



# Mentor Guidebook

Opening Doors to Employment for  
Young Adults with Disabilities

Revised August 2020

## **Table of Contents**

### **Welcome**

- Mission Statement
- Vision Statement
- Need for Workplace Mentoring
- Mentor Eligibility & Expectations
- Types of WTC Mentors
- What Makes WTC Different
- WTC Participant Eligibility

### **Mentoring**

- WTC Approach to Mentoring
- Working With & Mentoring a WTC Participant
- What to Say After Hello
- Act of Mentoring
- Creating a Mentoring Plan
- WTC Mentor Forms

## **Mentor Overview of Working Together Chicago**

- Flowchart
- Mentor Order of Operations
- Why Intern?
- During Internship
- Mentor Responsibilities
- Completion of Thirteen-week Internship
- Introduction to Job Carving
- Job Customization and a Mentors Role

### **Policies and Procedures**

- Reasonable Accommodations
- Disclosure
- Confidentiality
- Non-Stigmatizing Language
- Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy
- Photo Permission
- Corrective Action
- Top Takeaways

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

## **Mentor Training Checklist**

## **Resources**

## **Welcome**

### **Change a Life - Become a Mentor!**

Volunteer mentors are critical to the success of Working Together Chicago (WTC).

Mentors matter! Not only do mentors foster “true” inclusion, they improve overall workplace productivity. Mentors help young adults with disabilities through transition periods by acting as guides, sounding boards and confidantes<sup>1</sup>. Mentors also increase employee job satisfaction and retention, while advancing the professional development of the WTC participant.

We are excited that you have taken the first steps to becoming a workplace mentor. As a mentor, you will help open doors of employment for young adults with disabilities throughout the Chicagoland area. You will help talented young individuals' access and sustain employment.

### **Mission Statement**

Working Together Chicago is a program of the Center for Independence through Conductive Education is an Illinois 501 (c) (3) nonprofit.

The mission of the Center for Independence through Conductive Education is to help children and adults with disabilities achieve their highest level of independence in school, the community and workforce.

### **Vision Statement - Working Together Chicago**

WTC creates and sustains employment for individuals with disabilities. The program links unemployed young adults with disabilities to employers and volunteer mentors throughout the Chicagoland area. WTC helps employers transform the culture and productivity of the workplace by hiring a person with a disability

### **Need for Workplace Mentoring**

One of the distinguishing factors about the WTC program is our strong, researched-based belief in mentoring. A mentor is a valuable resource and critical when the Job Coach support ends. Job Coaches are state funded employees of Social Service Agencies assigned to help participants in task training and job readiness for a limited amount of time.

Mentors act as foundational support for an employed person with a disability. The foundations of support are the supervisor, job coach and the mentor. The mentor is someone who takes a special interest in a person and in teaching that person skill and attitudes to help them succeed<sup>5</sup>. A mentor can really help with the intern's confidence as they are starting out. Mentors can help in orienting the new employee to the office culture.

It can be difficult for anyone starting a new job. A new employee with a disability may already have some concerns and fears such as, “Will they accept me as a person, not as a person with a disability? What ideas do they have about my disability? Can I really handle the job responsibilities?”

Many times, knowing the culture of the employer is as important as doing the job well. Job satisfaction comes not only from good performance evaluations, but also from feeling that the person fits in, has friends at work and can be themselves<sup>5</sup>. A worker with disabilities may have a disadvantage due to less developed relationship-building skills and stigma. A mentor can help give feedback about social cues and advice on how to respond in certain situations.

## **Mentor Eligibility & Expectations**

To be eligible for the WTC mentor program, you must have an interest in helping individuals with disabilities succeed in the workplace. Mentors are able to problem solve and come up with adaptations to help assist the WTC participant in realizing their future potential in the workplace. All volunteers must be the age of 21 or older and have relative work experience to share and guide the mentee.

## **Types of WTC Mentors**

WTC seeks two types of mentors: Internal and Community. Internal mentors have been identified through the WTC workflow efficiency survey and are co-workers of the WTC participant. Community mentors are mentors that are not co-workers of the WTC participant

Both types of mentors engage in the same process and reporting to WTC. Internal mentors, however, might begin interacting with the WTC participant earlier in the internship.

