



Oct. 20, 2023

Welcome to Employment Connections' (EC) Division newsletter - *The Connection!* This newsletter focuses on sharing information to connect, engage, support, and excel.

Read regular updates on projects and programs, and this month's message from Assistant Director Alberto Isiordia. We also want and need to hear from you! Send your thoughts and suggestions to the [EC Virtual Suggestion Box](#); and for newsletter ideas and comments, you can share those by emailing the EC Communications [inbox](#), and we'll be in touch with you!

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Message from the assistant director of operations

Hi, Employment Connections team,

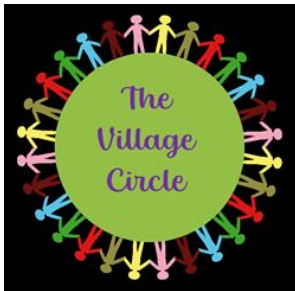


Last week, as I picked some apples at the farm I grew up on last week, it dawned on me that fall is officially here. Summer sure went by fast!

Our weather cycles and works cycles are tied together in workforce development. This time of year, we are coming up on seasonal layoffs and UICS' busy time. Certain regions are impacted more by this than others. We are working hard to make sure you are all supported in your roles, and our goal is to make sure you are feeling the "love," as outlined in our core values.

An important step to achieving that goal came on Oct. 3-5 when we brought together more than 50 supervisors from around the state for the Supervisor Summit. I have been so impressed with the energy and drive I saw at the Summit; let alone all the work this group accomplishes in any given week. Know that we plan to take all the supervisors' input and recommendations and make it even better next year! To get an inside story on the Summit, don't miss our Summit article and photos.

SUPERVISORS SUMMIT



The October Village Circle meetings have been productive, and our last few conversations have been on worker safety. On Oct. 11, Joe Chinco, assistant safety and security program manager in the Office of Facilities and Safety, joined us and answered staff questions. Some questions require follow-up with guidance from the experts. We ask for your patience as we wait for responses from ITSD.

If you have questions or concerns, you can always drop them in the [EC Virtual Suggestion Box](#). Suggestions are totally anonymous, but it helps us to have your email in case we have clarifying questions. The next Village Circle will be on Oct. 25 when we'll talk with Deputy Commissioner Phil White.

I hope you saw ESD's big announcement earlier this month about the [Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development \(PROWD\)](#) award and the \$6.2 million federal grant to support reentry work in the Seattle-King County region. It took an impressive team effort to make this happen, and our grant team has earned the right to celebrate! Thank you again. You know who you are. The four-year grant clock started ticking on Sept. 30, and we are all excited to hit the ground running and implement the work with partners and the reentry community.

Next week, the Washington State Office of Equity is holding the annual [We the People Convening on Oct. 24 - 25](#). This two-day event brings together state government employees, community members and organizations to talk about best practices as we build belonging and equity in state government. I have the honor of being invited to speak at the event. This is a wonderful opportunity to talk about our continued efforts to advance reentry programs. I hope to network with other agencies and community partners on ways to bridge barriers and serve offenders as they transition and reenter the workforce. At the same time, I look forward to learning how I can support in other areas, such as disability employment.

The month of October marks two national awareness topics: Domestic Violence and Disability Employment Awareness. This year also marks the 50th anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. You'll find a personal story and resource information on both topics later in the newsletter.



If you haven't responded to the [Employee Engagement Survey](#), please take it today. We have until Oct. 31. This is another important way you can make your voice heard. ESD leaders prioritize reviewing and acting on your anonymous feedback.



I recognize and appreciate all your dedication and efforts in serving our customers.

Muchas gracias,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Isordia".

Alberto Isordia
EC assistant director of operations

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WIT Replacement Project updates



A little bit about WIT

Submitted by Michelle Griffith, WIT project owner

Things are picking up now that we have our WIT contract in place! You may not have heard, but our new contract was signed on Sept. 22. Exciting! This shifted our Product team back into high gear, working quickly to resume the discovery sessions with the vendor and Lead Development Partners (LDPs).

What does this mean for you? It means the "sprint reviews" will be scheduled very soon. As a reminder, sprint reviews are part of the Agile method the WIT team is using to build the new case management system. The sprint reviews will give us an opportunity to see chunks of the product that have been developed and give us an opportunity to provide valuable feedback to the Product team. To learn more about Agile and sprints, check out the [Agile Training 101 Presentation](#) on the WIT page of the [Workforce Professional Center](#) (WPC) site.

