

# Effective Approaches at Engaging the Business Community

2005 Conference- American Public Human  
Services Association and the Center for Workers  
with Disabilities (July 19, 2005)



*A Specialized Human Resource Organization*

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*Meeting the employment needs of people with  
disabilities and the business community*

A private, non-profit agency with a mission to  
serve the community as a catalyst  
in the employment and development of persons  
with disabilities.



## **Pennsylvania Business Leadership Network**

The Pennsylvania Business Leadership Network (PA BLN) is an employer driven program designed for business leaders to promote hiring practices that enable qualified people with disabilities to enter and succeed in the workplace. The emphasis of the PA BLN is to create opportunities where employers can communicate, peer-to-peer, to provide candid and frank assessments of hiring successes and challenges.

# Employment Situation in PA

- In looking at the last census, 11.5 million citizens in PA.
- 1.2 million are of working age (21-64) and self report a disability (18% of working age population)
- @540,000 of this 1.2 million are UNEMPLOYED
- Just under 500,000 are receiving Tickets (Ticket to Work). So far, about 481,000 have received Tickets. 58 entities have been certified as Employment Networks (ENs)
- State VR has gotten most of the assigned tickets (3,000)
- 58 ENs have been assigned 265 tickets

# Employment Situation (continued)....

- In calendar year 2004, AHEDD engaged 50 individuals in services under the Ticket to Work Program.
- 13 of these individuals went to work, 11 were earning SGA
- Currently not financially feasible for many private organizations to participate
- Benefits Counseling Program- significant effort to encourage Medicaid eligible individuals to work

# Employment Situation (continued)....

- Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD)- program and video
- Study of PA Medicaid Buy-In (Dec 2004). Surveyed a geographically dispersed sample of the 500,000 working aged adults who receive SSA benefits. Only about 10% were working.
- The other 90%, were interested in becoming employed. This is approximately 225,000 residents of my state...not on the unemployment radar.
- In May 2005, PA reported unemployment of 305,000 persons.

# ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

means understanding the  
needs of businesses  
and realizing differing  
perspectives

Historically, the state Medicaid agency (and SSA) view individuals with disabilities as being in need; dependent and high end consumers of services.

The state Medicaid agency offers free or low cost services.

To a business, an employee is someone who responds to and satisfies a need in the workplace.

Business offers compensation for value added work.

# What Are Some of the Top Needs/Concerns of Business?

- Qualified Employees
- Reduced Turnover
- Expansion
- Reduced Taxes
- Assistance with Training
- Technology
- Insurance Costs

Tailor Your  
Message/Info to  
Speak to These  
Needs

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS  
CARE ABOUT?

HOW MUCH DETAIL IS  
REALLY NECESSARY?

# Employment of People with Disabilities is an Economic Issue

- Employment means more expendable income in communities
- Employment means less of a strain on subsidies supported by tax dollars
- Employment means more individuals are paying into the local tax base. In some PA counties, more than 10% of the working aged population is receiving SSA benefits. Can you imagine what impact this has on the tax base of these communities?
- Financial Incentives

# Employment of People with Disabilities is a Labor Market Issue

- Aging Workforce
  - More prevalence of disability
  - Will be leaving the workforce within the decade
- Employers should be concerned about...
  - Finding ways to keep talented workers that develop disabilities
  - Expanding their recruitment strategies to ensure that they can fill labor needs with talented workers

# Other Things We Have Learned...

- If you can show a business how your services can HELP the company's bottom line, they will probably pay attention
- Employers are not likely to be interested in attending separate events hosted by service organizations...
  - To engage employers, take your message to events that already draw employers (Chambers, HR organizations, trade associations...)
  - Run your message by a few employers prior to presentation

# Other Things We Have Learned...

- Utilize 'Champion' employers to make business connections
- Collaborate with local resource organizations that are already the trust of business and have experience in such communications
- Employers like a single point of contact...
  - Reduces confusion of acronyms and programs
  - Takes employer less time to get info/support

# Other Things We Have Learned...

- True support comes from the TOP
- Depending on service, may need to approach different contacts within a company
- Find ways to keep employers engaged, even when not hiring...(mentoring, internships, more)

# HOW A BLN CAN HELP PUBLIC/PRIVATE RELATIONSHIPS...

- Employer Outreach
- Employer Awareness of the Business Case
- Employer Education and Training
- Business to Business Approach- Sharing Experiences
- Employer Focused Resources

# Recommendations...

- State Medicaid agencies should find meaningful ways to engage the business community about the potential pool of workers
- Did you know..only 3% of SSI recipients are working in some parts of the country, about 6-8% in most areas, and over 20% in a few states. Unemployment rates may be a factor. The avg monthly gross earnings in PA were \$264 last year for SSI Recipients. That's monthly, not weekly.
- Given these diverse responses from states, perhaps state Medicaid agencies should increase their expectations of infrastructure systems which support SSI recipients.

# More Recommendations...

- Assess your approach to engaging other resources and employers...
  - Begin any ventures with business as if both parties cared equally about the individual

# VIDEO EXAMPLE

PA DPW CREATED VIDEO TO PROMOTE MAWD AND EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

PARTNERED WITH PA BLN AND INCLUDED FOOTAGE OF INTERVIEWS WITH BUSINESS