

Business Appendix

The Hidden Workforce

- **Best Practices** for Hiring and Retaining Employees with Disabilities
- **Employer Survey:** Metrics and Analysis Regarding the Hiring of Workers with Disabilities

**Best Practices for Hiring and Retaining Employees with Disabilities
and
Metrics and Analysis of Employer Survey
Regarding the Hiring of Workers with Disabilities**

The Business Council of Fairfield County

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WIRED Research Demonstration Project on Disability Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the growing number of individuals with disabilities in America, particularly those able and willing to work, unemployment among workers with disabilities ranges from 43% to as high as 65%. The 2000 U.S. Census recorded 49.7 million people in the U.S. age 5 and over with a disability – nearly 1 in 5 U.S. residents or 19 percent of the population. Of that total, 32.5% have a severe disability which includes physical, mental or cognitive impairment and are unable to perform one or more physical, sensory or other functions.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration, launched an initiative in November 2005 called Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED), designed to bring together a network of assets from the cross-border region of Connecticut and New York – people, institutions, capital and infrastructure – to generate growth and prosperity in the region’s economy. This region, consisting of Southwestern Connecticut and Westchester and Putnam Counties, New York, is called *Talent for Growth*.

Findings:

- Employer survey was conducted from June through September 2008, targeting a universe of 1,868 employers in Southwestern Connecticut, Westchester and Putnam counties (New York) and yielded a response rate of 4.7%.
- Responses addressing most common barriers to employment with people with disabilities included “Lack of skills/experience, “workplace accommodation,” and “employer reluctance” (which could be interpreted as lack of understanding of the term *disability* and/or the general stigma attached to the term). The other positive response from the survey related to those employers who had acknowledged hiring people with disabilities. These employers checked high ratings for people with disabilities in a variety of subject areas including: productivity, promotability, attitude, dependability, punctuality/retention, and work hours tolerance.
- A positive response (41%) to the question –“If an employment placement agency provide an onsite job coach to a person with a disability, would you hire them?”-- reflects a best practice that is available to employers cost free who may be concerned about the ability of a worker to learn a specific job skill in a short time span.
- The positive response (47%) to the question – “Are there jobs within your company that could be performed by a person with a disability?” is further evidence that there are positions within large and small businesses for persons with disabilities if the placement agency can overcome the employer’s prejudice of the term *disability*.
- Hiring trends for people with disabilities, nationally and regionally, have continued to deteriorate in the last decade with a significant drop in the hiring of individuals with disabilities as the recessionary downturn began to take hold in the fourth quarter of 2008. Beyond the economic downturn, reasons for low employment for people with disabilities

continue to be more related to a lack of education as well as discrimination on the part of employers toward workers with disabilities rather than factual justification for why a person cannot perform a specific job.

- The workplace competency and capacity of people with disabilities have been and continue to be negatively affected by the myths that have developed around the job performance of workers with disabilities. A list is included of the most common myths regarding workers with disabilities. Example: Myth: A person with a disability is more likely to miss a lot of work. Reality: 86% of people with disabilities are rated average or better on workplace attendance than workers without disabilities.
- Follow up interviews with employers and disability advocates confirmed the findings of the employer survey and Best Practices research regarding the major barriers and success factors for employment for people with disabilities. **Barriers to hiring:** The stigma of the term *disability* and the lack of knowledge on the part of employers of what disabilities means and what workers with disabilities are capable of doing and not doing. **Hiring success factors:** Placement agencies using the business model based on skills and job capabilities when pitching the value of a job candidate to an employer.

Best Practices

Based on interviews with employers who have hired people with disabilities, the most effective approach to placing people with disabilities in jobs is to use the skill needs business model. Job placement advocates for people with disabilities often come from a social service background and fail to appreciate that the employer's needs come first in hiring decisions:

- Approach employers on a skill needs basis. Identify the employer's needs, and then match those needs with skills of job seekers you are trying to place. Keep in mind that the employer is the customer!
- Focus attention on the skills of the person you are trying to place; avoid using the term, "disability" in initial conversation with employer unless relevant to skill needs.
- Emphasize the high retention rate of workers with disabilities (72% after 6 months) and the reliability factor. Remind the employer of the potential savings of not having to replace workers who leave within months after being hired and trained for a specific job.
- Offer worksite job coach support to the employer. This onsite training service is generally paid for by the state or local Vocational Rehabilitation agency. It is only offered for a limited period.

