

## **What You Can Do to Make a Person with a Disability Feel Welcomed**

by Kathy Shields, Vice President of The Alliance for the Physically Disabled

There are many things that each of us, as individuals, can do to help people with disabilities feel welcome. The following is a list from the Pathways Awareness Foundation's Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors Program.

- Treat ALL people as PEOPLE FIRST- as we would like to be treated.
- SPEAK DIRECTLY to the person with a disability, not to the nearby family member, companion, interpreter or the canine companion.
- Offer to SHAKE HANDS when introduced to a person with a disability. Persons with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb may shake hands. Shaking the left hand is okay, too.
- Place yourself at EYE LEVEL, in front, for easy conversation with a person in a wheelchair, with crutches, or with a walker.
- OFFER ASSISTANCE and WAIT until the offer is accepted. Wait and then ask for instructions. Guide a person with visual impairments by GIVING VERBAL CLUES to steps, curbs, escalators or doors.
- BE PATIENT and WAIT for the person with difficulty speaking, rather than speaking for the person. Help
  - by asking short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head.
- See the WHOLE PERSON beneath the surface of someone with a disability, and overcome the tendency to turn away or ignore the person.
- Treat adults with developmental disabilities AS ADULTS, not as children. Use first names only when using the same familiarity for all persons.
- Get the attention of someone who is hearing impaired by LIGHTLY TAPPING their elbow or shoulder or by WAVING YOUR HAND. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips.

These may seem obvious, but how often do we tend to shy away from the person who is different than us?