



# Business Matters

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace • Promoting a Positive Environment for Business Growth

Summer 2001

## Disability Friendly Strategies for the Workplace

Employers who include disability issues in corporate diversity policies enrich and enhance workplace benefits in the new economy. Such benefits include diverse leadership, innovation, increase in overall morale and the ability to cast a wider recruiting net. Outlined below are strategies to successfully incorporate persons with disabilities into the workplace.

◆ **Make a corporate commitment to include persons with disabilities among your stakeholders.** CEO commitment means senior leadership will embrace disability policies and that the organization will “talk the talk and walk the walk.” Is the CEO committed to a disability friendly workplace? Are workers with disabilities employed at all skill levels in the workplace, including senior management positions? Are your products or services marketed to customers with disabilities?

◆ **Educate all staff on disability.** Providing disability education dispels myths and enables all staff to make sound disability employment decisions. Does new staff orientation include disability awareness training, with materials available in alternate formats such as large print, Braille, and captioning?

◆ **Provide ongoing information on disability.** Continued education enables employees to utilize pertinent disability information to resolve everyday family and work-life situations. Does staff receive disability information that could be helpful at work, at home or at school? Is disability information provided routinely in the company newsletter or on an intranet site? Are disability resources in the community contacted to help injured workers return to the workplace as soon as possible?

◆ **Form a disability support group.** Disability perspectives enable all employees to contribute their full work potential to corporate success. Do employees with disabilities meet to discuss disability employment issues and have authority to make recommendations to management? Is all staff aware of this group and the contributions it makes to corporate success?

◆ **Provide accessible facilities and services.** Accessible facilities and services are more useful for everybody. Are buildings, parking areas, work spaces, and communication systems accessible to persons with disabilities?

◆ **Accommodate applicants and workers with disabilities.** An open policy on accommodations allows candidates and workers with disabilities to demonstrate what they can do. Are applicants and employees informed that accommodations are available if needed? Does staff routinely stay abreast of new developments in universal and assistive technology?

◆ **Project a disability friendly image to attract candidates and customers with disabilities.** Building relationships with community agencies increases referrals of candidates with disabilities. Do recruiters search for resumes on disability-related Web sites? Are publications directed to persons with disabilities targeted for company advertising? Are recruiters and other personnel responsible for establishing working relationships with community agencies serving applicants with disabilities?

◆ **Hire applicants with disabilities.** A diverse workforce includes employees with disabilities. Do recruiters regularly attend employment fairs for candidates with disabilities or target students at colleges? Are employees offered incentive bonuses for referring applicants with disabilities?

◆ **Train and advance workers with disabilities.** Employers who “talk the talk and walk the walk” of disability employment promote qualified workers to upper management positions. Do employees with disabilities routinely participate in employer-sponsored training opportunities? Are procedures in place to promote qualified employees with disabilities to management and supervisory positions?

◆ **Encourage staff to volunteer in the community.** Employers who want to make a difference in the disability employment arena are eager to influence tomorrow’s disabled workers and help job candidates with disabilities with their search. Is staff encouraged to build relationships with disability community service organizations during work hours? Does staff make regular visits to high schools to inform administrators, teachers and students (including students with disabilities) about scheduled open houses and job trends in your industry?

\*source: Job Training and Placement Report (June 2001) and Office of Disability Employment Policy website at [www.pcepd.gov](http://www.pcepd.gov)

### *Five Simple Steps To Accommodate Persons with Disabilities into the Workplace*

1. **Examine the job description.** See what parts of the job are essential and performed most often.
2. **Talk to the employee.** What are his or her needs?
3. **Talk to other employees** who do similar work, and to the supervisor involved, or will be involved.
4. **Talk to businesses** who have hired people with disabilities.
5. **Utilize local resources.** Call DRS at 1-800-552-5019 for expert help in disability recruitment and diversity training.

## *EARN it!*

The Employer Assistance Referral Network (EARN) is a new, nationwide information referral program created by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Labor, to link employers with potential employees with disabilities in their area.

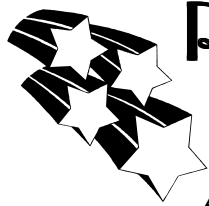
Employers seeking to fill a specific position may contact EARN with their job specification and, in turn, EARN staff will then search a database of local employment providers who may have appropriate job candidates with disabilities, and send that information back to the employer. The employer can then follow up directly with the service provider to connect with the potential candidate(s).

To contact EARN, call 1-888-695-8289, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m EST. For more information, visit [www.earnworks.com](http://www.earnworks.com).

## *Disability Awareness Training*

Is your company equipped to meet the needs of today's diverse workforce? Have you done all you can do to provide the best atmosphere for creative, innovative and productive results for your organization?

Schedule your staff to participate in disability and diversity training. For more information on attending a training seminar, call Ethel Walker at (804) 662-7153. Also see attached flyer.



## **Recognizing Abilities...**

Last May, Aileen Colorado, Public Relations Specialist at the Department of Rehabilitative Services, was presented with the 2001 *All-Star Adult-Worker Award* from Workforce

One of the Greater Richmond Chamber of Commerce during their annual Awards Breakfast. The Adult-Worker Award "recognizes a man or woman who has overcome life's adversities to meet the challenges of the workplace through a determination to succeed." Ms. Colorado was recognized for her employment success as an individual with a disability and for her contributions at the Department of Rehabilitative Services towards advancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Workforce One's All-Star Awards were created to honor the stellar achievements of such individuals and businesses in the Greater Richmond Area whose achievements focus on workforce development and leadership in the community.



*"...One of the greatest obstacles I have had to face as a person living with a disability is to not give up on myself. To not let the limitations of my disability limit my goals and aspirations to lead the life that I had chosen for myself. I knew I wanted to work.... I wanted a career... I wanted to make a difference. And through an amazing support of family, friends, and special people in my life who have helped me get to where I am today, I am doing just that. Today, I work with remarkable people that enable me to be a part of this system of workforce development that is opening so many doors for people like me to succeed and contribute back to the community..."*

*~ Aileen Colorado, May 9th 2001*