- Promote the idea of probationary employment with employers regarding workers with disabilities; this format provides the employer with a period of time to evaluate worker without cost or hiring commitment.
- Do not ask employers to consider hiring a person with a disability for humanitarian reasons. Emphasize that persons with disabilities want to be judged by the same standards as any other job seeker in competition for the position. Emphasize that people with disabilities are not seeking charity, but a level playing field where they can be judged on their skills and work experience.
- Employers should provide training for managers directed at successful interviewing, hiring, managing and retention of employees with disabilities.
- Research indicates that one of the best practices used by employers for retaining employees with disabilities is a “buddy system” for all new employees, with disabilities or not. “The buddy system prevents the isolation and stress that disabled workers often experience in their first days on the job,” says Janet Dohm, General Manager, Brewster Plastics, Patterson, NY.
- The mission of St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County, Oregon, is to help homeless, destitute, and at risk populations (included those with disabilities) to become self-sufficient. A major factor in “Vinnie’s” success in placing clients with disabilities in private, for-profit jobs is its initial, temporary in-house labor experience requirement in several of eight Saint Vincent de Paul stores and entrepreneurial initiatives. The in-house work experience identifies skills or problems of its jobseekers before they enter the regular labor market, thereby insuring higher retention rates when the person is placed in a for-profit job.
- When interviewing a person with a disability for a job, employers’ application and interviewing procedures should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits disability-related questions or medical exams before a final job offer is made. Ensure that all questions asked during the interview are job-related.

Recommendations

- Encourage employers who serve on the local Business Advisory Council to invite business colleagues to regular, ongoing information sessions to discuss the positive qualities of hiring people with disabilities and dispel myths that remain barriers to their employment.
- Offer training workshops to disabilities advocates and stakeholders about how to approach employers to send the correct business message when trying to place people with disabilities in jobs.

- Invite small and mid-sized employers to speak to disabilities advocates and job placement agencies for individuals with disabilities about the most convincing approaches to placement.
- Organize a state summit consisting of employers and disability stakeholders and advocates to discuss findings of the report, including Best Practices in the placement and retention of people with disabilities.
- Local One Stop Centers and rehabilitation agencies should publish employment success stories of people with disabilities on a regular basis. There should also be forums organized with workers with disabilities as keynote speakers to various business groups.

I. BACKGROUND

a) WIRED Initiative –

Global competition, a 21st century economic reality, is typically seen as a national challenge, but the front lines of the battlefield are regional, where companies, workers, researchers, entrepreneurs and government come together to create a competitive advantage. That advantage stems from the ability to transform new ideas and new knowledge into advanced, high quality products or services – in other words, to innovate. And those regions that are successful demonstrate the ability to network innovation assets – people, institutions, capital and infrastructure – to generate growth and prosperity in the region's economy.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA), launched an initiative in November 2005, called Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED), to create these conditions in regions; integrating economic and workforce development activities and demonstrating that talent development can drive economic transformation in regional economies across the United States. WIRED goes beyond traditional strategies for worker preparation by bringing together state, local and federal entities; academic institutions (including K-12, community colleges and universities); investment groups, foundations; and business and industry to address the challenges associated with building a globally competitive and prepared workforce. This specific research initiative focuses on Southwestern Connecticut (which includes parts of Fairfield and New Haven Counties, Connecticut), and Westchester and Putnam Counties, New York, referred to as the Talent for Growth region.

b) Background on Disability Research study...

This demonstration project hopes to build upon the success The WorkPlace, Inc., has had in making the services of One Stop Centers accessible to people with disabilities.

Through the WorkPlace's network of partners, it has provided dedicated services to over 1,200 people with disabilities since 2002.