## **What Makes WTC different?**

WTC specializes in three critical aspects of employment:

- 1) Job development through our unique job carving process
- 2) Paid internships that lead to sustained employment
- 3) Short-term job coaching
- 4) Long-term support through mentorship

## **WTC Participant Eligibility**

In order to participate in Working Together Chicago, individuals must meet the following criteria:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Have a significant disability and the ability to be gainfully employed
- Have an open Department of Rehabilitation (DRS) account
- Access to transportation

## **WTC Approach to Mentoring**

WTC takes many factors into consideration when assigning a WTC intern with a mentor.

A WTC mentor could be an internal mentor employed by the same company or a volunteer community member. Mentoring is a trusting relationship in which an employee receives guidance, support and encouragement from another professional. Successful mentoring programs involve thoughtful planning.

Common characteristics of successful mentoring relationships and programs that follow a traditional one-on-one format:

- Mentors and WTC participants make a long-term commitment to working together
- Mentors take time to build trust and respect with their mentee
- WTC participant and mentors set high, clear, fair and positive expectations for themselves and their mentoring partners
- Monitoring of the relationship should be consistent and frequent over the course of the mentoring relationship. Regular contact between mentors and mentees (with program staff as appropriate) has been associated with longer-lasting and stronger mentoring relationships
- Helping WTC participant learn about and adjust to the culture of a new workplace environment
- Introducing and connecting WTC participants to other professionals within and outside the company to expand their professional networks
- Encouraging WTC participants to pursue their professional goals and persevere in the face of challenges at work
- Identifying other opportunities for the WTC participant to grow their skill set and/or increase their network by job customization
- Assisting WTC participant with mastering a particular skill-set or gaining further content and subject knowledge required to maximize job performance and advance professionally

## **Working With & Mentoring a WTC Participant**

Your WTC participant has many skills and talents to contribute to the workplace. They have a desire to learn and grow through the internship experience. They want to succeed and advance in the world of work. Treat your WTC participant just like anyone else you may mentor. Have high expectations for what they have to offer with an appreciation for individuality.

There is a wide variety of disabilities and an even wider variety of individuals. The best practice for interacting with an individual with disability is to relax and be yourself. The best way to foster a relationship is to be honest and ask questions. If you don't know how to help your WTC participant, ask.

## **What to Say after Saying Hello**

Even before you say hello, assess the body language of the individual. You must approach the individual on their terms. Try and match their energy level. Some WTC participants might be great conversationalists, and others may not be able to look you in the eye. Either way, begin the relationship from the place the intern interacts. Look at your WTC participant's body language and non-verbal communication. This will give you indicators on how to interact with the individual.

Don't assume anything about your WTC participant or make judgements based on what you see or what you hear from others. Your WTC participant knows themselves better than anyone else, so start by asking questions you might ask anybody: "What are your career goals? What are your strengths? What skills do you want to learn or improve? What do you hope to gain through the job?"

## **The Act of Mentoring**

A mentoring plan is critically important for the WTC participant. The first step in a mentoring plan is to communicate with your WTC participant and agree on how you will meet on a regular basis.

A few challenges that can arise:

- Difficulty understanding some of the intern's work situations
- Conversation may be difficult to facilitate due to short answers
- It seems like my WTC participant doesn't want to talk with me

It is crucial to the success of the relationship that the mentor take time to get to know the WTC participant and build a trusting relationship. The first few times the mentor and WTC participant meet, it is recommended that they discuss any topics that will build a strong relationship.

## **Creating a Mentoring Plan**

Creating a mentoring plan helps guide the WTC participant and mentor. The plan encourages discussion and defines the WTC participant's employment and career goals. Understanding the WTC participant goals will guide the mentoring plan.

A mentoring plan is a series of written documents that clearly defines the goals and objectives agreed upon by the mentor and WTC participant. The plan outlines action steps the mentor and WTC participant agree to take to achieve the goals and objectives. Creating a plan clarifies expectations and responsibilities for both individuals. It also provides a tool for tracking the progress and outcomes of the relationship.

## **WTC Mentoring Forms**

WTC has a series of forms that helps formalize the relationship and process:

### **Intern Satisfaction Survey (Form M-2) - *To be completed at first meeting***

The intern satisfaction survey is to be completed after the mid-internship review performed by the job supervisor. This form asks the WTC participant general questions to create a baseline of satisfaction of tasks, supervisor interactions, and workplace culture.

### **WTC Meeting Summary (Form M-3)- *To be completed every time a mentor meets with a WTC participant***

Documents topics discussed, identifies and addresses any issues in a timely manner. Start/Stop/Continue is the first section in this document. Start/Stop/Continue is a process that helps the mentor/mentee relationship by identifying actions that lead to improved communication and professional development.

