

Partnering For Placement



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Our Mission

Abilities, Inc. is a non-profit agency dedicated to facilitating integrated employment and full participation of persons with disabilities in their work and living communities. Employment is accomplished through direct service to youth and adults with disabilities and to employers, insurance carriers, schools and colleges and other rehabilitation programs. Services are delivered, when possible, in diverse community settings in response to consumer and business needs and legislative mandates. Abilities, Inc.. is committed to developing and demonstrating programs and services of national excellence.

A Colorful Mosaic: The PWI Programs of Abilities, Inc.

By Judy Young

Abilities' Projects With Industry programs are distinctive pieces of a colorful mosaic comprised of dedicated professionals supported by successful organizations with a shared vision. Out Employment Specialists are the indefatigable driving force that facilitate major changes in the lives of over 500 persons with disabilities each year.

While all the programs share a common goal and must comply with the same strict regulatory requirements dictated by our joint funding source, each staff member brings his or her unique approach, distinct style and individual contribution to the mosaic at large. Staff represents different ethnic and age groups, educational backgrounds and work experiences. Some have worked with individuals with disabilities; for others this is a new challenge. Some have completed their education just a few years ago, while others have had several previous careers and jobs, often in the corporate community. A few had been part of our colorful mosaic for just a couple of weeks, while others started out on our collective journey quite a few years ago and have

emerged as the PWI experts.

Although over time we have experienced turnover and lost some precious pieces of our mosaic, there have always been others who stepped right in to carry the torch and enrich us all with their fresh perspectives and strong desire to make us whole again.

Let us remember that mosaics do not exist in a vacuum; they all need a place to turn to for advice, inspiration and encouragement and a forum at which to display their own unique colors and accomplishments. These colors are often enhanced by others at the parent organizations who provide guidance, support, and assistance to staff as well as to the consumers they serve. The articles that follow exemplify the distinct styles, perspectives, and character of not only the programs and organizations, but the staff as well. No one shines brighter than all of us together.

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CAREER OPTIONS: A Career Development Model For Projects With Industry

Successful Employer Development

By Anita Zimmerman/Vivian Ouziel

As we all know, it's hard enough in today's economy to find employment for a person without a disability, let alone a person with a disability. This is why job development should not be regarded as finding a job for a particular consumer, but rather developing a relationship with a company for all your consumers. The size of the company needn't matter. Whether they employ five or five thousand people is irrelevant. The strategy is the same. It is common practice for the placement staff of the Career Options project to build relationships with each and every company that we contact or who initiates contact with us.

Building relationships is a long process and not an easy task to realize. After the initial interaction with an employer is achieved and a contact has been established, the perspective employer needs to be nurtured in order to trust in our ability to refer qualified individuals with disabilities for open positions. In many cases we have found that we first need to provide disability education, thereby dispelling myths and enabling them to make sound decisions, embrace disability policies, and successfully incorporate persons with disabilities into the workforce. This strategy is usually put into practice when we contact a company where there is no definite Human Resource Department and the number of employees is

small. On the other hand, we have found larger companies to be more aware of disability issues. However, we still need to gain their trust and assure them that our support services are unsurpassed.

There are many ways to cultivate companies and increase their commitment to hiring individuals with disabilities. Our main objective is to become a referral source for skilled applicants. The first step is to research the company and arrange a convenient time to visit their facility. This action communicates our willingness to give of our time and expresses an interest in their organization. In turn, most Human Resources personnel are then motivated to visit our Center. In the event that there are no immediate job openings, we present our desire to build a long-standing partnership. We invite representatives to become members of our Business Advisory Council (BAC). Individuals who participate in the BAC become knowledgeable of our specific programs. The major responsibility of the BAC is to work in a leadership role with staff to assist in carrying out all activities related to achieving employment for persons with disabilities.

All of these strategies have proven successful in finding employment for our consumers. Along the way, we have built

strong relationships, and succeeded in enlightening employers and initiating positive life changes for our consumers.

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BRIGHT NEW FUTURES

Partnerships: Everyone Wins!

By Lisa Quinn

As any Employment Specialist knows, community and employer relationships are vital to a successful program. Both of these relationships provide key benefits: through community relationships we develop a referral network, while employer relationships provide much needed jobs for our consumers. However, every job developer also knows that these things, although fundamental to our success, also take a lot of time and energy. Fortunately, that use of time and energy often pays off!

