Moving Forward: Expanding Employment Opportunities for Jobseekers with Disabilities Through Employer Partnerships

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New Realities in the Workforce System

Many of the nation’s leading companies have recognized the “Business Case” for hiring jobseekers with disabilities and have established disability recruitment initiatives.
The Business Case for Hiring Jobseekers with Disabilities

- Employees with disabilities have equal or better reliability and retention rates resulting in reduced costs and increased productivity for employers.
- Improved morale and productivity throughout the company.
- Employers with a diverse workforce can fine tune their products to customers with disabilities.
- Customers prefer to do business with companies that employ people with disabilities.
The Business Case for Hiring Jobseekers with Disabilities

- Employers must prepare to accommodate and retain experienced and knowledgeable employees who acquire a disability.

- Labor market projections indicate a shortage of skilled employees in the next decade; savvy employers are developing recruitment strategies to tap non-traditional sources of labor including people with disabilities.

Source: Disabilityworks, Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
**Companies that are Leading the Way**

Companies with disability employment initiatives include:

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<th>PepsiCo</th>
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<td>Manpower</td>
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<td>Walgreens</td>
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Innovative Partnerships Facilitate Hiring

- Employers rely on a partner agency to: (1) provide assistance with recruitment and training; (2) organize and coordinate workplace supports; and (3) provide technical assistance on disability related workplace issues.

- Employers do not want to have to maintain relationships with many varied workforce supplying organizations.

- Employers want a single point of contact to coordinate assistance and support they need to recruit and hire employees with disabilities.

- Assistance and supports provided through the collaboration are based on employers’ needs and standards.
Profile: Walgreens

- Established a corporate goal of having 30% of the employees at its distribution centers nationwide be people with disabilities.

- Located two new, high-tech distribution centers in South Carolina and Connecticut based on each state’s agreement to assist the company in meeting its disability employment goals.

- The Economic Development Agencies in South Carolina and Connecticut provided funding for training of employees with disabilities in their incentive packages to Walgreens.
Profile: Walgreens

- Partnerships with local agencies in Anderson, S.C. and Windsor, CT assist Walgreens with recruitment, job training, and supports for job retention.

- Focuses on recruiting people with intellectual disabilities and autism and has developed a state-of-the-art curriculum for training people for skilled positions.

- As of January 2012, 40% of the employees at the Anderson, S.C. and Windsor, CT distribution centers are people with disabilities. Additionally, Walgreens exceeded 1,000 employees with disabilities at its distribution centers nation-wide.
Profile: Walgreens

In June, 2012, Walgreens published a study comparing the performance of employees with and without disabilities in its distribution centers. Findings included:

- Employees with and without disabilities were equally productive.

- Turnover for employees with disabilities was 48% less than for employees without disabilities.

- Worker Compensation costs incurred by employees with disabilities were significantly lower than those incurred by employees without a disclosed disability.
Profile: Walgreens

Based on the success of its disability employment initiative in its distribution centers, in May 2012 Walgreens announced a national Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI) in its retail stores.

Elements of the program which was piloted in four states include:

- Partnership with a local service agency.
- A four week training program to prepare qualified candidates for store positions.
- Employment of graduates in Walgreens retail stores or another retail setting that requires similar skills.

Walgreens sought to have a partnership established and an initial training scheduled in each of its 227 districts nation-wide by January 2013.
Profile: Lowe’s

- Lowe’s is the 2nd largest home improvement retailer worldwide. It has 1,700 stores and 238,000 employees.

- In 2008, inspired by the success of Walgreens, Lowe’s made a decision to recruit employees with disabilities throughout its distribution center system. This began with Lowe’s effort to fill positions at its new distribution Center in Pittston, PA.

- The V.P. for Supply Train said: “It’s not charity, we are looking for great employees.”

- Lowe’s initially established a partnership with The Arc of Luzerne County. The Arc assisted Lowe’s in recruiting two local service provider agency partners and serves as the single point of contact.

- The Lowe’s initiative focuses on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities but includes jobseekers with a range of disabilities.
Profile: Lowe’s

- Prospective employees undertake a paid trial work experience overseen by a Lowe’s supervisor with supports from a partner agency job coach. Prospective employees who successfully complete the trial work period are placed in jobs at the center.

- In 2010, an internship program for students with disabilities was added in partnership with the regional education services agency.

- As of September 2012, Lowe’s has hired 77 employees with disabilities at the Pittston distribution center through the partnership.

- The success of the initiative at the Pittston distribution center has driven Lowe’s to establish replications at its centers nationwide.
Reddwerks is a software company that provides distribution management systems software to companies such as Best Buy, Walmart, and Williams and Sonoma.

In recognition of its customers disability employment initiatives, Reddwerks developed software to assist employees with disabilities to operate distribution center machinery.

The Reddwerks system displays information visually, using letters, pictures and easy-to-follow prompts. The system decreases training time and provides real-time feedback on performance.

The Reddwerks system enable employers and their community partners to expand the pool of candidates with disabilities for positions in distribution centers.
Profile: Project SEARCH

- Project SEARCH was developed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) in 1995 in response to a business need for reliable employees. The program prepares students and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities for entry level hospital jobs.

- The program at CCHMC is supported by a partnership with the Board of Developmental Disabilities, the local Technology Institute, Cincinnati Public Schools, and the Ohio Rehabilitative Services Commission.

- Students with disabilities in the Project SEARCH High School Transition (HST) Program spend their final year of school at the hospital in an internship that includes coursework and “rotations” through various jobs.
Once the student has successfully completed the rotations, a job placement process is initiated. After the student is placed in a job, job retention supports are provided.

