller can set and reach goals of being a more inclusive company.”

- Pam Roelofs, Herman Miller, Inc.

MORE than you think

OCTOBER 2011

THE INITIATOR

PARTNERING AND PLANNING TOGETHER: Creating a Sustainable Workplace

At Disability Network/Lakeshore (DN/L) partnerships are key to our success in making our communities where people participate, contribute and belong. When a business asks for our input into their disability employment awareness, we are excited to accept. Many times we are the organization entrusted with bringing disability to the forefront of peoples' minds.

Herman Miller, Inc. is one of those businesses that has reached out to DN/L and asked for input with their upcoming activity in October for Disability Employment Awareness Month. The informational workshop called "What Can YOU Do?" is available to any organization from The Campaign for Disability Employment. Spearheading the workshop at Herman Miller is the disAbility Advocacy Team (dAT).

"Working with dAT has been a wonderful experience for our organization," says Lucia Rios, Accessibility Specialist, at DN/L. "We have been able to see firsthand how a company not only talks about being inclusive, but takes action."

Currently, the dAT consists of 23 employee volunteers including members who work remotely calling in from North Carolina and Ann Arbor. The team's mission is "to advocate for sustainable initiatives to remove barriers at Herman Miller that prevent people in our community from performing to the full extent of their abilities individually and on teams." Each member of the group has a story to share about how disability affects his or her life. Some members have family and friends with disabilities



Pam Roelofs and Jill Woods

Photography: Kristen Worst, Tsakani Studios

and others identify as a person with a disability. But all members are passionate about bringing disability awareness to Herman Miller employees.

Pam Roelofs, Executive Assistant at Herman Miller, presently leads the dAT. Her hopes for the team are to reach out to Herman Miller's hiring managers, work team leaders, and talent recruiters regarding disability awareness. "We really want to lay the foundation to what it means to employ people with disabilities," says Pam. "We hope that others will recognize that having a disability is something that can happen to anyone at anytime."

In June, dAT provided a trial run of their upcoming October workshop "What Can YOU Do?" The campaign provides information for disability and business

organizations to promote positive employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Ultimately, the effort encourages employers, as well as workers, to recognize the value and talent people with disabilities bring to the workplace. With the "What Can YOU Do?" campaign as a guide, dAT members shared personal stories, talked candidly about disability and employment, and shared videos of people with disabilities provided by the campaign.

"It is our desire to teach those who are in positions to hire to recognize the value and talent that people with disabilities bring to the workplace," says Pam. "We also want to show that maintaining a flexible and inclusive workplace will increase the talent pool, as well as to help retain and advance employees who may be faced with a disability sometime in their career."

Jill Woods has worked for Herman Miller as a pattern maker for 21 years. She says being involved in the dAT is an excellent opportunity to engage with fellow employees. She learned sign language in college, has family members with mental illness, and raises leader dogs for people with

visual disabilities. She brings different angles of disability to the group.

"In the past we had too much focus on the disability and we'd like to change that view to ability," says Jill. "There are many people in the workplace that are getting older or acquiring disabilities," she adds. With the "What Can YOU Do?" event the team would like people to really focus on the talents people with disabilities have that can be retained and enhanced.

"Working with DN/L has been a great benefit to this Herman Miller team," says Pam. "It has broadened my scope of how a company like Herman Miller can set and reach goals of being a more inclusive company. The team looks forward to continuing our work together and building an even stronger relationship."

Though the October event is geared toward Herman Miller employees, Pam says the event will be recorded and available for those unable to attend. For more information on The Campaign for Disability Employment, "What Can YOU Do?" visit www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org

Maybe you or someone near to you is a person of influence at a company or organization like Herman Miller. If so, we would love to connect with you to explore partnership opportunities. We view it as a great privilege to incorporate best practices from companies like Herman Miller into all the employers and organizations we interact with.

Please contact us at (616) 396-5326 or e-mail Todd Whiteman at todd@dnlakeshore.org if such an opportunity comes to mind.

At Disability Network/Lakeshore, we believe everyone can participate, contribute and belong. To build a community where this is possible, we need you. Please include Disability Network/Lakeshore in your charitable giving this year.

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