

Challenge Unlimited Marks Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month with Conversations About Inclusion

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Challenge Unlimited is challenging employers and medical professionals to think about accessibility during Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and beyond.

The organization, based in Alton, helps disabled job-seekers connect with employers. Challenge Unlimited offers job coaching, interview skills and job carving programs that can make it possible for disabled employees to find “meaningful employment,” according to their mission. March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, and the organization hopes to renew some of the conversations about inclusion and accessibility throughout the spring.

“This year’s theme is ‘A World of Opportunities,’ which really speaks to our mission of providing pathways to opportunities for individuals with disabilities,” explained Marketing Manager Stephanie Schrage. “Awareness is key because those of us who may or may not have similar struggles may not think of what someone else is going through. So it’s really about that empathy of being able to put yourself in somebody else’s shoes and think about those things ahead of time to make those environments more inclusive.”

While Challenge Unlimited focuses on employment services and community housing, they also advocate and educate throughout the community. To mark Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, Michelle Matsche, Director of Training and Development at Challenge Unlimited, will talk to OSF St. Anthony partners and providers about how to make medical spaces more inclusive.

Schrage pointed out that medical appointments can be intimidating for anyone. Finding ways to make a doctor’s office less overstimulating can make it better for everyone, especially people with developmental disabilities. Matsche will encourage providers to think about their spaces and how they can be more accessible.

“The OSF St. Anthony’s Diversity Council hosts a speaker series and the purpose of that series is to educate their mission partners and providers on different elements of diversity, inclusion, unconscious bias, things like that,” Matsche explained. “One of the overarching themes of this presentation is how we can as individuals make a difference and be inclusive, because we can’t probably single-handedly overhaul entire systems. But what we can do is be inclusive of the people that are sitting across from us and make changes in the ways that we show up to better support the community of people with disabilities.”

Both Matsche and Schrage look forward to more partnerships in the community, especially throughout Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month and April, which is

Autism Awareness Month. They hope to see these conversations continue all year long. For more information about Challenge Unlimited, visit their [official website at cuinc.org](http://cuinc.org).



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