As part of its commitment to developing the Bright New Futures – Projects With Industry program, the Employment Services team at the AACIL has been focusing on building upon and expanding its already good relationships with community organizations and employers in our area. As part of this effort, Lisa Quinn, one of the Employment Specialists at the AACIL, started keeping office hours on Monday afternoons at the local One-Stop, Michigan Works. In keeping office hours, Lisa was able to work closely with many of the counselors at the One-Stop, and was subsequently invited to co-sponsor a youth job fair with Michigan Works that was held in May. This proved to be beneficial in more than one way: 1. By recruiting employers to attend the job fair, she

was able to develop relationships and interface with employers that the Center had not previously worked with, 2. She was able to send some of her consumers to the job fair, and 3. She was able to meet the employers that Michigan Works invited to the job fair; it was this benefit, in particular, that turned out to be a great help!

During the job fair, Lisa spoke with Mary Katherine, the General Manager for Sodexho, a local food service company. Lisa and Mary Katherine soon realized that their professional needs were complimentary, and that they could be a great resource for each other. Mary Katherine was in need of good staff, and Lisa was working with consumers who could fill that need. The following week, Lisa went for a tour of Sodexho and took some consumers' resumes. In talking about hiring people with disabilities Mary Katherine and Lisa decided that it would make sense to provide a sensitivity training for current staff in order to talk about working with people with disabilities, and discuss various questions the staff might have. Since that time, Sodexho has interviewed four consumers, hired two, and continues to look at qualified candidates. Sodexho has also become part of the AACIL's Business Advisory Council (BAC) and has agreed to participate in company tours, give

consumers opportunities to job shadow, and will be conducting practice interviews for the consumers.

In looking at the partnership with Michigan Works, followed by the alliance with Sodexo, it did take some time and energy, but in the end, the relationships have been a benefit to everyone involved, especially our consumers which is the reason we're all here! It is this relationship and others like it, that continue to

enhance the Projects With Industry program at the AACIL.

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Collaboration: Can It Be A Good Thing?

By Joe Fortmann

The word is, "collaboration." Webster's defines collaboration as, "to work together, esp. in literary or scientific work." Of course, matching people who have disabilities with jobs is not literary or scientific, but for those who develop jobs for people with disabilities, it is so much more!

There are lots and lots of reasons to work together. Let's take a look at two really good ones.

The old adage, "two heads are better than one", works here. Resources and skills of several people and organizations are, indeed, better than one. The Center for Independent Living of Mid-Michigan, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, Michigan Works!, the Family Independence Agency, Experience Works!, have worked together to improve the lives of people with disabilities in the recent past. Each agency, each individual, brings resources, sensibilities and understandings and even varied insights into the mix. Some of this population is difficult to serve, bringing barriers to be overcome, often multiple barriers. The solutions require as much input as possible to enhance the opportunities for success. All of the collaborators need to share strategies, insights and secrets to open as many

possibilities for the consumer. The process should continue until real, meaningful employment is achieved. If the current operating strategy is not working, explore other avenues. If a low-end job is achieved, continue to work with the consumer until a better job is achieved. We need to remember that our success is directly linked to the success of our consumers. We are successful only when they are successful. That link can never be broken.

Few organizations have more funds this year to serve the same number of consumers and achieve their goals. Sharing and collaborating spreads funds across organizational lines; no, not actual cash, but funds in the form of services, information, assessment, referral, and more. Individual organizations can not be all things to all people. As a group, however, much more can be offered.

So can there be any doubt, that collaborating, working together to achieve the best result for consumers, is a good idea? If the answer is still unclear, perhaps the next question to ask is, “can we be successful without it?”

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Persistence and Convenience

By Gina Sahin

Some employers go to great lengths to stay anonymous when searching for potentially new employers. Many newspaper want ads list only their fax numbers followed by “no phone calls please.” Others will post a job opening on America’s Job Bank, purposely omitting their name, address and phone number, which in effect forces the prospective candidate to make a trip to their local DOL for further paperwork and screening. Many human resource personnel rely on receptionists to shield them from applicants by accepting resumes and answering the phones. Some companies go as far as paying employment agencies to find qualified candidates just to avoid the hassle of reviewing resumes, conducting numerous interviews and answering dozens of telephone and follow-up calls. Hiring a new employee takes time and energy, and it is a task that many employers dread; therefore, how does a job developer navigate through the hurdles? How does a job developer break down the walls that employers have built around themselves and create business relationships that result in jobs for our consumers.

The first thing that comes to mind is convenience, convenience and more convenience. Everything must be employer friendly. In the realm of retail, job development usually involves a trip to the business location. In these situations, the manager or assistant manager is usually in the stores but does not always have time to discuss employment openings. Lately, some stores are

relying on the *computerized* application that sends the information to a centralized location. If a candidate qualifies, then an interview is scheduled. I try to approach the manager at a *convenient time* to speak about job openings.

