



How Hiring an Inclusive Workforce Strengthens Your Business Model: Five Employer Success Stories

One of the biggest challenges businesses face is the shortage of employees available to fill positions specific to the needs of each organization. People with disabilities represent the single largest minority group seeking employment in today's marketplace. Further, according to the U.S. Department of Education, workers with disabilities are consistently rated as above average or better in performance, quality and quantity of work, flexibility, and attendance. Hiring an inclusive workforce will not only create a thriving employee base, but will strengthen your business model as a whole. Still not sure of the benefits? Read more to discover five success stories right here in Maryland and the benefits these business owners have discovered from their inclusive workforce.

Improving the on-boarding process



As owner of *Chouquette Chocolates and Confections*, a small specialty chocolate business in Bethesda, Sarah Dwyer noted that recruiting, training, and retaining quality staff can be a constant challenge. As a small business, she could not utilize a human resources department or mid-level manager to ensure staff received training and feedback. Adequate recruitment requires both financial and time resources which are often in short supply for a small business. After years of frustration, Ms. Dwyer was approached by an Employment Specialist for an agency supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ms. Dwyer was given the opportunity to communicate her staffing needs to the agency and was matched with an employee who had the best potential for success.

"The most rewarding part of the process was having someone else to bounce issues and questions off of," said Sarah Dwyer. "The Employment Specialist was key in creating a successful onboarding process tailored to both the needs of my business and my employee. Even the best head hunting agencies do not provide the type of one on one support we received post hire. Stephanie has been working with us for four years now and we no longer need ongoing agency support. She is an invaluable member of my team and really one of our most dedicated staff members."

Sarah Dwyer, Owner of *Chouquette Chocolates and Confections*

Driving innovation

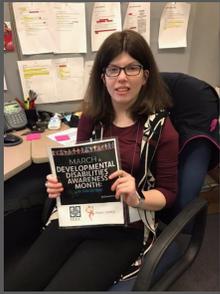


Founded in a garage in Rosedale, *Acadia Windows & Doors, LLC* has been producing, manufacturing, and selling windows and doors for over 70 years. Since that time, the company has continued a solid growth pattern while always looking for new ways to bring quality offerings to the customer. One of the valued innovations harnessed by *Acadia Windows and Doors* was the discovery that an inclusive workforce, strengthened their business model. The company now boasts that 14% of their workforce includes individuals with significant disabilities.

What began as an experiment in partnership with The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region has blossomed into one of the company's most successful human resource initiatives. Acadia's Vice President of Manufacturing, Neill Christopher, noted, "We didn't partner with The Arc NCR to be altruistic; we partnered with them because to do so makes sense as a business decision. This is a fantastic pool of workers. We had a great deal of trepidation, however, when The Arc NCR first approached us. This is a manufacturing environment, with large sheets of glass, saws, and presses, all capable of inflicting serious injury. What we learned is that everything that we did to make things safer for our team members from The Arc NCR, made it safer for everyone else as well. We're an OSHA SHARP site; proud of our safety record while striving to always make our facility safer for all who work or visit here."

Neill Christopher representing *Acadia Windows and Doors, LLC* as they are recognized at the Maryland State House for their innovative inclusive hiring model.

Strengthening collaboration



The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program is a business led, one year school-to-work program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that takes place entirely at the workplace.

Business owners know that collaboration with public and private groups is essential to their bottom line. Furthermore, the benefits of hiring workers with disabilities has been well documented by those who employ them. By partnering with area providers of disability employment services and other entities, opportunities are created that are a win/win for jobseekers and businesses.

Bridget is a story of success through Project SEARCH Montgomery County Government which is a collaboration among SEEC (an adult service provider), Ivymount School, and Montgomery County Government. Over the course of nine months, Bridget attended daily classroom instruction followed by hands-on experiences in unpaid internships in various settings. As a result, Bridget developed strong administrative and clerical skills. In addition, her demonstrated work ethic and confidence resulted in securing a full-time, paid position at the office of Maryland's Register of Wills.

"Relationship building is key," said Karen Hochberg, Montgomery County Government Business Liaison for Project SEARCH. "After several years of fostering partnerships between both State and Local agencies, the Project SEARCH team developed an internship for Bridget. Through collaboration, and hard work, the relationship continues to develop into more opportunities for our interns. For Bridget, her hard work coupled with on-going relationship building led to an opportunity for her to transition from intern to a permanent full time employee. A successful outcome for all involved."

Building resiliency



Businesses owned by people with disabilities, like this one in AA County, are increasing in number.

Hiring workers with disabilities is not the end of the story. Self-employment and business ownership is an option which is increasing within the disability community at a faster pace than the general population. On average, business owners who have disabilities themselves tend to boast a more diverse workforce than most without disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities, families, and job coaches are increasingly turning to the option of self employment for job seekers with disabilities. To fill this niche, there are several local agencies in Maryland which focus on teaching the skills necessary to run a successful business. Some of these organizations also assist in the start up of very small or "micro" businesses to put these skills into practice. A business community which reflects the diversity of the general population allows for a stronger, more resilient economic climate in the state which responds more adeptly to the varied needs of residents.

Getting the job done



The position at NAPA is perfect for Alex," said his Job Coach. "He excels at keeping things in order and has impressive attention to detail."

Sometimes the perfect job and the perfect employee just need to find each other. Alex's Supervisor at NAPA Auto Parts in Hunt Valley, noted that Alex is an extremely valuable member of the team filling a niche position that no other staff person was able to reliably complete. Keeping the shelves stocked and organized is an important part of the business, as both NAPA's commercial and private clientele prefer to find needed supplies quickly and efficiently. Alex reads the bar code labeling on each product and matches that label to what is on the shelf. Alex said that at first he needed prompting and reminders from his Job Coach but he can now complete almost all of his job duties with no assistance.

Penn-Mar Human Services used a technique called *Customized Employment* to assist Alex in finding an ideal work environment. *Customized Employment* is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. This job search technique is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer.

Alex says he enjoys going to work each day and likes spending time with his coworkers. When asked his favorite part about working at NAPA, Alex smiled and said, "I get the job done."

*This document is available in alternative accessible formats by calling 410.767.3660 or contacting info.mdod@maryland.gov
Publication of The Maryland Department of Disabilities www.mdod.maryland.gov or 410.767.3660*