Our other big focus right now is the data migration. If you were around when we moved from SKIES to ETO, you know having a clean data migration is key! We have an amazing team of staff dedicated to reviewing existing data to determine what needs to be fixed so it is ready to move into the new system. To see more of what we're working on this month check out the "What's going on with the project" summary and [monthly status report](#) on the WPC site.

WIT reminders:

- The next WIT town hall meetings are scheduled on Friday, Nov. 17, at 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. If you can, please plan on attending one of the sessions. We hope to see you then!
- If you can't make Nov. 17 or are looking for the latest information, check out the [WIT Replacement Project](#) page on the WPC site. It's continuously updated with excellent information about the project, including the most recent recordings from the WIT town halls, Q&A documents, and project status updates.
- Have comments or suggestions for our WIT project team? You can submit feedback, ideas, and questions directly to us by using the [input and questions form](#) located on the [Workforce Professional Center site](#).

Until next month ... that's a little bit about WIT!

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Strategic initiatives update

EC Playbook status and IT challenges

Submitted by Anne Goranson, EC strategic initiatives manager

EC Playbook: prioritizing our work

EC's Playbook is the document that will guide how we prioritize our work. Earlier this year, we received great feedback from EC team members about our current Playbook. We haven't made any changes yet, because ESD's Executive Leadership Team is considering some changes to the overall agency direction; but that doesn't mean we can't start taking your feedback to heart. One thing we heard was that we've packed **a lot** into the Playbook, and your leadership team agrees! To simplify, I'm planning to use this space to share basic information about key topics that we know are important to you – only one or a few each month. If you have questions about projects or anything **strategic**, please feel free to reach out to me at anne.goranson@esd.wa.gov.

IT challenges

Improving your technology experience with help from the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD) has been a priority for EC leaders since we started hearing concerns at Village Circle meetings. Back then, Victoria Pruett quickly compiled a list of comments from Village Circles (verbal and chat), as well as additional messages. We used those lists to create the following buckets, and EC's awesome regional operations managers (ROM) helped us to prioritize the list.

1. Responsiveness to Remedy tickets.
2. Slow bandwidth at WorkSource sites.
3. Onboarding – ensuring access for new employees.
4. VPN issues.
5. Intermittent computer lockouts.
6. Computer restarts.

While we still have work to do, I want to share that ITSD's managers have been fully engaged and focused on our priorities. Kudos to Ardriel Galvan, Famous Atkison, Krystin Boydston, Deb Calcote, Michele McMillin and Roberta Schulz, to name just a few! Many of our tech issues have developed over time, and it will take a while for them to be fully resolved.

In the meantime, we've developed an escalation process that we're using to ensure that critical issues are moved to the top of IT's task list. If you are experiencing a technology problem that prevents you from customers or completing critical work tasks, please check in with your region's ROM or regional director so we can move your issue to the escalation track. They will likely ask you questions about the impacts; and if there are work arounds, they may encourage you to take that route so that critical work stoppages get ITSD's attention first.

Since we started this process, I have received two escalation requests, and they were resolved the same day I shared them with ITSD. Please don't hesitate to reach out as needed!

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Resources and other updates

2023 EC Supervisor Summit delivers a high note for attendees.

The band is back together, and it has some new recruits!

Submitted by Victoria Pruett, communications consultant, Barney Brockwell, EC management analyst, and Cam McClary, regional change agent, SW Coastal Region

When October rolled around, it was time. Time for EC's team of hard-working supervisors to come together and talk about how to get the work done — how to manage the juggling act of managing and motivating staff, supporting customers, implementing plans and projects, and supporting leadership.



It was time to get the band back together for the first EC Supervisor Summit in four years. Over 59 supervisors, team leads, program supervisors and a few extras came together on Oct. 3-5 at the state capitol building. The agenda was packed, and the room was full — fuller than expected! Executive leaders kicked off the first day with intention and recognition of this valued WorkSource team that had come from across the state to be there.

“You represent all of Washington state government, and you do it well!”

Ismaila (Ish) Maidadi, EC director

A special Supervisor Summit planning team organized the event, a workshop-style conference for supervisors to connect, network, share best practices, listen, learn, air concerns, and find solutions. From the start, it felt like the old band was back together, and this time, some new players joined in. This was a band with talent and skills. Marie Burrows, director of People and Culture, tallied the collective supervisory experience in the room at over 1,000 years!