Since then, best practices have been identified and integrated into the physical and cultural environment of the CTWorks One Stop Centers. Some of those included:

- An active regional Task Force with broad community representation (customers, service providers and employers);
- On-site availability of high-quality adaptive technology;
- Full-time, trained staff with skills, knowledge and experience able to relate successfully to persons with disabilities, to provide accurate information and referral services, and to serve as role models for persons with physical and mental challenges seeking employment.
- Established working partnerships with over 50 public and private services organizations serving customers with disabilities many of who help staff the One Stop Center.

c) Objectives

As a WIRED region (Talent for Growth) that includes Southwestern Connecticut along with Westchester and Putnam counties in New York, The WorkPlace has recently completed the Talent for Growth implementation plan for the newly-created region. The larger region and increased number of partners means more job opportunities for people, including those with disabilities, and a larger workforce for businesses on both sides of the NY-CT border. The Workplace, Inc., in partnership with Norwalk and Westchester Community Colleges and the Business Council of Fairfield County, developed a comprehensive regional assessment as it relates to persons with disabilities in the Talent for Growth region. The data collected and the analysis completed provides the basis to develop an economic strategy and corresponding implementation plan that will identify specific goals and tasks, providing both a vision of the region's economic future and a blueprint for how to achieve that vision.

(d) Study framework

The project was administered by The WorkPlace, Inc., and conducted in cooperation with The Business Council of Fairfield County, Norwalk Community College, Westchester Community College, and other affected and interested organizations and agencies.

A Steering Committee was formed to review project goals and research issues and to review research progress during the life of the grant by meeting periodically.

The southwestern Connecticut Disabilities Task Force and the Westchester Employment Network have expanded their collaborative efforts to share the expertise of its members and any relevant data with the study team.

e) Business Council of Fairfield County (BCFC) –

BCFC conducted the following activities under the Demonstration Research Project involving people with disabilities:

1. Tasks –

- Identified and recommended employers in Westchester, Putnam and Fairfield. Counties willing to serve on the Disabilities Task Force.
- Attended periodic meeting of the Research Project Steering Committee to review research progress and the final draft report produced by Norwalk Community College and Westchester Community College.
- Conducted a survey of employers in southwestern Connecticut, Westchester, and Putnam counties, New York, to identify barriers to hiring persons with disabilities.
- Followed up the survey with interviews of employers individually and in a focus group setting to better understand survey findings, exploring best practices for hiring and retaining persons with disabilities, and identifying tools and structural changes needed to encourage the hiring of people with disabilities.
- Conducted research to identify national and local employer’s best practices for hiring and retaining workers with disabilities.
- Conducted interviews with job placement and disability advocates to identify their perspective on barriers and best practices in hiring and retaining persons with disabilities.
- Based on the employer survey, individual interviews and research results, produced draft and final reports containing summary of best practices and strategies for hiring and retaining persons with disabilities.

2. Deliverables

- A report of employer survey results and summary of interviews with employers and disability stakeholders to include most common barriers to hiring people with disabilities as well as tools and structural changes needed to encourage employers to hire individuals with disabilities.
- A report on best practices for hiring and retaining employees with disabilities.

II. Findings

a) National hiring trends on workers with disabilities

“Disability is not an outcome, it’s an input,” says the Center for Disease Control’s Don Lollar. “Disability is a demographic variable –just like age, sex, racial ethnicity,

socioeconomic status -- and it needs to be seen that way, as opposed to a negative health outcome.”¹

Despite the growing number of individuals with disabilities in America, particularly including those able and willing to work, unemployment among those with disabilities ranges from 43% to as high as 65%. The 2000 U.S. Census recorded 49.7 million people in the U.S. age 5 and over with a disability – nearly 1 in 5 U.S. residents or 19 percent of the population; 32.5% have a severe disability which includes physical, mental or cognitive impairment and are unable to perform one or more physical, sensory or other function.

