

Title:

'Excellence' Program Assists People With Disabilities

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Summary:

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Article Body:

People with disabilities remain an untapped resource in the nation's work force, facing an unemployment rate of 70 percent.

NISH, a nonprofit organization that helps secure federal contracts for agencies that employ people with disabilities through the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program, is working to change the status quo. The organization has introduced a new program whereby agencies designated as "Centers of Excellence" serve as mentors to other agencies to help them improve the quality of the service and products they provide to the federal government.

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program is the largest single source of jobs in the U.S. for people with disabilities. Often referred to as the JWOD program, it provides employment opportunities for more than 45,000 people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Through the JWOD program, NISH works with a network of more than 600 nonprofit agencies that employ and train people with disabilities.

The program stems from the Wagner-O'Day Act, passed in 1938, which provided employment opportunities for the blind by allowing them to manufacture mops and brooms to sell to the federal government. In 1971, Congress amended the act to include people with severe disabilities and to allow the agencies to provide services as well as products.

According to a recent Harris Interactive survey, two out of three people with disabilities who are not working want to work, but the lack of opportunities and accessibility issues prevent them from finding employment.