The team worked with regional directors to recognize a supervisor from each region and work group for their contributions. Thirteen different presentations and discussions covered everything from PFML, UICS and speed dating with all the state program operators to a PDP discussion and an EDI breakout session with Ayanna Coleman and her team. Aaron Mason blew everyone’s minds talking about artificial intelligence and what we know today on the potential impacts for workforce development.

“EC supervisors get more done in 40 hours a week with less resources than any other team at ESD.”

Jessica Barr, regional director, North Sound Region

Liane Johnson, ESD change leader, presented a self-assessment tool called the [Bird Assessment](#) to determine whether you are an Eagle, Owl, Dove or Peacock. Attendees enjoyed a laugh-out-loud presentation by funny man, [Tim Gard](#), who spoke to the group about using humor as a tool for self-care and de-escalation while providing helpful and practical ways to bring a lighter side to daily work.

A special thankyou goes to the EC Supervisor Summit planning team for planning and facilitating a fresh approach to coming together. The team was led by Barney Brockwell, and some seasoned EC staff: Robbin Gard, Cam McClary, Kim Tickner, Tonja Harris, Joe Volz, Mimi Reeves, Maliea Yakymi, and Michelle Wilson. Thank you for your time and hard work to bring the band together!

Check out [photos from the 2023 Supervisor Summit](#).



Liane Johnson, ESD change leader (left), and Michelle Cochran, supervisor, WorkSource Everett

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It's that time of year: YesVets Hire-A-Vet Employer-of-the-Year awards and the annual November statewide virtual job fair.

For YesVets employers and all businesses who hire Veterans, it's not too late to submit nominations before Oct. 31.

Submitted by Seth Maier, Veterans & Military Families Program operator, and Victoria Pruett, communications consultant



The Washington Hire-A-Vet Employer of the Year Award recognizes businesses and other organizations that go above and beyond to hire Veterans. There are three employer size categories: small employers (1-50 employees), medium employers (51-499) employees, and large employers (500+ employees).

YesVets employers have been invited to apply via YesVets and DVA email messages, and the EC Veterans & Military Families Program team is hoping to add some new YesVets employers to the list.

Nominations are still open for employers and if an employer is not yet enrolled in YesVets, it's easy to sign up at [YesVets.org](https://www.yesvets.org). It's free.

If you know of local employers or organizations that are hiring Veterans and deserve recognition for their efforts, have them **apply before Oct. 31, 2023**, using the [YesVets nomination form](#). To apply for this annual award, employers need to:

- Be registered in the Washington YesVets program.
- Have hired a least one Veteran in 2022 or so far in 2023.
- YesVets employers also need to meet the following requirements:
 - 7% of 2023 hires are Veterans OR
 - 75% Veteran 12-month retention AND
 - 7% of all employees are Veterans AND
 - Identify specific efforts to support Veterans and Veteran families in their community.

If there are any questions or you want to refer an employer, don't hesitate to connect with your local WorkSource Business Services team.

YesVets and the Seattle Seahawks are hosting the statewide Hire-A-Vet Washington Virtual Job Fair for Veterans and military families.

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2023, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.!



**HIRE-A-VET WASHINGTON
VIRTUAL JOB FAIR**

Nov. 7, 2023  **10 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

YesVets and the Seattle Seahawks are hosting a statewide virtual job fair for Veterans, transitioning service members, guard, reserve members and military spouses.

PROUD EMPLOYER OF U.S. VETERANS

Washington State YesVets program, the Seattle Seahawks and the Seahawks' [#TaskForce12](#) will host the annual virtual job fair to support transitioning service members, Veterans, National Guard and Reserve members, military spouses and their families.

Employers will be able to market their job openings to candidates statewide, and Veterans and military families will be able to connect with supportive employers that are part of the Washington YesVets community. YesVets is expecting more than 50 employers to participate, and Veterans will also be able to connect online with several Veteran resource and support organizations.

For employers, it's easy to participate. They just [sign up](#) for an online booth space!

For job-seekers, all they need to do is register before Nov. 7 by clicking [REGISTER NOW](#) on the [job fair page](#).

During the four-hour event on Nov. 7, Veterans Day 2023 will be recognized, and **ESD will announce the winners of the Washington State ESD Hire-A-Vet Employer of the Year awards.**

If there are questions about the upcoming virtual job fair, please email: hannah.schoepp@esd.wa.gov.

For information from the WA State Department of Veterans Affairs, see [October's WDVA Veteran Voices](#).