I visit the store on different days and during the week. I sometimes ask other employees about staffing needs. Before approaching a manager, I try to research the target site and pick a time when it appears convenient for the manager. I *never* ask other employees to page a manager because it could be an inconvenient time for the manager. In the end, I will introduce myself to the manager and ask if there are any job openings that Abilities can help fill. I explain that Abilities is a non-profit employment service that assists others in finding jobs in the community, and that I have someone who is interested in working for their company. I stress that job coaching is available throughout the training process and afterwards for follow up visits. Employers should know that the job developer is there to help!

Persistence: if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. This is essential in establishing meaningful relationships with employers. A non-retail job like office worker, graphic designer, receptionist and medical assistant require more tact in securing an interview. In this competitive market, many job listings receive numerous responses from jobseekers; therefore, it can take a job

developer many tries to secure even one interview. Navigating through the hurdles of employers who don't understand the services or who are reluctant to hire from an agency requires time and repeated visits. Sometimes employers need time to *think about it*. Several employers have hired consumers one year after the initial visit. Last year, I approached a homeless shelter in response to an ad for a social worker. The consumer used a wheelchair and unfortunately the shelter was a two-story home. Conditions were not right for a good match; however, I kept in touch with the shelter's manager and called many times to follow-up to present other applicants' resumes. Just last week, I received a phone call from the house manager who is anxious to interview another consumer. This consumer also uses a wheelchair but this time the homeless shelter is in a one-story building. Persistence is essential in developing effective relationships with employers because employers need to see that the job developer is committed to helping them meet their employment needs.

Over the years, I have found that employers want the same things from our

consumers that they want from other applicants that is to be motivated, enthusiastic, hard working, and reliable. Many times an employer has said, "I don't care if the person has a disability or about the tax credit, as long as the person can do the job."

Successfully communicating the consumer's strengths to an employer is essential to job development. Always be truthful and the employer will believe you the next time.

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ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Successful Employer Development

By Elizabeth Cooper

Networking and partnerships are interchangeable yet descriptive to each other in discussing many components to the PWI program. Each is an extension of the other in that networks lead to partnerships and partnerships are the outcome of the networking by interested parties with the same agenda: EMPLOYMENT.

Employer development starts by researching possible locations and companies to identify positions and employment cultures that represent each facility. Research is conducted via internet, newspaper, job lines, telephone, referrals, and walk-in introductions. Staff will encourage all prospective companies to seek applicants from qualified disability consumers. We define disability and advocate for each consumer. A general awareness is

seen at this time, whereas the company had not focused on disability consumers in the past, but is now readily seeking opportunities to receive tax credits for employing persons with disabilities, and seeing ways to give back to the community at large. We inform the companies that our consumers are trained and skilled to perform at all levels of employment. A thorough screening and interview process is performed on each applicant to assure that each candidate is a good match for each company.

All prospective partners are invited to become members of the BAC and to tour our facility to meet with all staff regarding a fruitful working relationship. TRACO Maintenance Company was referred to the PWI Program as a new thriving company in the metro Birmingham area. The business office is located in Fairfield, Alabama, right outside the city limits of Birmingham and has many contracts within the city.

I initially contacted Mr. Coleman, the owner and manager of TRACO, by phone and was able to introduce, define, and create awareness for hiring people with disabilities.

Mr. Coleman was ready to interview qualified applicants with no questions asked. He wanted to utilize our skills to interview and pre-screen the best candidates for him. He gave us a job order and even before going to his office, I was able to refer two applicants for employment who were subsequently hired. TRACO has hired a total of four applicants, three of which are still working with him today. We are proud of his confidence in the PWI program and welcome TRACO as a new member of the BAC.

This is what networking can do for you. This was a good day.

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Employer Networking and Developing Strategies

By Rhonda Kidd

Developing and maintaining an employer network is critical in our efforts of securing positions for individuals accessing the program services. Our Business Advisory Council provides a core team of employers who have committed their time and effort to assist individuals obtain employment. The BAC members provide references to other employers as contacts are being made within the community. These employers have knowledge of resources for training, and other community supports. They provide informational interviews and feedback, company tours, advocacy assistance on public transportation,

job readiness classes, and other types of work related issues.