In one of the most comprehensive national surveys of employers regarding attitudes and actions in hiring people with disabilities, completed by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University and the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut in 2003, employers described a workplace in which people with disabilities are “woefully underrepresented.” Only one fourth of employers surveyed said that their company employed a worker with a physical or mental impairment despite jobs existing within the company that required only rudimentary or repetitive skills. Reasons by employers for this low employment level of people with disabilities included: lack of physical accessibility, lack of workplace experience on the part of jobseekers with disabilities, employer reluctance to hire workers with physical or mental disabilities, and discrimination against such workers. Other factors can be attributed to the fact that many employers surveyed do not provide any training to their employees regarding working with people with disabilities.

Asked what is the greatest barrier to employers hiring people with disabilities, nearly one third (32%) said that the nature of their company’s work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by workers with disabilities. Despite the belief by many employers in the survey that it can be difficult or costly to provide accommodations to workers with disabilities, the vast majority (73%) of employers reported their workers with disabilities did not require any accommodation.²

On the positive side, results of a 2004 survey conducted by Opinion Research Business of 1,000 small business owners(50 employees or less) indicated that small businesses would more likely than larger firms to hire people with disabilities. Among the survey’s key findings:

- More than four in five employers think that people with disabilities “would fit into their team.”
- 80% of employers surveyed disagree that “disabled people will be less productive than other workers.”
- 85% of employers said they would be happy to be flexible about hours or minor bits of the job role if the employee has the right skills and enthusiasm.³

On the negative side of the survey:

¹ The Center for an Accessible Society, 4/29/2002 Press briefing in Washington, DC; www.accessiblesociety.org.

² John J. Heidrich Center for Workforce Development, “Restricted Access...Ibid.

³ Opinion Research Business, A Disability Rights Commission Survey of small Employers’ Attitudes to Disability, 2004.

- 45% of employers believe it would be “quite/very difficult” to employ a person with a disability.
- If the job did not work out, one in four employers think that employees with disabilities would claim legal discrimination.
- Nearly one third of small businesses in this survey were labeled under the category – “Naïve Discriminators.” In this category, more than one in two say they are not very familiar or not familiar at all with the issues that people with disabilities face; three out of four say it would be difficult to employ someone with a disability or a health condition.
- 41% of employers in this category use the nature of their business (e.g., that it requires physical labor or driving) as an excuse for not employing people with disabilities.

Overall, the employment picture in the United States involving people with disabilities as of 2009 has deteriorated in the last decade with a significant drop in the hiring of workers with disabilities noted as the recessionary economic downturn began to take hold in the fourth quarter of 2008. Beyond the economic downturn, reasons for low employment for workers with disabilities continue to have more to do with a lack of education and discrimination by employers about the workforce capabilities of people with disabilities than factual justifications for why a person cannot perform a specific job.

b) Myths and Realities about People with Disabilities in the Workplace.

The workplace competency and capacity of people with disabilities have been and continue to be negatively affected by the myths that have developed around the job performance of workers with disabilities. What follows is a list of the most common myths regarding workers with disabilities and the reality of the specific issue based on research published by THEO BC, a Canadian organization devoted to issues affecting people with disabilities. Disability advocates and job placement agencies take note when establishing a relationship with an employer.⁴

“Myth: *Persons with disabilities can’t keep up with other workers.*

Reality: It has been conclusively shown that, on average, people with a disability are more loyal, dependable, and productive than their colleagues without disabilities -- and that they work more safely; 90% of people with disabilities rated average or better on job performance.

Myth: *A person with a disability is likely to miss a lot of work*

Reality: 86% of people with disabilities rated average or better on attendance.

Myth: *My staff wouldn’t want to work with a person with a disability.*

⁴ THEO BC, “Myths and Realities about People with Disabilities in the Workplace;
<http://theodata.brinkster.net/myths.html> .

Reality: Hiring a person with a disability can increase an employer's ability to attract and retain employees. People with disabilities bring diversity to the workplace which has a distinct, positive impact on staff morale.

Myth: A person with a disability cannot work in a position requiring physical labor.

Reality: Of those people who identified themselves as a person with a disability, only 10.5% have mobility-related issues.

Myth: Hiring a person with a disability will require changing my workplace.

Reality: Employers often cite the cost of accommodations as a barrier to hiring persons with disabilities. The vast majority of persons with disabilities who are currently employed require no special workplace accommodations whatsoever. Employers can be reimbursed for the cost of accommodations up to a specific point.

