

# A Resource for Creating Inclusion Presented by the *INCLUSION COUNCIL FOR THE UNITED WAY SYSTEM*

## **BREAKING DOWN WORKPLACE STEREOTYPES: A Guide for Being Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities**

Developed by United Way's Persons with Disabilities Business Resource Group

### ***INTRODUCTION***

The *Inclusion Council for the United Way System* is a group of United Way staff members that advises the United Way system on how to best leverage diversity to create an inclusive environment. The Council helps address business and system issues, including enhancing relationships with donors, increasing community engagement and developing professional talent.

Members of the Inclusion Council lead nine Business Resource Groups made up of staff members throughout the United Way system. These groups give feedback and insight on strategic business questions related to their segment of the population to the Inclusion Council as a whole. The segments are **African American; Asian/Pacific Islander; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender; Latino/Hispanic; Native American; Persons with Disabilities; White Engagement; Women; and Young** (under 40).

The Inclusion Council has identified five primary focus areas as targets for its work. The five areas are Leadership; Career/Professional Development and Networking; Human Resources Practices and Internal Processes; Marketing and Outreach; and Collaborations and Partnerships.

Each Business Resource Group was selected to work in one specific focus area to develop resources and related products that will help the entire United Way movement to be more inclusive. The **Persons with Disabilities** group focused on Human Resources Practices and Policies, with an emphasis on hiring practices. The group looked to United Way's Standards of Excellence as a starting point.

With regard to Inclusion, the United Way Standards of Excellence states the following:

*"United Way recognizes that in order to effectively engage communities to achieve community impact goals, staff, volunteers, donors/investors, and community partners should include the communities United Way serves. The organization's culture, recruitment, partnerships, and other business practices demonstrate inclusiveness. Formal policies and practices promote and measure inclusiveness in all aspects of internal and external functions."*

As the group began this work, it became clear that perhaps the biggest deterrent to hiring people with disabilities was the stereotypes and misperceptions around people with disabilities in the workplace. In response, the following guide dispels the myths, highlights the benefits and provides resources for hiring people with disabilities.

# BREAKING DOWN WORKPLACE STEREOTYPES: A Guide for Being Inclusive of Persons with Disabilities

## ***PROFILE OF THE SEGMENT***

People with disabilities represent 18% - nearly 1 in 5 - of the US population.<sup>1</sup> Individuals can be born with a disability, or can acquire one at some point in their lives. With the aging of the U.S. population, the number of individuals with disabilities is likely to increase in the coming years. If we live long enough, most of us will have a disability at some point in our lives.

The disability community itself is quite diverse, with types of disabilities ranging from physical to developmental to mental impairment. Some individuals may be born with a disability, while others may acquire one later in life. Regardless, it is essential to focus on the unique abilities and the strengths each individual brings. People who have disabilities cannot be easily categorized, since any individual may have one or more diagnoses, and the severity of any particular disability varies with each individual. Some types of disabilities include:

*Acquired Disabilities* are disabilities that can occur at any point in life. They include but are not limited to: Alzheimer's Disease, chronic diseases, cancer, AIDS, or Multiple Sclerosis. Acquired disabilities can have minimal to severe effects on a person's ability to carry out daily living skills.

*Developmental Disabilities* are disabilities that delay an individual's rate of growth and/or development. They include but are not limited to: Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) autism, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome or mental retardation, and epilepsy. Individuals with these types of disabilities range in their functional abilities, their social and communications skills, and daily living skills. Some learning disabilities – for example, dyslexia – assume normal cognitive abilities, and refers specifically to problems in reading, math, and written expression.

*Mental Disabilities* are psychological conditions that affect a person's ability to function. They include but are not limited to: bipolar disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, personality disorders, Social Anxiety Disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and schizophrenia. Mental disorders range in their day-to-day affects; some individuals may exhibit no noticeable affects while others may be more evident

*Physical Disabilities* are disabilities that affect physical or sensory movement. They include but are not limited to: spinal cord injuries, Cerebral Palsy, hearing impairments, Spina bifida, and vision impairment. Having a physical disability does not mean a person has a developmental or mental disability, or cognitive delay.

