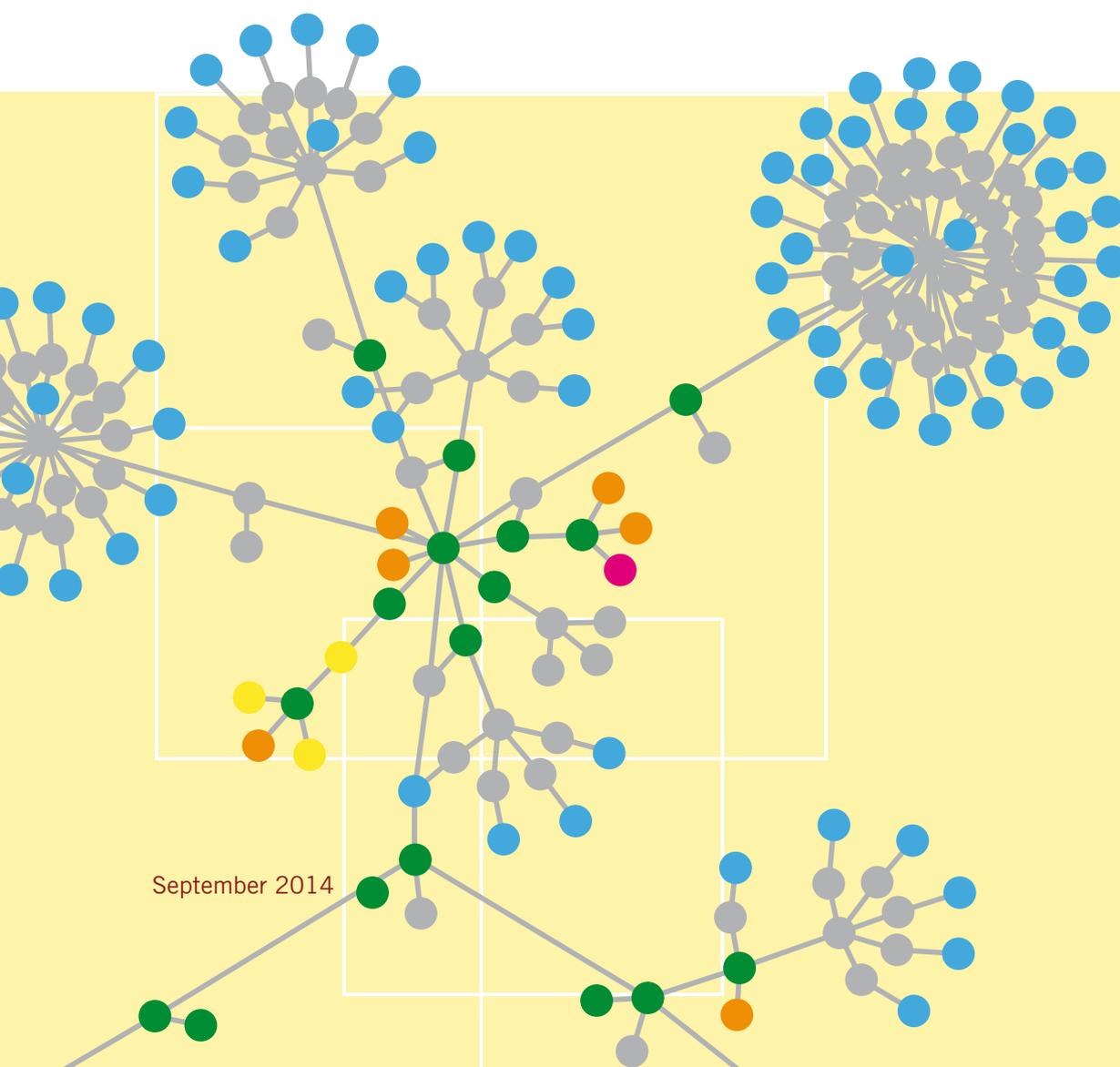




International
Labour
Organization

Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities:

The Business Case



September 2014

Conditions
of Work and
Equality
Department
(WORKQUALITY)

Bureau for
Employers'
Activities
(ACT/EMP)