Myth: A person with a disability will have more accidents on the job

Reality: It has been conclusively shown that, on average, people with a disability are more loyal, dependable and productive than their colleagues without disabilities— and they work more safely. 98% of people with a disability rated average or better in work safety.

Myth: Accommodations make it too expensive to hire a person with a disability.

Reality: Accommodations for persons with disabilities are generally very inexpensive and tax credits are provided to employers to cover most costs involved.. Furthermore, 90% of employers had no change in their insurance costs to employ people with a disability.

Myth: It will be more difficult to terminate a person with a disability.

Reality: Persons with disabilities will be the first to agree that they don't want to be treated differently than other employees. Within the context of whatever accommodations have been provided, an employer can have the same performance expectations for a person with a disability as they would with any other employee.

Myth: Persons with disabilities don't really want to work.

Reality: Staff retention, regarding persons with disabilities, is 72% after 6 months on the job, considerably higher than employees without disabilities, saving millions of dollars each year in recruitment and training costs.

Myth: When employers hear the word "disability," many (45%-50%) immediately think of someone in a wheelchair.

Reality: There are only 1 million people who need a wheelchair or less than 5% of the total population with disabilities in the U.S.”

- c) **Analysis of Employer Survey in Southwestern Connecticut, Westchester and Putnam counties, New York. Refer to Appendix A for the survey questions.**

Employer Disability Research Survey Results

Conducted: June – September 2008

Universe: 1,868 employers in southwestern Connecticut and Westchester and Putnam counties, New York

Response: 88 (4.7%)

Between June and September 2008, The Business Council of Fairfield County conducted a survey by Internet and regular mail to employers in lower Fairfield County and the lower Naugatuck Valley, CT and Westchester and Putnam counties, NY. The surveys were conducted with support from the Business Council of Westchester County and the Greater Valley Chamber, Shelton, CT.

The employer survey was one of two deliverables assigned to The Business Council of Fairfield County by The Workplace, Inc., as part of the WIRED Research Demonstration Project regarding Disability Services in the Connecticut-New York border region.

The universe surveyed included 1,868 employers in lower Fairfield county, CT, the lower Naugatuck Valley, CT, and Westchester and Putnam counties, New York. Response was 88 or 4.7%.

Analysis: Half (50%) of the respondents answered Question # 1 -- “Have you ever employed a person with a disability?” in the affirmative. Nearly half of the respondents also answered Question #2 – “If you answered YES to the first question, would you hire another disabled worker?” – in the affirmative. Based on the answer to the second question, one could reasonably conclude that employers were pleased with the performance of a worker with a disability. This conclusion is further reinforced by answers that provided high ratings to workers with disabilities in a variety of subject areas including **productivity, promotability, attitude, dependability, punctuality/retention, and work hours tolerance**. Out of the four rating responses offered, employees with disabilities were given “Excellent” more than 50% in four of the six subject areas and “Good” more than 50% in all six subject areas.

In response to Question 5 – “What are the most common barriers to employment for people with disabilities?”-- **lack of skills/experience and workplace accommodation** received the majority of votes under the “Most important” and “Important” column responses. **Employer reluctance** received the third largest response of this question. The last answer reflects a lack of knowledge employers have about individuals with disabilities in general. The responses to the **lack of skills/experience and workplace accommodations** for workers with disabilities reflect a weakness in educating employers about the potential of workers with disabilities to learn a specific workplace skill, and the negligible cost of workplace accommodations for workers with

disabilities. Fact: Less than 10% of workers with disabilities require workplace accommodation. Often, it only requires moving furniture. If accommodations are required, firms can apply for a tax credit to cover costs.

The positive responses (41%) to the question – “If an employment placement agency provided an onsite job coach to a person with a disability, would you hire the person?”— reflects a best practice that is available to employers who are concerned about the ability of a worker to learn a specific job skill in a short time-span. It is also a disability support source that should be stressed to employers by job placement agencies representing people with disabilities.

The positive response (47%) to question # 7 –“Are there jobs within your company that could be performed by a person with a disability?” -- is further evidence that there are positions within large and small businesses that can be performed by employees with disabilities.