Currently, CCHMC has approximately 65 employees hired through Project SEARCH. These people are predominantly in skilled well paying jobs with benefits.

CCHMC has touted Project SEARCH as a huge success in tapping a pool of reliable employees to meet its workforce needs. This has resulted in employers nationwide implementing replications.
Profile: Project SEARCH

- Based on the success of the program, Project SEARCH has been replicated at 200 sites in 42 states, the UK, and Australia, predominantly in hospitals but other sectors such as banking and government as well.

- The program has an 80% rate of employment for people completing the program at either the host site or other community employers.

- Project SEARCH at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center maintains a licensing program for all Project SEARCH sites to ensure fidelity to the model and offers curriculum materials and technical assistance as well.

- Project SEARCH now licenses “Adult” sites that provide the same program to young adults who have exited school.
Profile: Connecticut Industry-Specific Training and Placement Program

The Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) through its Industry-Specific Training and Placement Program offers grants to Community Rehabilitation Provider agencies (CRP’s) to develop partnerships with major employers on disability employment initiatives.

The grants are for two years and are based on the projected number of people to be employed. Grants include a lump sum payment for the first year to facilitate development and start-up.

As of December 2011, BRS had awarded five grants which, in total, sought to place over 400 people with disabilities in jobs at partner employers.
Employer-Driven Initiatives: Keys to Success

It’s about business

Leadership

Partnership

Innovative Teaching Strategies

Opportunities for on-site learning
KAEC is comprised of organizations and agencies in the Knoxville area with a shared commitment to fostering employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The KAEC is affiliated with the Knoxville Business Advisory Council (BAC) and is a sub-committee of the area Workforce Investment Board.

As a benefit to employers, KAEC provides a “single point of contact” for access to assistance and services for recruitment, job training and job retention of qualified jobseekers with disabilities and technical assistance on disability issues.
KAEC Members Include:

- Breakthrough
- CAC Workforce Connections/Knoxville Career Center
- Cerebral Palsy Center of Knoxville
- City of Knoxville, Disability Services Office
- disABILITY Resource Center
- Emory Valley Center
- Goodwill Industries
- Knox County Schools
- Knoxville Center for the Deaf
- Ridgeview Resources for Living
- Sertoma Center
- Sunrise Community
- TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- TN Division of Rehabilitation Services
- University of Tennessee—Corporate Connections
- University of Tennessee- Disability Careers Office
Knoxville Disability Mentoring Day
KAEC Initiative with the CVS Distribution Center

- After attending a KAEC employer forum and learning about the Walgreens distribution center initiative, the human resource director at the CVS distribution center in Knoxville reached out to KAEC to discuss a similar disability employment initiative.

- KAEC representatives made a presentation to the senior staff at the center after which the general manager decided to move forward with an initiative.

- CVS hired two people with disabilities who participated in a Disability Mentoring Day activity at the center.

- The initiative is currently on hold due to a changeover in management at the Center.
KAEC Partnership with Walgreens REDI

- Walgreens posted REDI trainings at five Knoxville area stores last December. KAEC contacted the Walgreens Regional Manager and established a partnership. The KAEC designated a single point of contact for Walgreens.

- KAEC then coordinated five member agencies to post for the REDI trainings. The agencies and stores are as follows:

  disABILITY Resource Center - Halls
  Cerebral Palsy Center - North Broadway
  Sunrise - North Shore
  Sertoma Center - Maryville
  Breakthrough - Chapman Highway
KAEC Partnership with Walgreens REDI

- Each agency had at least one job coach trained by the respective store manager and certified by Walgreens for REDI.

- Two rounds of REDI training have been completed. To date eighteen people have completed REDI externships and eight have been hired. Additional people are in the application process.
KAEC Partnership with Walgreens REDI
KAEC Project SEARCH

In June, Breakthrough on behalf of KAEC received a $15,000 grant from the Trinity Health Foundation of East Tennessee to develop a plan to establish two adult model Project SEARCH sites in Knoxville. The plan was developed over the Summer and submitted in September as a proposal for a $150,000 implementation grant. Elements of the Plan are as follows:

Sites and Operating Partner agencies:
The University of Tennessee Medical Center - Breakthrough
East Tennessee Children’s Hospital’s Hospital - Cerebral Palsy Center

Referrals: There is an agreement between the five KAEC members who have both a VR LOU and a DIDD contract to assure access to Project SEARCH internships to people served by all of the agencies.
KAEC Project SEARCH

Interns and staffing:
Each site will provide nine month internships for nine people served by DIDD each year.
Each site will have a Coordinator instructor and three job coaches. A job retention specialist will be added for the second year to provide supports to people hired by the host employers.

Sustainability:
The internships will be funded through DIDD Community Based Day Services funding;
The assessment, job placement and stabilization will be funded by VR Supported Employment funding; and
Job retention supports will be funded through DIDD Individual Employment funding and Ticket to Work milestone payments.
Conclusion

- An increasing number of employers recognize the value of people with disabilities in meeting their workforce needs and have established disability recruitment initiatives.

- These employer-driven initiatives have expanded both the number and quality of job opportunities for people with disabilities.

- For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, employer-driven initiatives have “raised the bar” on the skill level of jobs that people can perform and expanded the possibilities for people’s lives.
Conclusion

- In order to fulfill opportunities from employer-driven initiatives, local service provider agencies need to collaborate with each other and develop partnerships with employers. Provider agencies should customize supports based on the employer’s needs and policies.

- State’s need to have strategies to foster and support employer-driven initiatives and the community partnerships that support them.
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