



Microsoft® Office Specialist

Helps Individuals Overcome Barriers to Learn Key Workforce Skills

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Success Story



Able-Disabled Advocacy

ABLE-DISABLED ADVOCACY

Location:

San Diego, California

Center Enrollment:

600

Program enrollment:

80 students

Success Metrics:

- Validation of workforce skills
- Confidence booster
- Program differentiator



WORKFORCE TRAINING CENTER VALIDATES OFFICE SKILLS TO HELP DISABLED YOUTH AND ADULTS LAND JOBS WITH LOCAL EMPLOYERS

CHALLENGE

Able-Disabled Advocacy (A-DA) helps individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment achieve independence and become self-supporting through occupational skills training, on-the-job training, paid Internships, career counseling and job placement assistance.

The non-profit organization serves individuals

at four San Diego, California locations and has placed more than 10,000 youth and adults into jobs since 1975.

Recently, A-DA administrators analyzed the San Diego area employment landscape and realized they needed to do more to help youth and adults develop skills for the area's burgeoning computer and business services sectors.

A-DA's research also indicated that a technology certification, specifically the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) exam, would help to fulfill employer requirements to validate knowledge, skills and abilities relating to the Microsoft Office systems.

SOLUTION

The A-DA established two new programs to validate critical employment skills - CareerLink and TechWORKS. These two new programs gave A-DA a new platform to engage employers with the added benefit of certification.

"Allowing our students to certify gives them an edge and helps them to overcome the barriers of a disability," said Shane Doyle, director of TechWORKS. "It helps the potential employer to stop focusing on the disability."

Cindy Lennon, director of CareerLink, said adding MOS certification to the CareerLink and TechWORKS programs was a good way to distinguish A-DA and its program participants in the workforce.

"The MOS certification was a must have," Lennon said. "We actually made MOS certification a requirement for our program because we felt that it had so much value. There are a lot of training programs in our area, but most of the other programs do not emphasize certification."

CareerLink and TechWORKS program participants are hand-selected through an intense screening process.

"We have high expectations of our students," said Lennon. "We tell them we expect 100 percent of them to complete the course and become MOS certified."

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"MOS certification builds confidence for our students because it proves they can do something significant. It's a huge boost for them, and I think it helps them believe they can accomplish other things they set out to do."

– **Cindy Lennon, Director of CareerLink at Able-Disabled Advocacy**

Although Lennon acknowledges that not every enrolled student will achieve certification, so far nearly all participants have worked through the initial 10-week training course and individual practice with Certiprep, Certiprep's test preparation software for Microsoft Office certification. Students who score in the 90th percentile on Certiprep can take a certification exam in either Word 2003 or Excel 2003.

Doyle believes program participants are willing to go to extraordinary lengths and put in the work to achieve a valuable credential.

"I don't think anyone works to achieve MOS certification without understanding the value behind it," Doyle said. "Most of my students have done research on their own to determine the significance earning certification. Most also express a desire to earn additional certifications after they reach their first milestone."

RESULTS

Although visually impaired, an A-DA student became a proficient Microsoft Office user with the aid of a screenreader for text, menus, links and image meta tags. Currently certified in Word and Excel, Lennon believes the student's drive to succeed, coupled with proven Office skills, will make him an excellent hire.

"Just about every business is using Microsoft Office," she said. "If you have documented computer skills, you will be seen as more qualified to do the job. I think employers recognize the importance of those skills."

Tania Avezedo also enrolled in the A-DA CareerLinks program after struggling to find employment even with a bachelor's degree. Despite accessibility limitations in a motorized wheelchair, she said the training course and MOS certification helped put her in position to succeed. "I already had the college degree, but MOS certification gave me something current to put on my resumé."

In a chance encounter with a potential employer, Avezedo's positive attitude and credentials helped her land a part-time internship with the National Center for Urban School Transformation (NCUST). Pamela Engler, director of operations for NCUST, was impressed with the skills Avezedo had to offer.

"Earning certification is a way to help people learn something in a structured and comprehensive format," she said. "The experience of learning the programs is useful. Once you have the breadth, then you can build the depth."

Currently, Avezedo works part-time as a computer lab assistant at Pacific Gateway Group. She often trains others to use Office programs and eventually she would like to pursue an advanced degree.

Lennon sees a sense of self-empowerment emerge in students who successfully complete the MOS certifications. "MOS certification builds confidence for our students because it proves they can do something significant," she said. "It's a huge boost for them, and I think it helps them believe they can accomplish other things they set out to do."

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