HIRE-A-VET
EMPLOYER of the YEAR
2023

Employment Security Department WASHINGTON STATE

YESVETS.org Say yes to those who served.

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Washington Service Corps to help with 20 WorkSource positions.

Run — don't walk — to the head of the line, and WorkSource did!

Submitted by Ashley Palmer, WSC director.



AmeriCorps recently decided to release unexpended funds back to grant recipients. [Washington Service Corps](#) (WSC) received our funds and immediately started working on plans for the best use. We recognized quickly that this funding would help us keep the IT Service Corps active for the current program year with some added financial benefits rolled in. By continuing the IT Service Corps, our members will be able to maintain access to the [NorthStar Digital Literacy](#) platform via our partnership with the Washington State Libraries. This platform was hugely successful last year in our pilot with providing tangible skills to customers and staff.

At the recent EC Supervisor Summit, we heard from many WorkSource supervisors about the value of hosting WSC members, and the tremendous support gap they are feeling right now without those member positions. WSC determined we can place 20 WSC members in WorkSource offices at **no cost to the offices** this year.

We moved quickly and sent messaging out on Thursday, Oct. 12, that 20 positions were open on a first-come, first-served basis. In less than 24 hours, all 20 positions were accounted for by WorkSource offices, and positions were posted for recruitment! These IT Service Corp AmeriCorps member positions will serve an 8.5-month term and the living stipend for these members will be \$14,247. WSC also has the [Member Equity Enhancement](#) state funding to increase the member living stipend to the equivalent of the state's minimum wage for eligible applicants.

WSC is really excited this opportunity presented itself and that we were able to put a plan into action swiftly. This is an opportunity to measure the impact of these members and to see how creative we can be in using other workforce grant funds to keep the momentum going!

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Paid Leave provides love and support for WorkSource teams.

Leave & Care and Employment Connections partner to deliver in-person resources.

Submitted by John Mattes, Leave & Care operations manager, and Teri Holme, EC South Sound regional operations manager



The Leave and Care Division (LCD) and Employment Connections (EC) have been working closely on a joint project to bring resources and tools to local WorkSource (WS) offices.

Here are the highlights on what's available and what's coming:

- **Paid Leave training:** Paid Leave overview training [ESD LCD Paid Leave Basics](#) is available for EC staff. Most WorkSource teams have already received training and are up to speed.

- **Paid Leave customer materials:** We have **posters in English and Spanish** for your local WorkSource resource rooms and business cards with a Paid Leave QR code. For posters, please reach out to teri.holme@esd.wa.gov. There is also a **“How to apply”** video tutorial for customers. [Paid Leave – How to apply \(13 min. video\)](#)
- **Desk-aid for WS staff:** This is to help WS teams with Paid Leave questions ([Paid Leave Desk-aid](#)). If you have questions, you can email tammy.stillwaugh@esd.wa.gov.
- **Pilot programs:**
 - **A resource room phone** with Paid Leave access is being tested at WS Columbia Basin and WS Rainier.
 - **Paid Leave virtual orientation** is being piloted at WS Rainier.
 - **In-person scheduled appointments** are happening at WS Columbia Basin and additional sites are being considered.
- **Paid Leave presentations and Q&A sessions:** If your WorkSource team would like to schedule a virtual/in-person Paid Leave Q&A session or presentation, please contact ESDGPLCDO Outreach@esd.wa.gov.

LCD and the Paid Leave team are excited to provide the resources WS needs along with testing different options on how we can work together to support our mutual customers with the best service possible.

If you have questions or would like to know how to obtain Paid Leave resources, please contact ESDGPLCAdmin@esd.wa.gov.

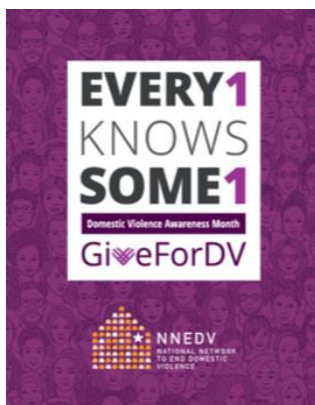
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NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

National Domestic Violence Awareness Month: A personal view on Every1KnowsSome1

Submitted by Anne Goranson, EC Strategic initiatives manager

Throughout the year, we honor a growing number of month-long observances. It’s a great way to celebrate the people we work with and to share information about cultures that might be unfamiliar to us. It’s also an opportunity to raise awareness of issues that touch us individually and collectively. October’s Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) is a good example.