**Start-** Ask the participant one thing they or someone else could start doing

**Stop-** Ask the participant one thing they or someone else could stop doing

**Continue-** Ask the participant one thing they or someone else could continue doing

### **Mentoring Plan (Form M-4)- To be completed yearly September-December**

This simple form helps the WTC participant identify their short-term and long-term job goals. The form also plays an important part in the continuation of job customization and professional development of the person with a disability.

Goal -learn to use the printer to print daily schedule

Action- gain access to an approved computer, gain access to a log in, define rules for printing, learn how to print

### **Mentor Notice of Completion Form (M-Final)**

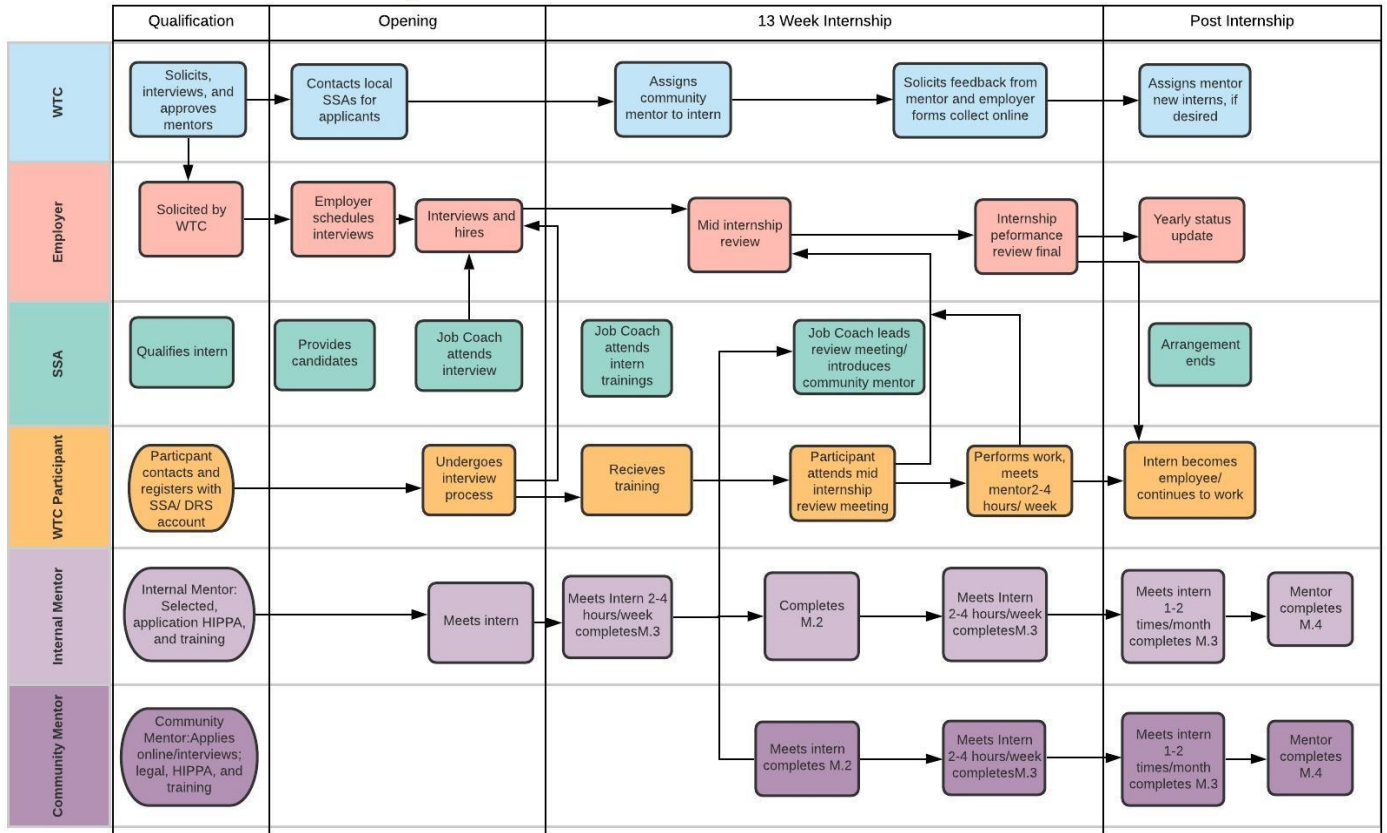
When a mentor no longer wishes to volunteer and exits the program they must complete and submit the notice of completion form.

