

AHTA Grant-Funded Programs Improve Employment for People with Disabilities

By Andrew Zeiger

Historically, people with disabilities in the United States have had low levels of labor market participation and high unemployment levels. Starting in 1982, the AHTA began receiving federal grant funding to improve employment and training opportunities in horticulture careers for the disabled through an innovative job development and job creation program (Davis, 1992).

Census data from the 1980s indicated that the labor participation rate of the 13.4 million Americans with disabilities was 31.6%, compared to 78.9% among the 142.2 million Americans without a disability. Additionally, only 18.2% of the 13.4 million Americans with disabilities were employed full time. A 1980's Louis Harris Poll, which surveyed people with disabilities, indicated that over two-thirds of respondents said they would like to find work (Int. Ctr. For Disabled, 1987). When asked about barriers to employment, respondents mentioned employer attitudes, lack of appropriate jobs, insufficient education and training, lack of accessible transportation, and lack of necessary equipment or devices.

In response to these barriers, the AHTA employment programs were designed to provide education and support specifically to the horticulture industry. In total, five employment projects were grant-funded and completed. The first program, entitled Horticulture Hiring the Disabled (HHD), established educational materials as well as national and regional advisory councils composed of leaders across the horticulture industry. Project HIRE, the second program, created marketing materials to employ workers with disabilities. Project Plantwork was then established to demonstrate how incentives such as employer wage subsidies and personnel assistance could facilitate employment. Project HHD-Transitions

was established to demonstrate a model for how young adults with developmental disabilities could be prepared for employment. The last program, Project Access, created an industry-based matching and screening process to employ Social Security Disability Insurance beneficiaries within the horticulture industry.

The AHTA employment projects ran between 1982 and 1998 and resulted in the placement of 2269 people with disabilities within the horticulture industry. The projects demonstrated that the horticulture industry offers many job opportunities for people with disabilities and that horticulture employers are receptive to hiring people with disabilities. 🌱

Sources cited:

1. International Center for the Disabled. (1987). The ICD survey II: Employing disabled Americans. Louis Harris & Assocs.
2. Davis, S. H., & De Riso, M. S. (1992). Horticulture Hiring People with Disabilities, HortTechnology horttech, 2(2), 183-189.

FUN FACTS

In **1992**, AHTA participated in the AmeriFlora '92 event in Columbus, Ohio. The AHTA had a stepping stone placed in the Lions of Central Ohio sensory garden.

► See images on back cover.

AHTA 50th Anniversary Timeline

CONFERENCES

PRESIDENTS

1990

AUGUST 5

Protecting Health and Habitat in the 90s

Albuquerque, NM

1991

JULY 28

Advancing the Practice of Horticulture As Therapy

Philadelphia, PA

1992

AUGUST 9

Exploring the People-Plant Connection

Columbus, OH

Nancy Stevenson, HTR

1989-1992