



International  
Day of  
**Persons with  
Disabilities**  
3 DECEMBER

## **International Day of Persons with Disabilities – December 3**

International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) was established in 1992 by the United Nations. It is celebrated every year on December 3.

The day promotes the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities at every level of society and raises awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of political, social, economic, and cultural life. The emphasis is on recognizing the rights of individuals to participate fully, equally, and effectively in society with others, and reduce the barriers they face in all aspects of their lives.

As the sibling of a brother who had profound developmental disabilities in his youth and was later diagnosed with autism, I have over five decades of experience living in the special needs community. The world is more accommodating and inclusive than it was when my brother was born in 1969. Although far from perfect, the United States provides some of the best supports from birth through adulthood of any country. For families with a loved one with a disability, the biggest challenges are often locating accurate information and resources and having time to implement what they find. For society, the biggest challenge remains understanding the needs of this group and providing the infrastructure to support individuals throughout their lives.

I am encouraged by the greater acceptance, inclusion, and integration of people with disabilities in all areas of society. Public schools now provide supports for individuals through age 21 or 22 (25 in Michigan). Students, in most cases, are integrated with those without learning challenges in many classes and separated for specialized instruction when appropriate. In corporate settings, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) laws make workplaces more accessible and inclusive. While the ADA rules have helped, there remains a staggeringly high unemployment rate among those with disabilities who want to work. Despite improving over the past several decades, direct government support for those with disabilities remains inadequate. With increasing media exposure of the joys and challenges that loved ones with special needs bring to their families, I am optimistic that the future will bring further improvements in the acceptance, inclusion, and integration of individuals with disabilities.

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Our firm, Oak Wealth Advisors, was created to provide financial guidance and support to families with loved ones with disabilities. We strive for ways to be inclusive and to highlight and celebrate the skills of individuals in the disability community. Partnering with local non-profit organizations has been one way in which we have deepened our

special needs planning knowledge while also expanding the reach of the organizations. The birthday cards and holiday thank you cards that we send to our clients and valued relationships have cover art created by disabled artists. We often host art contests for agencies serving the special needs community to generate the art used for the cards. The winning artist and the agency both receive prizes for their winning submissions.

Among the things that financial services firms can do to improve their employee awareness of disabilities among their clients, vendors, and fellow employees are the following:

- Host a formal training session either in-person or virtually;
- Recognize the neurodiversity (autism is the most commonly encountered type of neurodiversity) in the population and evaluate how it could benefit your firm;
- Improve accessibility in your office;
- Promote inclusion within firm teams and at firm events;
- Make a pledge to implement some improvement over the next twelve months

I hope that everyone will take a moment on December 3rd to think of one thing that they can do for one person with a disability. These small actions can have a powerful impact.

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*This article was written by Michael Walther, Founder and President of Oak Wealth Advisors, on behalf of the NAPFA DEI Initiative. Learn more at [www.napfa.org/DEI](http://www.napfa.org/DEI).*