<sup>1</sup> WOW! 2006 Quick Facts: Disabilities, 2006, pg. 11

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## ***PROFILE OF THE SEGMENT (continued)***

There is no one common accommodation for people with disabilities, whose needs are as individual as any person's. The best approach is to respect each individual and focus on ability, but be sensitive to the types of accommodations they may need in the workplace or as a volunteer. The person affected by the disability will best be able to tell what accommodation they may need. Types of accommodation can be simple, for example:

A United Way staff member is hearing impaired and reads lips. When staff meetings are held, presenters are instructed to stay in one place and make sure they are facing the staff member, enabling the staff member to understand what is discussed at the meeting.

A United Way volunteer has a physical disability that limits his mobility. It makes it difficult to attend 8 am meetings, because the county transit system for people with disabilities begins operating at 8 am. Meetings can have a call-in option or begin later to accommodate the volunteer.

## ***MYTH BUSTERS<sup>2</sup>***

*Myth 1: People with disabilities are more comfortable interacting with others that are disabled.*

Fact: People with disabilities are just as interested in interacting with people as any other person. As volunteers or staff, they should be included in events – from volunteer events to meetings – the same as a non-disabled person.

*Myth 2: Non-disabled people should help “take care of” people with disabilities.*

Fact: Many people with disabilities are self-sufficient and independent. Regardless, most can take care of themselves and know their specific needs. While anyone may provide assistance, please ask before helping.

*Myth 3: People with Disabilities are less interested in working.*

Fact: Two-thirds of unemployed people with disabilities would prefer to be employed. The employment rate for people with disabilities is 32%, despite the fact that many would prefer to be employed.

*Myth 4: People with Disabilities require expensive accommodations in the workplace.*

Fact: The majority of workplace accommodations cost nothing or less than \$500. Additionally, people with disabilities may have already have the accommodations they need or they may reasonably be obtained.

<sup>2</sup> Easter Seals Myths, [http://www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl\\_myths\\_facts](http://www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl_myths_facts)

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## **BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

Among the many challenges people with disabilities face is the challenge of finding employment. High unemployment is a serious problem in the disability community. Among adults with disabilities, more than 25% live in poverty, and more than 75% earn less than \$20,000 annually.<sup>3</sup> Among Americans with disabilities aged 18 to 64, only 32% are working, and two-thirds of the 68% who are unemployed say they would rather be working.<sup>4</sup> The employment rate for people with disabilities is less than half of the employment rate of those with no disability (74%).<sup>5</sup>

A 2007 survey of 92 Florida employers found that the largest impediment to the employment of people with disabilities is “attitudes” at all corporate levels.<sup>6</sup> Myths and fears about employing people with disabilities keep many businesses from hiring from this potential pool of workers. Concerns about litigation and Workman’s Compensation claims are among the issues cited. In reality, these concerns are unfounded. A 2003 employer survey indicated that 91% of respondents were not aware of any ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) related claims against their companies during the preceding 12 months.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, while many employers believe they will have to change their physical structures to accommodate a person with a disability, studies show that 15% of accommodations cost nothing and 50% cost less than \$500.<sup>8</sup> Tax credits are available to help employers offset any costs related to employing a person who has a disability.

