

The North America Association of Rehabilitation Programs in Computer Technology Seeks to Network with Other Training Programs

Dr. Robert J. Leneway, D.P.A.
ARPCT President, STIRC
Plainwell, MI 49080 U.S.A.

Abstract. A North American Association of Training programs in Computer Related Areas hope to connect with other worldwide forums and training and placement programs also interested in working with persons with disabilities.

1 Introduction

The Association of Rehabilitation Programs in Computer Technology (ARPCT) is an organization of 59 computer related training programs in the United States and Canada for adults with disabilities. Founded in 1978, ARPCT is dedicated to improving the communication and operations among and between member training programs. It's purpose is to promote and support communication between and among programs designed to train and place persons with disabilities in areas of computer technology and information processing. It also provides assistance for the establishment of new computer training and job placement programs for persons with severe disabilities. The ARPCT would like to extend our North American networking to training programs for persons with disabilities and the students and staff that they serve in the E.C. and elsewhere.

The ARPCT member training programs range in size and are currently located in a variety of American and Canadian settings. They range from single curriculum programs with 15 students and staff in a small town Goodwill Industry training program, to large state wide programs with 300 or more students and many different types of computer related curricula, such as computer programming, CAD, PC office skills and LAN Administration. But all programs are guided by volunteer business advisory committees, and all train and place persons with disabilities in some type of computer related occupation.

2. The ARPCT Program

The Association of Rehabilitation Programs in Computer Technology was estab-

lished so that each member program would be represented on the ARPCT Board of Directors. The members meet twice per year, once in the fall for a national leadership conference and once in the spring for a training conference. The semi annual conferences have provided a way to foster the exchange of information, reports and idea sharing. However, with advances in computer online networking, opportunities for other training programs and interested persons throughout the world to also network with ARPCT members are now much more possible. There are four standing ARPCT operating committees including: Program Operations, Communications, New Programs, and Conference Planning. The Program Operations Committee provides coordinated information curriculum, adaptive technology and accommodations, screening and selection of participants, evaluation of student training, Business Advisory Council roles, support services, and hardware and software issues. A New Program Committee is charged with the development and sharing of information to promote the establishment of new computer training and placement programs for adults with disabilities. The Communication Committee fosters organizational communication through a newsletter, VIEWPOINT and developing an on line communication network. These 59 training programs along with nearly 500 other job training and education programs and the IBM corporation have formed the network to help ensure that adults with disabilities and/or those who are disadvantaged are provided access ramps to the informational super highway. This consortium is known as Project ACCESS and includes (ARPCT), the IBM JTC, another 114 U.S. vocational training program for adults who are disadvantaged and 300 programs who are members of the America Association of Adult Continuing Educators (AAACE). Another 85 program members of the International Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (I-NABIR) are currently in the process of joining this consortium. This network is dedicated to improving telecommunication and information on behalf of the training and employment of persons with disabilities and/or who are disadvantaged. It is estimated that the ACCESS programs have a potential membership of over 20,000 U.S. and Canadian members including adults with disabilities, and/or those who are disadvantaged, business supporters and professional staff who are involved with the consortium's program throughout the United States and Canada.

3. IBM Partnership

This consortium aided by a generous equipment donation from the International Business Machine (IBM) have negotiated a contract with one of the leading on line electronic U.S. networking services, America Online. Through America Online, each of these 500+ training programs are linking together in a nation wide education and training telecommunication network for persons with disabilities and/or who are disadvantaged. Through America Online, Access members also have free part access to the Internet. Each of the ACCESS members are dedicated to providing greater opportunities for persons with disabilities and/or those who are

disadvantaged; to live and work independently. ACCESS provides a telecommunication forum for the exchange of information in areas such as: curriculum, adaptive technology, telecommuting, legislation, funding, and other disability related issues. In addition participants are able to write, post resumes, conduct business background searches, communicate directly with employers and network with others on employment and independent living issues anywhere in the world. Next year professional development and student courses are proposed to be offered on line. This is only the beginning for all the promise and potential that the telecommunication media has to offer.

IBM has already made PCs, printers, and modems available to many of the programs. Most of the others programs have their own. Many of the adult learners have access to computers with modems. Some of the programs have internal Local Area Networks connecting all users within a local program. IBM has also agreed to contract America Online for basic monthly connect fees for the ARPCT and JTC programs for the disadvantaged.

4. Conclusion

Future planning is needed to pursue new emerging concepts including such areas as: teleconferencing, InterNet access, extension to other related international job training programs, curriculum sharing, national job matching, small business start up, home bound education, accommodation information, on line literacy training, professional development, etc.

We now hope to connect with other worldwide forums and training and placement programs also interested in working with persons with disabilities. Persons interested in establishing an internet connection, please contact either Vicky Olson e-mail Volson@aol.com or Bob Leneway Leneway@aol.com for more information.