### **Mentor Overview of WTC**

- WTC creates a position for employment through our unique job carving process
- WTC partners with local Social Service Agency (SSA) to identify candidates
- Interns with a disability have an onsite job coach provided by a SSA/DRS
- WTC volunteer mentors provide additional ongoing employment support of the intern
- Participants are considered part-time employees and work approximately 16 –20 hours per week for thirteen weeks with the goal of sustained employment at the end of the internship
- Mentors complete Internship Satisfaction Survey (M.2) after Mid-Internship Review
- Participants are paid at least minimum wage, directly paid by the employer
- At the completion of the 13-week internship the employer will complete a final internship performance review and either hire the WTC participant as an employee or have the participant return to the SSA for further job support
- Mentor continues to work with WTC participant after internship



## Working Together Chicago (WTC) Process Flow Chart



Social Service Agency (SSA): Non-for-profit organizations funded through the State of Illinois to provide free vocational training to people with disabilities through open DRS accounts

### Mentor Order of Operations

Community Mentor	Internal Mentors
Applies to WTC via online form M-1	Applies to WTC via online form E-6 M-1
Community mentor interviews with WTC staff	Meets intern week 1
Community mentor assigned intern week 5-13	
Community mentor meets intern in week 7 – 13	

Community and Internal Mentors
Mentor completes all WTC forms and releases
Mentor completes online video training and review of Mentor Guidebook
Mentor completes WTC Internship Satisfaction Survey Form M-2 after Mid-internship Review



Mentor meets with WTC participant for 2-4 hours a week during the internship and completes WTC meeting summary form M-3
Week 13: WTC participant either continues employment or internship ends. If hired, mentor continues meeting 1-2 times a month
Mentor completes Mentoring Plan Form M-4 with participant.
Mentor and participant complete WTC Meeting Summary form M-3 after every meeting

## Why Intern?

Internships have been a long-standing successful method of integrating prospective employees into a prolonged career. Employers value internships as a strategic tool to build and expand their employment base: Research shows that employers who have internships for people with disabilities are 4.5 times more likely to hire a person with a disability than those who do not<sup>2</sup>.

According to the Institute for Corporate Productivity, there are many benefits to hiring people with disabilities.

Top 5 benefits of hiring a person with a disability:

- 57% claim people with disabilities are highly motivated employees
- 47% inclusive cultures attractive to talent pools
- 44% improved customer satisfaction
- 34% improved communication between/across cultures
- 34% enhanced employer brand

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, currently 70% of people with disabilities are underemployed or unemployed. This is an alarming statistic. People with disabilities can have great success in the labor market when they have the right supports and are given a chance.

## During the Internship

The WTC participant is an employee of the hiring company or organization and will be paid at least minimum wage directly by the employer. WTC mentoring reinforces the job coaching support services provided by the SSA. Mentoring is critical ongoing support. Often mentor, SSA job coach, and employer interactions will overlap. It is important to have clearly defined roles when there is overlap. The mentor is there to help bridge gaps in professional development, and does not replace the SSA job coach or employer supervision.

## Mentor Responsibilities:

Research shows successful mentorship programs improve job outcomes for people with disabilities. As a WTC mentor, you are not expected to assess or prepare the individual for job readiness. Your primary task is to build a relationship, while the Job Coach and Employer build the intern's skills when first assigned to a WTC participant.

The success of both the mentor and the WTC participant is determined by the relationship that is built. The relationship is the most important aspect of any stakeholder involved in WTC. You **cannot** rush this process.

**Job Coach Responsibilities (provided by SSA):**

- Training for job readiness
- Transferring skills to workplace
- Develop efficient communication system for participant
- Professional etiquette training
- Coping skills training

The Job Coach also provides one-on-one training and other guidance to achieve satisfactory work output, or to maintain and retain employment.

**Employer/ Supervisor responsibilities:**

The WTC participant's employer has primary responsibility for oversight and supervision of the intern/employee. Any concerns or corrective actions must come from the supervisor in accordance with the organization's policies and procedures.

Creating an inclusive culture should be a recurring theme that permeates all work-related activities. Ensuring that workplace supervisors and other key stakeholders understand the importance of disability etiquette and accommodations are key diversity strategies for businesses or organization. Disability etiquette and awareness training should focus on increasing knowledge and understanding.<sup>3</sup>

**WTC Participant Responsibilities:**

WTC participants are expected to take ownership of their own employment. All policies and procedures of the employer are expected to be followed.