Job development strategies include utilizing job search engines online daily, newspaper ads, searching community boards at the grocery, churches, universities, libraries and other public sites. Contacting our BAC for guidance on particular industries, trades, and apprenticeships is most helpful. Staff recommends that individuals enroll with the local Workforce Development Office. A contact person is on the BAC to help coordinate with information. Membership in our local area Recruiter's Club is an excellent

resource that provides contact names of company recruiters, phone numbers and email addresses. Quarterly meetings also provides face to face contacts and training on issues such as retention, marketing, benefits, and other issues faced by the companies. Attending these meetings provides information, employers' perspective and at the same time creates an opportunity for job development. Employers have come to the Center for group interviews and subsequently one on one. One construction company has recently hired individuals through this process. With the job market so lean at this

time, it is necessary to have as many contacts and networking opportunities.

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GETTING STARTED

Wedding Rehearsal Meets Job Development

By Michael Dolan

On a recent Friday night, my family and I were invited to a pre-wedding party on a yacht that circled around Manhattan. My daughter Kayla was the flower girl and as such, was responsible for us being invited. That being said, we really did not know anyone at the party, except for the family of the bride to be. We mingled as much as we could with anyone that was willing to share hors d'oeuvres with us.

Later in the evening, at the bar, my wife Carol and I struck up a conversation with a couple who were seated to our right. We exchanged pleasantries like which side of the family are you on and small talk like that. They mentioned that they were friends of the father of the groom and he said that he has been a long time co-worker at an advertising firm in New York City. The name of the firm that he mentioned rang a bell in my mind and I felt my job development hat go on and asked if he knew who a certain person was that I mentioned. His face lit up and said that she is

the director of human resources. He, of course, wanted to know how I knew the name of this person and I told him who I was again and told him about Abilities, Inc. and PWI. From that moment, he informed me that he is legally blind, and on the board of a major New York City organization for visually impaired persons.

The gentleman enthusiastically told me to contact the Human Resources person and have our organization reestablish contact with them.

As of this date, contact has been made and upon further research, this is a company that at one time was a member of the NBDC.

I have spoken to the human resources director and a meeting is scheduled for August.

I guess it is true that at any time, whether you are looking for it or not, an opportunity for job development can present

itself to you, even at a bar, on a boat, looking out to lower Manhattan to the right and the Statue of Liberty to your left.

Pretty cool when you think about it.

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Eyes on Employers

By Margaret Lawson

Employers want relationships, too. Nancy Santiago, human resources manager of the Institute for Community Living (ICL) affirmed this. So did Ivy Tsui, assistant vice president at JP Morgan Chase, as we chatted over diet cokes and fatty burgers at Wendy's.

The role of a placement specialist is "tall." Encapsulated in this role is the need to interact with employers with a sense of understanding. We understand that employers don't want their time wasted (neither do we by the way), but if the placement specialist is able to win the employer's trust, more time is granted. The victory of garnering time from the employer allows us to better understand their organization, their customers/consumers and their needs.

When the employer understands that I want to help her (and continue getting a paycheck), an intangible exchange takes place. This exchange is formulated on the principle of trust. The employer trusts that I will not waste her time with unqualified candidates. While she knows that I'm doing my job, she trusts that I have the good of her company in mind, and I trust that she will give me what I'm after: the job order.

Job orders are *inside* lists. Sometimes they include positions posted on the Internet for the entire world to see; sometimes they don't. When employers trust you, they listen more

carefully as you sell your services and candidates. Moreover, they OFFER invaluable information: the job order, which positions have not already been filled, sources that you can use as a lead and very important – their business card. Once you have their direct extension and e-mail address, the gatekeeper is out of the way.

In *short*, my conversation with Nancy went something like this:

Me: *Hi Nancy, it's nice to meet to meet you.*

Nancy: *Hi Margaret, thanks for coming over. How can I help you (get to the point)?*

Me: *I saw your advertisement for a case manager and I thought I could help (turning the table).*

Nancy: *Yeah, I got Nancy's resume (still cold).*

Me: *I think Nancy is a perfect candidate because...(sell her abilities). Also, I went to your website and found out that (mention facts about core business).*

Nancy: (Smile) *That's right (loosening up)!*

Me: *I interview (otherwise known as an intake) students with associate and bachelor degrees all the time. My job is to help CUNY students in Manhattan and Staten Island to find employment. I don't collect fees from employees (going for the juggler) or the candidates. The project that I work under is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. So, my real interest is finding out*

what you need (make it personal) and seeing how I can help you (keep it personal).

Nancy: (Smiling. She likes the no fee part) *Well...(tells me more about her company) and HERE'S THE JOB LIST (Got it, got it, got it)!*

Me: *Oh, I see that there's a vacant administrative assistant position. Has it been filled?*

Nancy: *Yes, but I'll probably get more in the future. Do you have a business card?*

Margaret: *YES!!!!!!*

Nancy: *What I'll do is put your information from the business card on my recruiter list. That way, you'll get a copy of my open positions each month. Then, you can send me resumes.*

Me: *Great! Do you include internships on the list?*

Nancy: *No. Tony Tucker handles internships. Why don't I CALL HIM FOR YOU and see if you can stop by his office.*

Yes, I met Tony, got the business card, the internship job list and Nancy and Tony agreed to becoming BAC members.