DVAM began in 1987 and the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) started in 1990. NNEDV’s theme this year is [Every1KnowsSome1](#). With the statistics at 38%, approximately four out of every 10 individuals have suffered domestic violence in one or more situations. That could be a coworker, a boss, or a customer who has or is experiencing an abusive situation, or it might be you.

Back in 1990, I never imagined I would one day call myself a survivor of domestic violence, but it’s true. Today, I know that my life experiences, even the most challenging ones, have both strengthened me and made me more compassionate towards others. Almost every time I have shared my experience in a group, someone has reached out and told me that they needed to hear that they weren’t

alone. That’s why I’m writing this. There are many of us – too many – and I hope that by telling our stories we might encourage others to see the signs of abuse and get help.

There are many variations of domestic violence; and my experience was primarily with emotional abuse. I learned the hard way that abuse really does escalate. For many years, I worked during the day alongside my ESD colleagues, completely dedicated to this work that gave me a feeling of accomplishment and purpose. I’ve always had amazing, supportive co-workers. Then I would go home, not ever knowing what kind of mood I would find my then-husband in. At first, I knew that the names he called me and the demeaning comments he made about me were not true, but over time, they started to sink in, and I forgot who I was. I didn’t know then I didn’t deserve to be treated that way. No one does. I tried my best to fake it, and to do that, I couldn’t let anyone in. It was lonely, it was isolating, and it seriously impacted my health – both physical and mental.

It’s been 15 years since I left that relationship. I’m one of the lucky ones. Family, friends, co-workers, and a great therapist have helped me “find myself” again and learn that I don’t have to be perfect. I am enough, just as I am. So are you. Every single one of you. It is a fact that “[Every1KnowsSome1](#),” and if any of my story resonates with you, please read the DV resource information included below. Reach out and build a network of people who you know will have your back. Feel free to reach out to me if you need someone who will listen.

[Emotional Abuse: Signs of Mental Abuse and What to Do \(verywellhealth.com\)](#)

Additional domestic violence information and resource links are on [InsideESD](#).

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NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH:

Celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Submitted by Victoria Pruett, communications consultant

Employment Connections is actively advancing access and equity.

In April, we observe National Disability Awareness Month, and in October, we pay special attention to National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This raises awareness of disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of workers with disabilities. Disability awareness is a year-round priority for the Employment Security Department and EC as we support job seekers, their families, and our local communities. The theme for 2023 is “[Advancing Access and Equity](#),” which fits like a glove with all of [ESD’s Core Values](#): access, love, belonging, equity and stewardship.



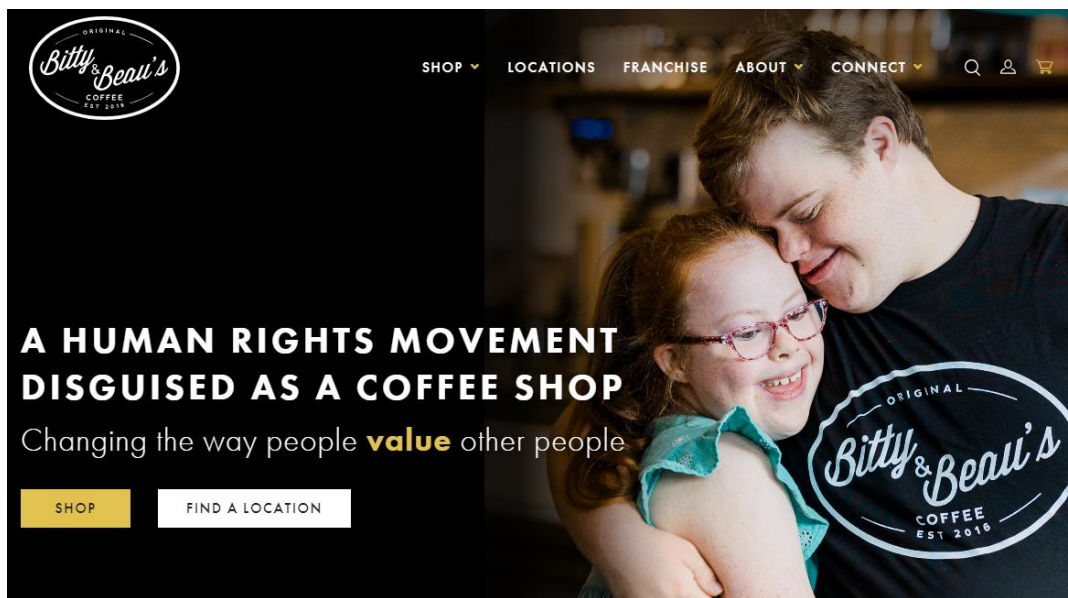
NDEAM’s roots go back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October of each year “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name. When the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) was established in 2001, its task became expanding awareness and scope. Find more information on the 2023 campaign available from [ODEP](#).