**Completion of Thirteen-Week Internship**

At the end of the thirteen-week internship, WTC strongly encourages all employers complete a final internship performance review of the intern. At the completion of the thirteen-week internship, the decision to hire the intern as an employee is at the sole discretion of the employer.

WTC takes great pride in the success of our program! 81% of WTC interns have transitioned to sustained employment. However, not all internships lead to ongoing employment. If the internship does not lead to employment at the completion of the internship, the SSA continues to work with the participant to secure future employment.

A WTC participant is not limited to the number of internships. However, a WTC participant will not be placed for a second internship with the same employer.

WTC reserves the right to discontinue services to any individual that does not comply with the employer's or WTC's policies and procedures and/or creates an unsafe work environment.

## **Introduction to Job Carving**

Job carving is a process that redistributes workflow and helps promote greater productivity of the workplace. Employees may be performing tasks over and over again that prevent them from completing more high priority tasks. 58% of time wasted at work has to do with employees not having challenging tasks. By changing the workflow from one employee whose skills are over-burdened and reassigning them to a WTC intern, an employer can see a sizable jump in productivity.

For more information on Job Carving check out WTC's Job Carving Training Video.

## **Job Customization and the Mentor's Role**

Job customization is a refining process of job carving that is ongoing and directly tied to the abilities of your WTC participant. For continued success, development of the WTC participant duties is key. Each WTC participant will have their own idea about how to make this work for them. Each WTC participant will continue to enhance their own productivity by sharing ideas for job customization. The mentor will also assist the WTC participant through the Mentoring Plan form. The Mentoring Plan form is the formalized process of job customization.

## **Other Things to Know When Mentoring a Person with a Disability**

### **Reasonable Accommodations**

While some interns with disabilities many need workplace accommodations, most employers report that dollar benefits of employing people with disabilities far outweigh dollar costs related to accommodations. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the leading source of guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues, surveyed employers who used their site and found that 58% of all accommodations had no cost, and those that did have a cost were only \$500 on average.

Reasonable accommodations can often be an intimidating term for both employees and employers. What is most important for the WTC participant and mentor to remember is that an accommodation or modification is an interactive process with the employer. This interactive process is an ongoing effort of the employer and WTC participant to remove barriers and increasing productivity.

### **Disclosure**

Disclosure is the process of sharing information about disability. Disclosure is voluntary and protected under the ADA. Disclosure is never required unless there is a formal accommodation request. Even then, careful consideration needs to be given to whom and the amount of information that will be given about one's disability.

WTC participants may or may not choose to directly talk about their disability and this should be respected. However, if disclosure is important to the success of the internship, a WTC mentor could ask for permission to discuss the disability and explain the advantages of doing so. If the WTC participant prefers not to engage in such discussion, do not insist. If they agree, keep your questions focused on what's relevant to the internship experience such as "Is there anything we can do to make the job experience better for you?"

## **Confidentiality**

All volunteers are expected to maintain professional standards related to confidentiality. Volunteers should not use the first and last names of participants or identifying details/features to discuss information or situations relating to participant in public places. Volunteers are not to discuss information or situations relating to participants with anyone other than WTC staff in order to problem solve or make decisions.

## **Non-Stigmatizing Language**

WTC requests that all volunteers and staff refer to participants as people first and to avoid using language that is stigmatizing (i.e. "a person who has a learning disability" instead of "learning disabled person). Person first language is crucial in opening doors and minds to employment.

## **Criminal Background Checks**

WTC conducts background checks on all volunteers prior to the start of their volunteer experience.

## **Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy**

In all activities Center for Independence through Conductive Education promotes and insures equal opportunity for all persons, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin.

The WTC program is committed to creating an environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Each individual has the right to volunteer and work in a professional atmosphere that prohibits discriminatory practices, including harassment. Each and every agent from all facets of WTC, shall refrain from discriminating against or harassing any other person. Actions, words, jokes or comments based on an individual's sex or any other legally protected characteristic will not be tolerated by WTC.

Any volunteer who feels they have been harassed should report any such complaint in full confidence to your supervisor or Executive Director.

## **Photo permission**

Volunteers are allowed to take photographs of participants if the intent is to share with and promote WTC and approval is given by the participant.

## **Corrective Action and Discipline**

Volunteers may have their volunteer privileges revoked for misconduct and/or other behavior including violation of any policy listed in the Volunteer Mentor Guidebook.

