

2008 National Rehabilitation Awareness Celebration

The third week in September is a good time to reflect on the importance of providing rehabilitation with compassion and dignity.

“Each year, during the third week in September, over six thousand rehabilitation providers and health and human services agencies throughout the United States celebrate the powers of rehabilitation,” observes Jim Brogna, executive director of the National Rehabilitation Awareness Foundation. “What began as a local awareness campaign celebrated by Allied Services healthcare system in 1976 has now blossomed into a year-round endeavor to achieve the educational goals of the rehabilitation foundation.”

The mission of the National Rehabilitation Awareness Foundation is to educate people about the benefits and impact of rehabilitation, develop programs which aim to increase opportunities for the nearly fifty million Americans with disabilities, and help those who are disabled live up to their fullest potential through rehabilitation.

“We’re proud to announce that this year’s theme is *Rehab: The Power to Change Lives*,” says Jim. “This slogan focuses on the fulfilling opportunities rehabilitation offers for physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, dizziness and balance specialists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, personal rehabilitation counselors, and others in the field of



rehabilitation to gain the satisfaction that comes from assisting and helping others improve their quality of life.

“And there is no better rehabilitation than that provided with compassion and dignity because rehab is not only a physical but also an emotional and psychological process as well. It is our goal that each of our partner agencies around the country carry forward that message.”

Everyday heroes

“Rather than choosing a few individuals to highlight nationally during our celebration, we prefer to leave it up to each local region to honor those who have done outstanding work close to home, either as professionals or as patients,” explains Jim. “We refer to these outstanding citizens as our *everyday heroes*.”

According to Jim, a local rehabilitation hospital might hold an awards luncheon to honor their everyday heroes, while a disability rights organization could sponsor a carnival to promote disability awareness and a physical therapy facility may set up an outstanding employees’ program.

“So National Rehabilitation Awareness will be celebrated September 21-27 in different communities around the country in many localized fashions,” says Jim, “while nationally we provide the central theme, essential ingredients, and information and support to enable providers to carry forward the celebrations’ theme within their own communities.”

Cigna Group Insurance and Intracorp are proud sponsors of the 2008 National Rehabilitation Awareness Celebration.

FHCN—Kris Kline

Providing New Opportunities for Fresh Beginnings

Millions of Americans with disabilities want to work, and rehabilitation providers play an integral role in helping to tap this workforce by eliminating barriers to their employment. Cammie McAda, vocational rehabilitation counselor with Cigna Group Insurance, shares with the readers of *Florida Health Care News* the part she plays in fulfilling their dreams.

My role is in assisting people with disabilities to re-enter the workforce. As part of the services I provide, I speak with individuals about their relationship with their current employer to see if there might be an opportunity for them to return to their place of employment, either in their previous role or in a new capacity. If that relationship no longer exists, then I speak to them about what other types of employers or opportunities they might be interested in, but many times our patients have over a decade of experience and loyalty to their company, and their employer has an equal number of years invested in them. Therefore it is often beneficial for everyone if the employer can find a new fit for that individual.

I recently worked for over a year with a young man in his early thirties, married with two children, who had formerly worked as a senior maintenance technician in a two-story building which did not have an elevator. As a result of a motorcycle accident, he had become a paraplegic.

The young man said from the very beginning that he didn’t plan on sitting home. “I don’t feel like that’s a good example for my children,” he said, “I want them to see that whatever happens in life, you keep going.”

Initially we worked to help him connect with medical and other community resources, while maintaining contact with his employer. By the time he was ready to return to work, his company had opened another site in the area and he was able to fulfill a new position as control room supervisor, so within a little more than a year he went through the whole process from injury to fulltime position.

I have to say that it feels wonderful to see the differences that can be made in peoples’ lives when they have the opportunity to start again.