JA BizTown becomes JA DeafTown

For two very special days during fall break, the hustle and bustle of JA City became a little more quiet when deaf students from Utah, Idaho and Colorado transformed JA BizTown into DeafTown. Participating with the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind, these amazing students are only the second in the nation to participate in an adapted version of the Junior Achievement BizTown program.

“The reason these students are willing to take their fall break to attend DeafTown is because they know they will have the opportunity to be in charge and run the whole City and feel like adults,” said Michelle Tanner, the Associate School Superintendent for the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind.

As part of the JA Biztown program, students learned how to fill out a resume, participate in an interview and were exposed to other career and financial concepts they will one day need in the workforce; but in this case, the JA BizTown activities were performed in the students’ first language, American Sign Language.

Jonathon Helgesen, Transition Specialist for the Utah Schools of the Deaf stated, “This event is all about these students’ futures. The big picture is to help students develop their skills: life skills, job skills, knowing what to do in the future. In the real world, of course, there’s going to be more barriers when it comes to language, but this opportunity allows them to see that if you have a barrier, there is a way to get that barrier removed, and you can be successful just like anyone else. Even though I’m deaf, I can show that I can work…..I can do these things!”

Pablo Miaya, who served as DeafTown Mayor and who hopes to be a teacher in the future, said of his experience, “This has been rewarding because it has allowed me to be in charge. It has encouraged me to follow my dreams. Deaf people, all of us, we have full potential just like anyone else. We can work, we can do anything that anyone else can do. We absolutely can do it!”

"Their options are limitless."  
- Michelle Tanner