



The Bridge Builder Project

Connecting businesses and communities to people with disabilities



The Bridge Builder Project is a landmark program presented by JJ's List (Wilmette) and the Center for Independent Futures (Evanston), and funded by a grant from New Trier Township. The objectives of the project are:

- To help local businesses reach the growing consumer market of people with disabilities and those who care about them. This market segment has significant discretionary spending power and is extremely loyal to businesses that provide disability-aware service.
- To connect local businesses and individuals with disabilities positively and productively to build greater disability awareness.
- To help close the gaps that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in the community.

Employees of local businesses need to have a basic level of comfort in serving individuals with disabilities, but often lack the resources and information to help them make disability-aware customer service a natural part of the day-to-day business environment. As a result, many local businesses are missing out on an opportunity to increase their base of loyal customers and to raise their standing in the community.

Individuals with disabilities need to know when they leave their homes to visit local businesses that they will be welcomed, respected and treated flexibly by the staff of the business. This is often not the case. Unwelcoming service is humiliating, frustrating and makes an individual with a disability feel isolated from the community.

Through participation in the Bridge Builder Project, businesses provide a valuable social service to promote disability-aware service that will benefit their business, individuals with disabilities who patronize the business, and the community at large. In the long run, as people with disabilities know more about a business's welcoming service, they will spread the word to their peers, networks and supporters.

The outcome will be good for all of us. Thank you for participating.

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PROJECT ELEMENTS

Businesses will build and promote their disability-aware service message in the community through:

- Membership in the JJ's List Disability Awareness Directory.
- New knowledge about the value of customers with disabilities to business.
- A window cling to promote the business's disability-aware service.
- A counter display to promote disability awareness and invite customer feedback.
- A disability awareness tips poster for the employee break room.
- Helpful information to share with other businesses.

Individuals with disabilities will develop important skills that will empower them to be involved members of the community including:

- Sharing disability awareness information with businesses.
- Learning responsibility and accountability for completing tasks.
- Building leadership skills.
- Becoming a trusted part of a team.