The lukewarm response to question # 8 –“Did you know research indicates that hiring a person with a disability can improve your ability to attract and retain productive employees? – (15% response) reflects the business community’s lack of knowledge about the value of a diverse workforce and consumer goodwill that a company can produce by hiring people with disabilities. Research in 2007 by the Bobby Dodd Institute in Atlanta, found that 90 percent of Atlanta workers with disabilities would be loyal consumers to a business with a track record of hiring individuals with disabilities.

- **Survey Metrics (Refer to Appendix A)**

d) Follow up Interviews with employers and stakeholders

Interviews with employers and disability advocates confirmed the findings of the employer survey and Best Practices research regarding the major barriers and success factors for employment for people with disabilities.

Barriers: The stigma of the term *disability* and the lack of knowledge on the part of employers of what disability means and what workers with disabilities are capable of doing and not doing.

Hiring success factors: emphasizing the business model of recruitment and hiring based on skills and job capabilities.

Salient points taken from those interviews:

- “The best way to place people with disabilities in a job is to educate the employer about the facts of the world of disabilities, and to show employers what disabled workers can do and not do.” Alan Mathis, Executive Director, Liberation Programs.

- “We have had a long history of hiring disabled persons and we are happy to make accommodations to support them in the workplace, but the decision to hire is based on a pure need – the question we always ask is how can you help us meet a specific business need?” Global HR Manager, Fortune 500 company.
- “We have been very successful in placing people with disabilities by using the employer-client skill match up. We initially meet with the employer to identify their skill set needs, what kinds of jobs are available and we match those needs with folks looking for work. I also promise the employer that for any reason the employee does not work out, I will support the employer’s decision to terminate without legal concerns.” Disability Services Advocate, Westchester County, NY.
- “It’s still an extremely difficult environment to place those with disabilities in jobs. There is a general bias on the part of the majority of employers to hire someone with a disability. Barriers include everything from fear of the unknown to cost of accommodations, and legal issues regarding the ability to let someone go who has a disability. And now with the economy dropping, it’s only going to get worse.” Disability Services Advocate, Westchester County, NY
- “We’ve been very successful in placing persons with disabilities based on a few best practices: We spend a great deal of time identifying the needs of the individual employer. We also offer worksite coaching support where our staff will help the person being considered for a job understand what is expected of him/her in the first week on the job. We also offer employers a free probationary period to see if the job candidate is a good fit.” Disability Services Advocate, Fairfield County, CT.
- “We hire people with disabilities as well as place them into jobs. In both cases, the key to success is about the skills of the individual. Best approach is to promote the skills and dependability of the person, then discuss limitations if any.” Employer, Southwestern CT
- “Since the 1970s, we have hired between 50 to 100 disabled workers, and the majority have been good, productive workers. The attractive qualities of disabled workers: a positive attitude, dependable and that they will not quit to take a job for a slight rise in salary.” Best practice: “We use a buddy system for all new employees including disabled workers. It helps them break the ice and feel part of the environment of the company.” Employer, Putnam County, NY
- “We have hired people with disabilities for years and they have worked out fine. Best practice for placing disabled workers is to emphasize job skills, dependability and attitude. Our policy is if you can do the job we will hire you.” Hospitality Services, Stamford, CT
- “We have hired disabled workers for some time and they always work out to be most reliable, loyal and productive employees. Bottom line is whether they

have the job skills needed to help us. We have made accommodations for people in wheelchairs because they had the skills we needed.” Childcare center, Westchester County, NY