Employers who hire people with disabilities consistently rate these workers as average or above average in performance, attendance and safety.<sup>9</sup> When it comes to employee retention and turnover rates, research shows that people with disabilities are inclined to remain in their jobs longer than the general workforce.<sup>10</sup>

In 2003, a survey of more than 3,700 businesses found that half of those who responded were having a hard or very hard time finding qualified workers.<sup>11</sup> For these employers, a willingness to hire people who have disabilities could significantly increase the pool of qualified job applicants. Additionally, staff who have disabilities may be very good at relating to the diverse groups United Way serves, often including other who have disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Frank Bowe, *Disability and Poverty in America*, Hofstra University (2006)

<sup>4</sup> National Organization on Disability, *Economic Participation: Finding Good Jobs* (2003)

<sup>5</sup> *WOW! 2006 Quick Facts: Disabilities*, 2006, pg 29

<sup>6</sup> Florida Business Leadership Network

<sup>7</sup> Center for Workforce Preparation, *Disability: Dispelling the Myths*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

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## RESOURCES

***American Association of People with Disabilities:*** [www.aapd-dc.org](http://www.aapd-dc.org)

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) is the largest nonprofit cross disability organization in the United States. AAPD is committed to organizing the disability community to be a powerful force for change economically. This site offers resources for employers who are interested in hiring people with disabilities and for job-seekers who have disabilities.

***Americans with Disabilities Act Technical Assistance:*** [www.ada.gov/](http://www.ada.gov/)

The Americans with Disabilities Act ensures equal rights for PWD. Title I of the Act outlines equal rights with regard to employment. This website helps employers and the general public navigate through the ADA and ensure their workplace is in compliance with ADA.

***Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers:*** [www.adata.org](http://www.adata.org)

Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers is a national network of ten regional centers that provide up-to-date information, referrals, resources and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act to businesses, employers, government entities, and individuals with disabilities.

***National Council on Disability:*** [www.ncd.gov](http://www.ncd.gov)

National Council on Disability (NCD) is an independent federal agency composed of members appointed by the President of the United States. NCD empowers individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. NCD provides advice to the President, Congress, and executive branch agencies to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability.

***National Organization on Disability:*** [www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

The National Organization on Disability focuses on expanding the participation of Americans with disabilities in all aspects of life, from employment to participation in civic life. They work with business, government and nonprofits to promote the inclusion of PWD.

***Rehabilitation Services Administration (Vocational Rehabilitation):*** [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which operates under the U.S. Department of Education, oversees programs that help individuals with physical or mental disabilities to obtain employment and live more independently through the provision of such supports as counseling, medical and psychological services, job training and other individualized services.

***U.S. Business Leadership Network:*** [www.usbln.org](http://www.usbln.org)

The US Business Leadership Network (USBLN) is the only national disability organization led by business for business. The USBLN recognizes and promotes best practices in hiring, retaining, and marketing to people with disabilities.

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## *RESOURCES (continued)*

### ***U.S. Department of Labor, Work Opportunity Tax Credit:***

[www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax](http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax)

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit offers employers a tax credit of up to \$2,400 for hiring an adult who has a disability.

### ***U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy:*** [www.dol.gov/odep](http://www.dol.gov/odep)

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides national leadership on disability employment policy by developing and influencing the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices, building collaborative partnerships, and delivering authoritative and credible data on employment of people with disabilities.

## ***JOB SEEKING SITES***

The following websites can help connect PWD job seekers with employment opportunities. Employers can consider posting positions on these sites:

- [www.business-disability.com](http://www.business-disability.com)
- [www.earnworks.com](http://www.earnworks.com)
- [www.hireds.com](http://www.hireds.com)

*Members of the Inclusion Council for the United Way System include the following leaders of the Persons With Disabilities Business Resource Group:*



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**GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.**  
**LIVE UNITED.**



For more information about United Way's diversity and inclusion work, please contact Marveen Henderson, Director, Diversity and Inclusion, [Marveen.Henderson@uwa.unitedway.org](mailto:Marveen.Henderson@uwa.unitedway.org), 800-892-2757, Ext. 847, or Deborah Foster, Executive Vice President, Strategic Alliances and Inclusion, 800-892-2757, Ext. 878, or [Deborah.Foster@uwa.unitedway.org](mailto:Deborah.Foster@uwa.unitedway.org).