

GACEC Launches New Disability Website



DeLAWARE DisABILITY HUB

www.deldhub.com

DOVER, DE- The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC), a small state agency, in the Anniversary month of the ADA or Americans With Disabilities Act, launched the Delaware Disability Hub transition website www.deldhub.com. This transition website for people with disabilities in the state and across the nation, helps youth, young adults, parents, caregivers, counselors, school administrators, caseworkers, educators and health care providers to assist students with disabilities going through the transition process.

The teen years can be difficult for the average youth, add a disability to the mix and life scenarios change. Special consideration must be given to education, employment, housing, transportation, healthcare, legal issues, community involvement and so much more. The website does just that by offering many resources to help aging youth.

Delaware Disability Hub incorporates enlarged text, a text to voice reader option with a built-in instruction guide and an internal search engine to make the website easier to navigate.

This transition website includes a section for parents. "Parents often worry or stress over their child turning into an adult, especially if they are going to live independently. For example, many parents rule out college; however, the Center for Disabilities Studies at the University of Delaware

has made it possible for many students with disabilities to have the college experience,” said Wendy Strauss, the Executive Director of the GACEC. “All colleges across the state and the nation are supposed to have an American Disability Act (ADA) Coordinator to assist college students to obtain the accommodations they need. We want parents to have the resources they need to help plan their child’s life changes.”

The planning categories covered on DelDhub are education, employment, housing, transportation health, legal issues, It’s My Life and Understanding My Disability. Under those topics, are toolkits filled with resources linking users to federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, vendors that assist people with disabilities and a lot of helpful information. Each category also has videos on related topics.

Parents, teachers and students will appreciate the transition timeline, which provides information on age-specific targets and suggested goals.

Special education teachers and transition coordinators will find lesson plans, videos and a lot of useful information in  their toolkit to help parents and students.

How did this website happen?

In 2012, the State Transition Task Force for Emerging Adults with Disabilities and Special Healthcare Needs was charged with studying the transition process for youth and young adults ages fourteen to thirty by the State Legislature. The Task Force and workgroups comprised over one hundred participants with interests in the disability community, including state agency leaders, educators, medical service providers, parents, self-advocates, nonprofit organizations and community members. They highlighted the strengths of the current system identifying over-arching gaps in services to

individuals with disabilities in the transition phase of life on housing, transportation, health, education, and employment. They concurred that the State needed a transition website.

With the support of the Council, and Secretaries of Education, Housing Transportation, Health and Social Services, Division of Services for Children, Youth and their Families and Department of Labor, and the State Legislature funding was provided and Delaware Disability Hub originally launched in 2014. The website was successful and helped many people going through transition. However, as a State website it did not have the common look and feel of other State websites. So in 2019 work began to update the site with more accessible features, add new resources and give it a new look.

Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Director, Exceptional Children Resources and Dale Matusевич, Education Associate for Secondary and Transition agreed, "Delaware Department of Education Exceptional Children Resources is proud to partner with GACEC to establish a new and improved Delaware Disability Hub (Deldhub) website for Delawareans with disabilities of all ages and their families."

Wendy Strauss, the Executive Director of the GACEC, the small state agency responsible for bringing the website to fruition, wanted to close the gaps in Delaware and was delighted when the Task Force unanimously agreed on a transition website. "We saw a need in the state for gathering information to make it easier for the disability community to find the resources they needed quickly. This website touches on a variety of topics that will help young adults with disabilities and their families link to resources that will assist them in their journey through life," said Strauss.

The DeLAWARE DisABILITy HUB website will serve Delaware's roughly 26,000 school-age children with disabilities. It took a great deal of planning and a lot of research to choose sections of the website and the resources to make life easier

for site users. Main categories address the areas of life emerging adults will need assistance:

Education – Realize options and potential for higher education

Employment – Guidelines for entering the workforce

Health – Take control of their health

Housing – Planning future living arrangements

It's My Life – Exercising independent living skills and advocacy

Legal – Know their rights

Transportation – Become independently mobile

Understanding My Disability – Learn about various disabilities

In each subsection of the site, users will find valuable resources such as personal stories, frequently asked questions, toolkits filled with information and videos.

Under Education, you will find a Higher Ed section to assist students seeking out post-secondary options and Delaware's most comprehensive area for the Gifted and Talented students to find resources they need.

Educators will appreciate the teacher's section on the main menu. It's a quick access point taking them to lesson plans, videos, toolbox filled with resources and all the articles on the site.

The GACEC collaborated with hundreds of organizations across the country and Delaware to bring federal, state and nonprofit resources together to assist families. Strauss said, "We had an outpouring of kindness from across the nation as we gathered amazing amounts of information. There was no use in reinventing the wheel. Experts have done the work and now Delaware brings it all into focus. This site will make a huge

difference in the lives of thousands of people.”

American Disability Act (ADA) Celebrates 30th Anniversary



The ADA is celebrating it's 30th Anniversary on July 26, 2020. The ADA is a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against individual with disabilities. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in state and local government services, public accommodations, transportation, employment and telecommunications.

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