## **Top Takeaways for Mentors**

- Build a relationship
- Approach the individual at their energy level
- Be Patient: Mentoring takes time!
- Stay in your lane
- Ask questions
- Be yourself

## **Top Takeaways for Employers**

- Inclusivity builds more productive teams
- See an individual for their abilities
- Be more efficient: Job Carve!
- Benefits of employing a person with a disability are tangible and intangible
- It takes time develop a truly inclusive environment
- Supervisors of individuals with disabilities develop strong management skills
- Frequent and honest communication is the key to managing all employees well
- Be yourself

## **Top Takeaways for WTC Participants**

- There is a place for you in the workforce
- Others care about your career development
- Communicate your needs
- You are valuable to the community
- Be yourself

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q: Who is eligible for Working Together Chicago**

**A:** Adults who are at least 18 years old, and have a significant disability are eligible candidates.

### **Q: What internship positions are available?**

**A:** WTC develops jobs with employers in a variety of industries. WTC encourages intern candidates to consider their strengths and career goals.

### **Q: When are the internships scheduled?**

**A:** Interns work a minimum of 16 hours per week for 13 weeks. Time frames will vary based on the employer's needs.

### **Q: What happens when the 13-week internship is completed?**

**A:** Continued employment opportunities are at the discretion of the employer.

### **Q: What supports are available?**

**A:** Job coaching is available through the SSA partners.

**Q: Can the employer retain the intern for permanent employment?**

**A:** Absolutely. This is at the employer's discretion and the goal of WTC.

**Q: Is there a cost to the employer or intern for the services provided by the Job Coach through the SSA or WTC?**

**A:** No, there is no cost to the employer or intern.

**Q: Is transportation provided?**

**A:** No, but the Job Coach will assist the intern in identifying potential transportation options.

**Q: Is the intern considered an employee**

**A:** Yes, Interns are employees and follow all HR procedures. Interns are paid at least minimum wage.

**Q: Why do I need a Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Account?**

**A:** By opening a DRS account, you will access free vocational support services such as an assessment and job coaching.

**Q: How does an interested employer hire an intern?**

**A:** Interested employers can begin the process by visiting the WTC website and completing the employer intake form.

### **Mentor Training Checklist**

#### Prior to Start Date:

- Complete Volunteer Application
- Submit information for Background Check
- Review "Mentor Guidebook" Document
- Review "How to Job Carve" Document
- View WTC training videos (on website)

#### During Mentorship Tenure:

- Volunteer will meet regularly as needed with the WTC participant
- Volunteer will provide workplace support and offer sensitivity, awareness, and articulate clear expectations
- Volunteer will submit all Mentor forms

## Acknowledgements

Despite improvement in education, access to rehabilitation, and the laws prohibiting discrimination under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, people with disabilities still face serious obstacles in accessing the workforce and are at significant risk for living in poverty. Working Together Chicago is grateful to the following who have donated their time and talent to open doors of employment for people with disabilities:

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WTC Young Advisory Board:

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Marni Harris  
Kacie Herbst  
Emily Holzmeister  
Katie Lightfoot  
Elizabeth Okrzesik  
Thomas Rajkovich  
George Renaldi IV  
Allison Wagner

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## **Mentors Resources**

National Mentoring Resource Center

<https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/index.php/what-works-in-mentoring/resources-for-mentoring-programs.html>

The National Mentoring Partnership

[www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)

Employer Assistance Resource Network: Workplace Mentoring Primer

[www.askearn.org/pwm.cfm](http://www.askearn.org/pwm.cfm)

U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): Cultivating Leadership: Mentoring Youth with Disabilities

[www.dol.gov/odep/documents/CultivatingLeadership.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/CultivatingLeadership.pdf)

### **Resources - Individuals with Disabilities**

Illinois Department of Human Services and Rehabilitation Services

<http://www.dhs.state.il.us>

Social Security Administration – Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

<https://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.html>

Social Security Administration – Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-apply-ussi.htm>

Health Benefits for Workers with Disabilities

[www.illinois.gov/hfs/medicalprograms](http://www.illinois.gov/hfs/medicalprograms)

### **Transportation**

Regional Transportation Authority

[www.rtachicago.org/](http://www.rtachicago.org/)

Ride Dupage

[www.ridedupage.org](http://www.ridedupage.org)

Pace

[www.pacebus.com/sub/paratransit/](http://www.pacebus.com/sub/paratransit/)

Chicago Transit Authority

[www.transitchicago.com/accessibility](http://www.transitchicago.com/accessibility)

Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

[www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mopd.html](http://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mopd.html)

### **Rideshare Applications**

Uber

Lyft