This year also honors the 50th anniversary of the passage of the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#), which recognizes the importance of prohibiting discrimination based on disability in employment by federal agencies, contractors, and recipients of federal funds. This was the first federal legislation to address access and equity for people with disabilities.

Leading employers are realizing that a disability-inclusive workforce is a stronger workforce, and they are now focusing on inclusive hiring and retention practices.

[A study by Accenture and American Association of People with Disabilities \(AADP\)](#) found that businesses actively seeking employees with disabilities outperform other businesses reporting twice the net income, increased revenues and 30% higher profit margins. Five large companies that are leading the way and doing it well are: Boeing, Bloomberg, Caterpillar, Fidelity and Delta Airlines ([Disability Inclusion – Five Companies leading the way, May 2022.](#))

Innovative new small businesses also are on the horizon with the mission and heart to embrace employment of disabled workers. [Bitty and Beau's Coffee](#), a family passion project, has led to a business movement based on hiring employees with intellectual disabilities (IDD), and it is changing the way people see other people. The purpose and mission have caught fire! This small business doubled in size in one year. Maybe we'll see some Bitty & Beau's Coffee franchises in the Northwest soon!



[The Founders of Bitty & Beau's Coffee on Building a Business Around Employees with Disabilities, May 2023.](#)

If you want to get involved with disability awareness, here are some options for the next few weeks:

- [Oct. 2023 NDEAM Webinars](#): Stony Brook University, NY ([Register today](#)):
 - Healthier U. Mindfulness, Oct. 24 at 8 a.m. PST
 - Employment of People with Disabilities: A Panel Discussion, Oct. 26 at 8 a.m. PST
- [Washington Mental Health Summit](#) is Nov. 2, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., sponsored by [Chad's Legacy Project](#), the University of Washington Medical School Behavioral Health Institute. Register to attend -- virtually or in-person -- on or before October 25 ([Register here](#)).
- [ValleyMed.org](#): [Nov. 18 at 1 p.m.: Free Screening and Director Q&A – Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution](#) at The Wyncote NW Forum, 1119 8th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101. Live captioning and ASL interpretation provided.
- [2023 calendar of disability activities-events.pdf \(centerfordisabilityinclusion.org\)](#)

For a list of related disability employment resources and NDEAM related information links, go to [InsideESD](#).

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Management tips

Being empowered: using your voice, and doing the work that matters



Looking at Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Disability Employment Awareness Month, it's important to recognize that individuals and groups who have been abused, bullied or marginalized may struggle to speak up and put words to their experience, let alone call out mistreatment or ask for support. If an individual or group is conditioned by experience to be a support person and not in the driver's seat or to not speak up and lets others take the lead, having and using their voice may be one of the hardest things to do.

It is hard to know how and when is the best time for certain voices to be represented, and hard to know how they will be impacted by changes within a workplace culture.

The movement to greater equity, diversity and inclusion is bringing those conversations to the forefront and empowering voices and perspectives that, in the past, have been put down or repressed.

What may come naturally to one person may take effort and energy for others. Knowing when to speak up, how best to communicate your message, asking for what you or your team might need and addressing difficult conversations are all skills that can be learned. For some, it may take more practice and awareness. Here are some articles to get you started.

[Encourage Your Employees at Every Level to Speak Up](#)

[Practice Gracious Communication: Communicating with Kindness](#)

[Speak with Confidence When You're Put on the Spot](#)

[Why Kindness at Work Pays Off](#)

[Make Time for the Work That Matters](#)

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It's that spooky time of year!

For Halloween fun in Washington, check out:

[*Family Halloween Events 2023, FabulousWashington.com*](#)

[*Best Washington Halloween activities, GetYourGuide.com*](#)

[*Washington Haunted Houses, WAhauntedhouses.com*](#)



Photo: Fabulouswashington.com

Hoping you all have a safe and happy Halloween!

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