- “We’ve hired folks with disabilities for many years. As long as they can do the work, we’re happy to hire them. To convince employers to hire the disabled, the conversation should focus on the success, reliability and dependability of jobs candidates.” Southwestern CT Employer
- “It’s all about the individual in terms of hiring. Limitations don’t enter into the decision if they have the skills to do the job and can get along with others on the staff. Before we hire anyone, we do occupational testing to understand what people can and cannot do.” HR Director, Fairfield County, CT
- “We have hired disabled workers in the past including those in wheelchairs, and they have been as productive as anyone else. For us, it’s all about the job skills. If they are a tax professional with the specific skills and experience we need, we will hire them.” Campus Recruiter, major accounting firm, Fairfield County, CT
- “We have hired disabled workers for years with no problems and they have done excellent work. As long as they can do the job, we have no qualms about hiring them. We will provide reasonable accommodation if needed. “ Non-profit company, Human Resources Manager, Fairfield County, CT
- “This company has never hired disabled workers before, but we would be willing to hire depending on the type of disability – vision impairment would be a disqualification, for example, but hearing impairment or a person in a wheelchair could be accommodated. If the person has the skill to do the job, we will hire them.” Manufacturer, Brewster, NY
- “The stigma of the term *disability* is a major barrier to employers for hiring disabled workers. We promote people with disabilities as productive, dependable and loyal employees. We also suggest the idea of providing onsite work support or job coaches to help those job candidates come up to speed on the requirements of a particular job. Persuading employers to hire a person with a disability is basically a challenge of education and dispelling the myths that have grown up around disabled workers.” Marketing Manager, Disability Services Advocate, Westchester County, NY
- “Major barriers to placing people with disabilities, besides the economy, include employer fear of legal issues if they have to let the disabled worker go. Also insurance liability issues for the company. We promote ourselves as the liaison between the employer and the potential hire. If the person doesn’t work out, we will provide a replacement worker who meets with the approval of the employer and relieve the employer of the burden of having to fire the person. We

are not looking for charity. Our goal is to provide a productive, skilled worker to meet the employer's immediate needs." Disability Services Advocate, Westchester County, NY.

e) Best practices in job placement, hiring and retention of workers with disabilities.

Based on interviews with employers who have hired workers with disabilities, the most effective approach to placing individuals with disabilities in jobs is to use the skill needs business model. Job placement advocates for people with disabilities often come from a social service background and fail to appreciate that the employer's needs come first in hiring decisions:

- Approach employers on a skill needs basis. Identify the employer's needs, then match those needs with skills of the job seekers you are trying to place. Keep in mind that the employer is the customer!
- Focus attention on the skills of the person you are trying to place; avoid using the term, "disability" in initial conversation with employer unless relevant to skill needs.
- Emphasize the high retention rate of workers with disabilities (72% after 6 months) and reliability factor. Remind the employer of the potential savings of not having to replace workers who leave within months after being hired and trained for a specific job.
- Offer worksite job coach support to the employer. This onsite training service is generally paid for by the state or local Vocational Rehabilitation agency. It is only offered on a limited basis.
- Promote the idea of probationary employment with employer regarding a worker with a disability; employer gets period of time to evaluate worker without cost or hiring commitment.
- When in the early stages of establishing a relationship with an employer, the placement agency must convince the employer that he/she will be an advocate for both the employer and the potential employee with a disability in terms of whether the employee is the right fit for the company based on skills and personality.
- Do not ask employers to consider hiring an individual with a disability for humanitarian reasons. Emphasize that persons with disabilities want to be judged by the same standards as any other job seeker in competition for the position. Be clear that people with disabilities are not seeking charity, but rather a level playing field where they can be judged on their skills and work experience.

- Employers should provide training for managers directed at successful interviewing, hiring, managing and retention of employees with disabilities.⁵
- Research indicates that one of the best practices used by employers for retaining employees with disabilities is a “buddy system” for all new employees, with disabilities or not. “The buddy system prevents the isolation and stress that disabled workers often experience in their first days on the job,” says Janet Dohm, general manager, Brewster Plastics, Patterson, NY. “the buddy is not responsible for doing the disabled worker’s job, but rather helping to introduce the new employee to incumbent employees and helping them to feel part of the environment of the company.”
- The mission of St. Vincent De Paul Society of Lane County, Oregon, is to implement social service programs that help the homeless, destitute, and at risk population (including people with disabilities) to become self-sufficient. A major part of “Vinnie’s” success in placing clients looking for work is the initial in-house labor experience of their clients with disabilities in several of eight Saint Vincent de Paul’s stores. By providing on the job experience for its jobseekers, -- whether repairing and recycling appliances, mattresses, autos or computers, building furniture or creating architectural and gift items from discarded glass at local landfills, St. Vincent de Paul is dedicated to a responsible reuse of resources as well as identifying skills or problems of its jobseekers before they enter the regular labor market.
- When interviewing a person with a disability for a job, employers’ applications and interviewing procedures should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits disability-related questions or medical exams before a final job offer is made. Ensure that all questions asked during the interview are job-related.⁶

⁵ ChicagoLand Chamber of Commerce; 2006 US Dept of Labor New Freedom Initiative Award Recipient, Employer Best Practices Draft.

