

Building a Resume: Tips for Youth with Disabilities: Tips for young people with disabilities and their families on effective strategies for building the first resume

The resume continues to be the main tool employers use to review the qualifications of prospective employees, and what they use when deciding who to interview or hire. All people who are looking for a job should have an up-to-date resume that shows employment, education, and volunteer history. Many youth with disabilities do not have an updated resume, or a resume at all. This is often because they feel they have nothing to put on a resume. The misconception is that only prior paid competitive employment positions can be listed. This is far from the truth.

Employers understand that young people may not have a wide variety of prior job experiences to list on a resume. What they are looking for instead is proof that the young person wants to work, and has taken steps to build work skills on his or her own. So, what can a young person list on a resume that shows a strong desire to work?

Volunteer Experiences: Volunteering is an excellent way to show employers that you are actively seeking skills that will be useful to you on the job. It also proves that you are an active member of your community and are willing to lend your time to people, an organization, or a cause that needs it. Many people assume that volunteer experiences can't be listed on a resume, or that the volunteering needs to be for a long period of time. The fact is that employers like to see any type of volunteer experience, especially if it is during a time you are not currently working. Another great benefit of volunteering is that families can do it together. For example, a young person with a disability can volunteer with his or her family to serve meals at a local senior center, pick up trash in community parks, or help

at the local animal shelter. Remember that Volunteering is not a substitute for a paying job, and should never be the end result of the job search.

School Work Experiences: Many young people with disabilities are involved in some type of school transition or work experience program. These programs may offer work experiences in the school, such as filing or janitorial work, or in the community, such as working at a local library. Another component of these programs is often academic curriculum in work readiness or interpersonal communication. Young people should list these experiences on a resume because they are building work readiness skills.

Job Shadowing: It is sometimes difficult for young people to identify what types of jobs they may be interested in as a future career. There are countless kinds of jobs in the world, and job shadowing is an excellent way for young people to explore if a particular type of job suits them. It also is an excellent way to show employers that you have taken the extra step to find out if you are truly interested in the type of work they do. A job shadow experience needs to be nothing more than a young person spending half a day following a person who is doing the kind of work they think they may like to do, and asking questions. For example, a young person may be interested in working with computers, and seek the opportunity to job shadow a computer programmer to see if the job truly fits his or her interests. This experience is then listed on the resume.

Informational Interviews: Like job shadowing, an informational interview is a great way to learn more about a job you might be interested in. Informational interviews take

Beware of resume red flags! Employers are very good at reading resumes, and recognizing when something is missing or may not be accurate. Remember that the first rule is to never lie or misrepresent yourself on the resume. If an employer finds an inaccuracy on the resume, you may be removed from consideration for that job. A second

red flag for employers are “gaps” in the resume. Gaps are long periods of time where a person does not have a position or activity listed. For example, an employer may see that you have no work related activities for a full year, and wonder what you were doing during that time. Employers tend to be cautious about people with big gaps

in their work history. A good rule of thumb is to try and have a volunteer experience, job shadow, or information interview listed for every three months you are not working. This shows the employer that despite not having a paid position, you are still making an effort to build work experience.

less time than a job shadow, but with the right set of questions, can yield the same information. An informational interview is simply an opportunity to ask questions of a person who is doing the type of job you are thinking of pursuing. It can be done over lunch or even through e-mail messages. Families can help arrange interviews by accessing people in their person networks who work in those fields. Again, this activity is then listed on the resume.

Attending of Career Fairs: Many school transition programs, colleges, and business groups will hold career fairs to help students access information about certain jobs. These events are a wonderful opportunity to learn what education and skills are needed to be in the world of work. There is no reason why this experience can't be included on a resume. One example of how attending a career fair could be portrayed on a resume could be: "Attended Mill City Transition Fair and spoke to an advocacy organization about job accommodations and to a representative from a local bank about what is needed to become a teller."

The resume is still an essential part of the hiring process. Youth with disabilities should have an updated, complete resume just like all other job seekers. Even if a person is receiving supports on the job or help finding employment (through Vocational Rehabilitation or a community rehabilitation provider), they need a resume. A good resume can help all youth become competitively employed.