Disability Awareness Day

A Workplace Awareness Guide

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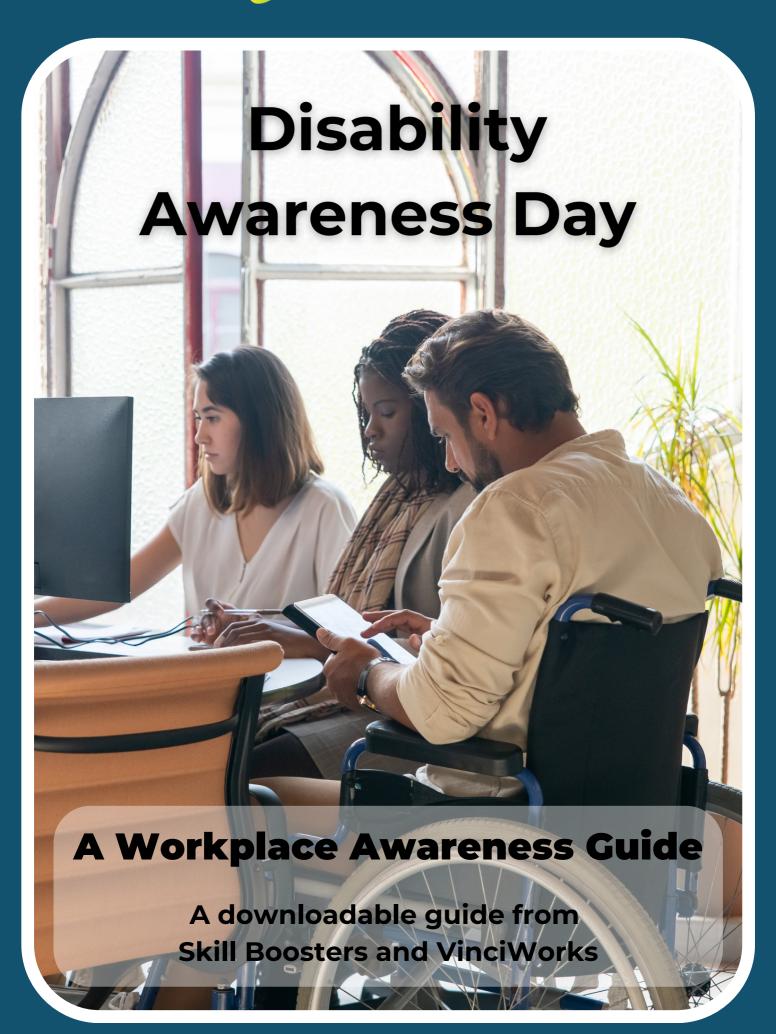Skill Boosters and VinciWorks

What is Disability Awareness Day?

Disability Awareness Day (DAD) is an annual event in the UK that typically takes place in July and aims to promote disability awareness and celebrate the achievements of people with disabilities.

The event was first established in 1992 and has been held every year since then. The in-person event is held in Walton Hall Gardens in Warrington, but there are also many online initiatives for wider participation, providing a platform for disabled individuals, organisations, and service providers to come together and raise awareness about disability-related issues, showcase accessibility initiatives, and provide information on various support services available.

Disability Awareness Day features a range of activities and attractions, including exhibitions, workshops, live performances, sports activities, and information stalls. It aims to challenge stereotypes, promote inclusion, and foster a greater understanding of the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

DAD Week

The week leading up to DAD also features a great line-up of exciting and interesting events including:

- Events for employers about recruitment and retention, reasonable adjustments and funding for workers with disabilities
- Shows and performances featuring performers with disabilities
- Mental health and well-being events
- Customer Vulnerability Summit, highlighting support services available to vulnerable customers
- Carers well-being festival.

How did it start?

Disability Awareness Day was founded by Dave Thompson MBE DL in 1992. Dave envisioned a day dedicated to raising awareness about disability-related issues, promoting inclusivity, and showcasing the abilities and achievements of disabled individuals. His goal was to challenge societal perceptions of disability and break down barriers that hindered the full participation of disabled people in society.

He was frustrated by the professionally-focused Independent Living Exhibitions and the exclusive atmosphere that surrounded Disability Sports festivals and wanted an event that would enable disabled people to live more independently. He also wanted to highlight support groups, services, equipment, holidays, benefits, and initiatives that offered disabled people a chance to try out sports activities, catering to all levels of interest and ability. It was with this vision in mind, that he established Disability Awareness Day.

When planning the initial event, he received negative feedback on the idea and was told it would never work, but he remained determined to make the day not just a reality, but a success, which he achieved.

The inaugural Disability Awareness Day was held at the Disability Resource Centre in Warrington, Cheshire, UK. The event featured various activities and exhibits to promote disability awareness, including information stalls, workshops, demonstrations, and live performances.

Over the years, Disability Awareness Day has gained momentum and expanded its reach, enjoying greater media coverage, welcoming high-profile guests, and winning recognition and awards.

It has become a significant event for disabled individuals, organisations, and service providers across the UK. The day serves as a catalyst for positive change, fostering understanding, acceptance, and inclusivity within society.

What can workplaces do?

Workplaces can play a crucial role in promoting disability awareness and inclusivity. Here are some actions that workplaces can take on Disability Awareness Day, and throughout the year!

- If you are local to the Warrington are in the UK, attend! At Disability Awareness Day in Walton Hall Gardens, businesses and professionals working in areas from social work to sports, can come and promote the services and products they offer to assist independent living in different ways. You can attend this fun, informative day as an exhibitor, performer, or guest. The events on the day and during the week leading up to it are a great opportunity for disabled people, carers, and anyone else to meet other people from the community and learn about any new tools, services, and technologies that are available.
- Offer disability awareness training to employees to increase their understanding of disabilities, dispel myths and conceptions, and promote a more inclusive work environment.
- Awareness campaigns: Organise awareness campaigns within the workplace to highlight Disability Awareness Day. This can include distributing informational materials, displaying posters or banners, and sharing personal stories or experiences of disabled employees.
- Conduct an accessibility audit of the workplace to ensure that facilities and infrastructure are accessible for employees with disabilities. This may involve making modifications to entrances, restrooms, workstations, and common areas to accommodate different needs.

- Review workplace policies, procedures, and practices to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of employees with disabilities. This includes recruitment and hiring practices, performance evaluations, career development opportunities, and employee engagement initiatives.
- Always involve employees with disabilities in the planning and implementation process to ensure that their needs and perspectives are taken into account.

Remember, disability awareness should not be limited to a single day. It is important for workplaces to make a long-term commitment to creating an inclusive environment and supporting employees with disabilities throughout the year.

A scene from Disability Awareness Day in Walton Hall Gardens. (Credit: disabilityawarenessday.org.uk)

Contact Skill Boosters for more diversity and inclusion resources.

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