

INSPIRING POSSIBILITIES

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 is the main tool employers use to review the qualifications of prospective employees, and what they use when deciding who to interview or hire. Everyone who is 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 have no 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 is proof that the young person wants to work, and has taken steps to build work skills on his or her own. What can a young person list on a resume that shows a strong desire to work? Here are some ideas:

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 worthy cause. Many people assume that volunteer experiences can't be listed on a resume, or that volunteer activities need to be for a long period of time. The fact is, employers like to see any type of volunteer experience, especially if it is during a time when you are not working. Another 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, volunteering is not a substitute for a paying job, but a step on the way to one.

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 or 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.

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. However, employers may also take notice of a resume that has many jobs listed in a short time span, and be concerned about the candidate's ability to stick with a job for an acceptable period of time.

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 can be as short as half a day of following a person who is doing the kind of work the young person may like to do, and asking a lot of questions during that time. For example, a young person may be interested in working with computers, and could 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 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 personal networks who work in those fields. Again, this activity is then listed on the resume.

Attending Career Fairs: Many school transition programs, colleges, and business groups 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 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 might 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), he or she needs a resume. A good resume can help all youth become competitively employed.

Visual Resumes or Portfolios

How can a young person make themselves stand out from other applicants? Consider creating a visual resume or portfolio of your goals, skills, and accomplishments. This is especially useful for youth who may have difficulty discussing these points during a job interview. A visual resume allows for deeper personalization by using pictures, graphics, and sound. There are several examples of visual resumes and portfolios online, and a youth can also consider using PowerPoint, a presentation program that is widely available. Youth are encouraged to maintain a traditional paper resume, and to ask if it is acceptable to e-mail the visual resume as part of their application.

Helpful Tip: Many businesses use an online application process or application kiosks to facilitate the hiring process. Youth may find that this method of applying for jobs is stressful due to the nature of the questions asked and the limited amount of time given to provide information. Having a completed resume is a helpful way to have all of the needed information in one place. Have the resume on a flash drive so it can be uploaded if requested. Finally, consider practicing how to complete applications online or at a kiosk to become more comfortable with how it works.

Resources

For more information, please visit the virtual Employment Resource Center at:
PACER.org/transition/learning-center/employment

The next page is an example of a resume for a youth with no paid job experience, but plenty of skills to offer an employer.

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Career Objective

I am a good worker and always on time. I like people and work well with others. I take pride in my work and like learning new things.

Skills and Achievements

- Student Manager of high school basketball team
- Often complimented on ability to work well with others and follow directions
- Good computer skills
- Able to use public transit for transportation
- Five Boy Scout Merit Badges

Education

2010 – Present Pine Falls High School

- Basic computer
- Communications
- Introduction to work skills
- Money management
- English

Work Skills and Volunteer History

Summer 2008 – Member of Boy Scout Troop #3 Clean Up the Highway Project

Summer 2012 – Visited Pine Falls Fire Station and interviewed the Chief

March 2013 – Assisted in raising money for the homeless in Pine Falls

Summer 2013 – Sold items at the concession stand at the Pine Falls Arena

Fall 2014 – Successfully completed two job placements by school transition program at Tallenger Landscape and Pine Falls Hospital

Hobbies and Interests

- Reading
- Listening to music
- Basketball
- Drawing
- Computers
- Traveling

References

Ken Tallenger

Tallenger Landscape

555-888-0938

Carrie Oswald

Pine Falls High School Work Experience Coordinator

555-888-2249

Tyrell Thomas

Boy Scout Troop #3 Leader

555-888-5722

(Written references available upon request)

My Action Plan for Employment

Have a discussion with your youth about what types of jobs they would like to do.

List 2-3 job types they identify:
1.
2.
3.

What skills are necessary to do the jobs that your youth identified? Please list 3 skills that your youth either has or will need to acquire to do the jobs he or she is interested in. (Skills might include computer use, interpersonal communication, knowledge of carpentry, or math/reading.)

Job #1
Skill:
Skill:
Skill:

Job #2
Skill:
Skill:
Skill:

Job #3
Skill:
Skill:
Skill:

Tip!

It may be helpful to begin this conversation by describing a job you have had and what was required of you. Talk with them about what they are already doing that will help when he or she has a job. For example, he or she gets to school on time, is well groomed, likes people, has good manners, follows directions, is pleasant to be around, willing to help others, has access and knows how to use transportation.

How is your youth going to acquire needed work skills? Be intentional about action steps you will take to help your youth.

Please check at least 3 boxes.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make sure work readiness or work experience is incorporated into IEP
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explore opportunities for volunteering in the community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make chores at home an expectation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look into job shadowing experience
<input type="checkbox"/>	Look for people your child can interview about their jobs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practice interpersonal skills in the community
<input type="checkbox"/>	Write down expectations of appropriate attire and hygiene and teach if necessary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Give opportunities to display leadership and self-direction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Be clear when tasks need to be done in a timely manner and practice if necessary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practice taking verbal directions at home
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enforce expectations of personal responsibility at home (waking up on time, homework, etc.) by creating a plan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practice phone skills by having youth call for information about a community business
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have your youth keep a calendar of his/her activities; medical appointments, school work due, youth spiritual activities, fun happenings, athletic events etc.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

Job Search Checklist

Here are some components of the job search to consider for your youth. Use this checklist as a reminder of strategies you can use to help your youth become employed:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Have discussion with your youth about career interests
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help your youth explore various jobs within chosen career area
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arrange for an informational interview with a job manager from your community and write a brief note of thanks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Work with IEP team to incorporate career interests into IEP
<input type="checkbox"/>	Work with IEP team to build work readiness, reading, math, and computer skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin discussion about what agencies can provide work supports (adults)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help your youth create a resume
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help your youth fill resume with paid work, volunteering, job shadowing, and personal interests
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider people in your personal network to help identify job opportunities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gather job applications
<input type="checkbox"/>	Create sample application for your youth to use as an example
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practice basic interview questions with your youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	If youth has an apparent disability, practice what he or she will say about his or her disability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Make sure your youth has appropriate clothing and knows what to wear for a job interview
<input type="checkbox"/>	Help your youth write follow-up thank you note to person who interviewed him or her
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practice working on automated job applications using the computer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider what job accommodations your youth may need on the job
<input type="checkbox"/>	If transitioning out of school, begin interviewing potential job support providers and talk with Vocational Rehabilitation Services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain high expectations that your youth will become employed!