I think the success of this new relationship is attributed to a business need being filled (or the potential to be filled). I never mentioned "students with disabilities". My business card indicates the name of my employer. I'm sure that the employer will do her research and will feel comfortable about asking me questions. For now, she is content with acquiring another source to supply her with a pool of candidates for ICL. As for me-my eyes are on the employer.

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Successful Employer Development

By Zoraida Fagundes

There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration when doing job development:

- You must be pleasant and easygoing but very respectful as a job developer.
- Dress professionally when meeting with an employer because you are not only representing yourself but also the organization that you work for.
- Make sure that you understand the employer's needs and the job descriptions of the positions that are available.
- You must listen carefully to what the employer has to say, show interest and even if there are no openings at the moment, you should take time and schedule to meet with the employer so you can become familiar with the company, see the surroundings, know

what they do, meet the Human Resources Recruiter, exchange business cards and start establishing a relationship so that when they do have job opportunities, you will be contacted to fill the positions. The relationship that you establish must be based on confidence, trustworthiness and respect.

- Once an employer contacts you, it is because there is a need for a worker at that moment or in the near future.
- Never refer a consumer to a company just because that person needs a job and they need a worker.
- You must do a very good assessment and screening of the consumer and make sure that he or she meets the employer's requirements. Explain the job descriptions very carefully to the consumer to make sure that everything is well understood, including the shift, number of hours required, salary and traveling instructions. Most important of all, the consumer must understand the duties and all the responsibilities involved.
- Make sure that the consumer can do the job. Even if the consumer has a disability, no special treatment or consideration should be expected.
- The consumer has to be aware of the fact that he/she is going to compete with many other job seekers so he or she must be well prepared to present the skills, education, experience, appearance during the employment interview the best way possible.

- A good job developer needs to be very careful when trying to fill a job order. The employer needs a worker but not just any worker, and the jobseeker needs a job but not just any job. We cannot afford to lose an employer but we should not set a jobseeker up for failure. We need both to be happy. We do not want a placement for a day or two. We want a good long-lasting employment. We also want an employer who is satisfied with our services because that means this employer will call us again and again when in need of good workers. This also means that the relationship that was built was a good one and that would make us, job developers, feel proud of our job.
- Always keep in touch with the employer even if no worker is needed. A good job developer always follows up on the people that were hired and shows interest in helping solve any problems that may arise. We should make ourselves available so that the employer as well as the worker can count on our advice if needed.

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News from NBDC

Training Opportunities Increase Employee Awareness

Submitted by Laura Francis

As per the Americans with Disabilities Act, employers must provide employees with disabilities the same opportunities to participate in training and programs that will improve job advancement as those available to their other workers.

Neither of these opportunities may be denied to any employee simply because they would require a reasonable accommodation, unless extreme circumstances prove to cause undue hardship. Some accommodations that may be needed to accommodate employees with mobility impairments, employees who are blind or visually impaired, and employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, are as follows:

- Accessible facilities that are located in barrier free areas.
- Interpreters and/or note-takers for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Written materials to be made available in alternate formats (Large print-16 pt. font size, Braille, audio-cassette, diskette, audio-described)
- Readers for employees who are blind, visually impaired, who may have learning disabilities or mental retardation.
- Captions or voice-overs for employees who are blind or have low vision.
- Proper lighting to illuminate an interpreter to avoid shadows that can interfere with communication between the two parties.

- Clarification of the topics being presented for workers who may have learning disabilities.
- Individualized instruction for workers with learning disabilities.

When programs are offered to employees off company sites, (hotels, conference centers, etc.), the employer is responsible for assuring complete physical accessibility and other accommodations to assure access to all program features. If companies choose to provide training at outside locations, the EEOC advises all employers to include provisions requiring the facility to provide all necessary accommodations in a written contract. However, if by any chance, the contractor fails to meet their responsibilities to do so, the employer remains responsible for providing the accommodations unless there is proof of undue hardship.

To summarize, it is necessary for all employers to be educate their managers and supervisors of all ADA requirements. Furthermore, an employer should never assume that an employee is not interested or qualified for advancement because of a disability, and, most importantly, it is unlawful to deny a promotion because of the need for an accommodation, unless undue hardship may be present.

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We Focus on Ability

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