⁶ Connect-ability.org – Bringing Connecticut’s Employers and People with Disabilities Together – Hiring section; website is managed by the Connecticut Department of Social Services.

III. Recommendations

- Encourage employers who serve on the local Business Advisory Council to invite business colleagues to regular, ongoing information sessions to discuss the positive qualities of hiring people with disabilities and dispel myths that are barriers to their employment.
- Offer training workshops to disabilities advocates and stakeholders about how to approach employers to send the correct business message when trying to place people with disabilities in jobs.
- Invite small and mid-sized employers to speak to advocates and job placement agencies that provide job search assistance to individuals with disabilities about the most convincing approaches for successful job placements.
- Organize a state summit consisting of employers and disability stakeholders and advocates to discuss findings of the report, including the Best Practices in the placement and retention of people with disabilities.
- Local One Stop Centers and rehabilitation agencies should publish employment success stories of people with disabilities on a regular basis. There should also be forums organized featuring workers with disabilities as keynote speakers to various business groups.

Appendix A – Employer Disability Research Survey Results

APPENDIX – A

Employer Disability Research Survey Metrics

Conducted: June –September, 2008

Universe: 1,868 employers in Fairfield (CT), Westchester and Putnam (NY) counties

Response: 88 (4.7%)

1. Have you ever employed a person with a disability?

	Responses
Yes -----	44
No _____	41
No responses _____	3
Total _____	88

2. If you answered YES to the first question, would you hire another disabled worker?

	Responses
Yes _____	38
No _____	1
No responses _____	49
Total _____	88

3. If you answered YES in Question 1, how would you rate the employee(s) in the following areas:

	Responses			
	1= Excellent	2=Good	3= Fair	4=Poor
Productivity _____	7	29	5	0
Promotability _____	5	19	14	1
Attitude _____	18	17	5	0
Dependability _____	21	19	1	0
Punctuality/retention _____	18	19	3	1
Work hours tolerance _____	15	21	4	0

4. If you declined to employ people with disabilities, please list reasons in order of priority that affected your decision not to hire.

	Responses:			
	1=Most important.	2=important.	3=less important.	4=Least important
Cost of accommodation_____	1	1	8	10
Absenteeism_____	0	1	9	4
Unable to perform specific job skills required	3	2	4	0
Work performance_____	1	2	0	0
Extra supervision required	3	0	0	0
Legal issues_____	0	0	0	0
Turnover_____	0	0	0	0

5. What are the most common barriers to employment for people with disabilities?

	Responses:			
	1=Most important	2=Important	3=Less important	4=Least important
Lack of skills/experience_____	17	5	8	10
Workplace accommodation_____	13	11	8	4
Employer reluctance_____	4	14	9	7
Discrimination_____	5	7	7	8
Low productivity_____	4	8	9	4

6. If an employment placement agency provided an onsite job coach to a person with a disability, would you hire the person?

	Responses:
Yes _____	36
No _____	8
No response _____	44
Total _____	88

7. Are there jobs within your company that could be performed by a person with a disability?

		Responses:
Yes	_____	41
No	_____	6
No response	_____	41
Total	_____	88

8. Did you know research indicates that hiring a person with a disability can improve your ability to attract and retain productive employees?

		Responses
Yes	_____	13
No	_____	25
No response	_____	50
Total	_____	88

9. Are you interested in learning more about the laws – ADA and DDA – that govern treatment of persons with disabilities in the workplace?

		Responses:
Yes	_____	19
No	_____	26
No response	_____	43
Total	_____	88

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