Inclusion of youth with disabilities: The business case

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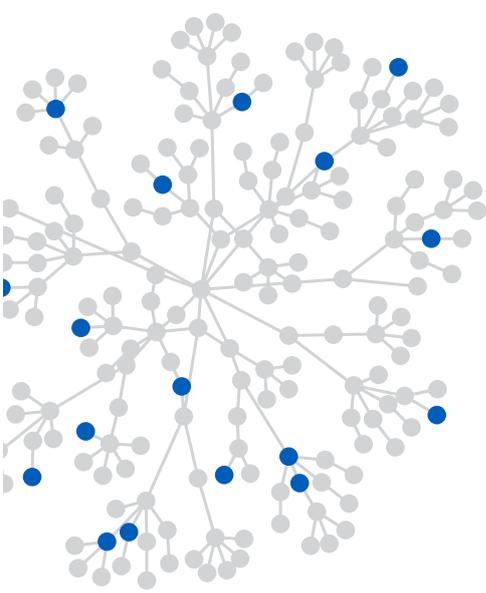
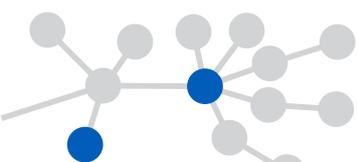
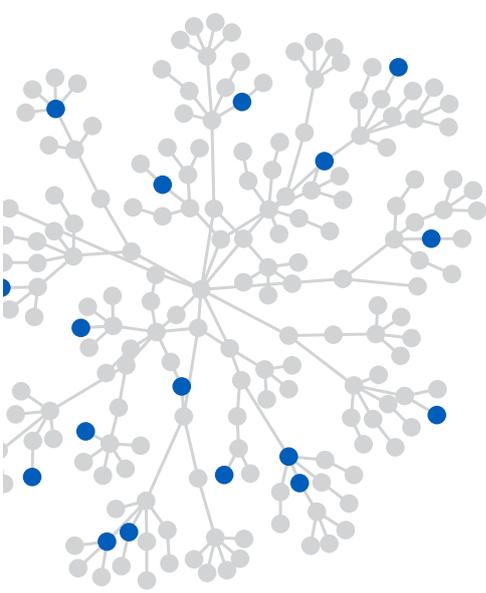


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Foreword and acknowledgements

The crisis of youth unemployment is a growing global issue. Youth with disabilities face even more barriers to decent work in this crisis. Many companies are realizing, however, the difference that hiring youth with disabilities can make for their business. They form an untapped talent pool that employers are discovering can be game changers. Learning how to recruit everyone on the basis of their capability and potential, including people with disabilities, just makes good business sense. This guide shows possible routes to what needs to be done to enable disabled young people to contribute to business success.

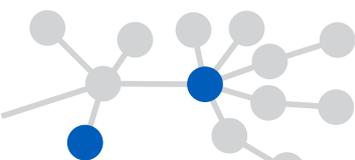
This paper describes the impact and the difference it made for the ten companies featured and in the lives of youth who are typically treated as unable to learn or incapable of contributing to the world of work in a dynamic way. The chosen initiatives from Brazil, Chile, China, India, Norway, Republic of Serbia, Singapore and the United States also present a how-to guide for replicating their success.

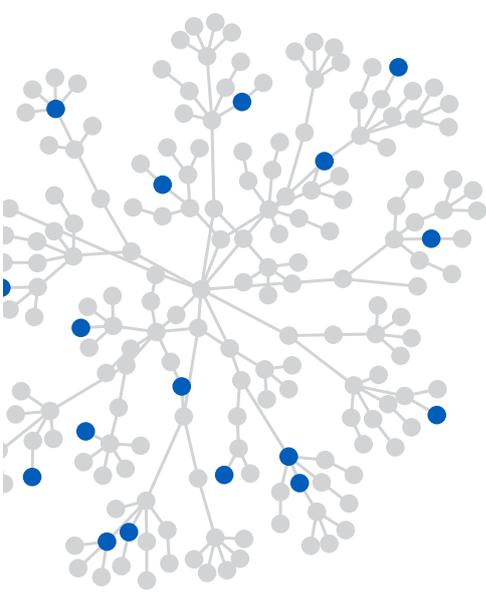
The International Labour Organization is grateful to the many individuals who contributed to this guide. We would like to express our special thanks to the company representatives who took their time to ensure an accurate content and provided photographs, testimonials and anecdotes to enliven the text.

Researchers and writers worked in collaboration to make each featured case both pragmatic and technically applicable. This guide was produced under the oversight of Stefan Trömel and Debra Perry, Senior Specialists in Disability Inclusion, Gender Equality and Diversity Branch, with the assistance of Jade Young and Andrew Lange, who contributed as writers, editors and guided it through to production. Appreciation goes to writers Judith Hasson, Karen Emmons and Amy Rhoades, and to Ada Lui Gallassi and Rena Gashumba, who conducted a part of the interviews with company representatives.

On behalf of all the researchers, writers and specialists who contributed, the ILO hopes this guide to innovating practices expands the opportunities for youth with disabilities and for businesses worldwide.

*Disability/Network Specialist
International Labour Office
Geneva
2014*





Executive summary

Inclusion of youth with disabilities: The business case is a how-to guide for companies interested in integrating youth with disabilities into their workforce.

This guide is based on initiatives that are currently tried out by ten companies to employ youth with disabilities in eight countries (Brazil, Chile, China, India, Norway, Republic of Serbia, Singapore and the United States). Good practices and useful insights are identified and explained through first-hand accounts.

First, the business case for employing youth with disabilities is made. This section will highlight how two companies benefited from initiatives to employ youth with disabilities.

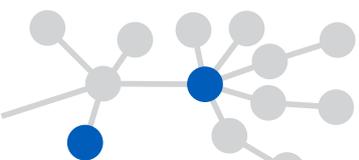
Next, four reoccurring good practices that were cited in the featured cases are given particular consideration:

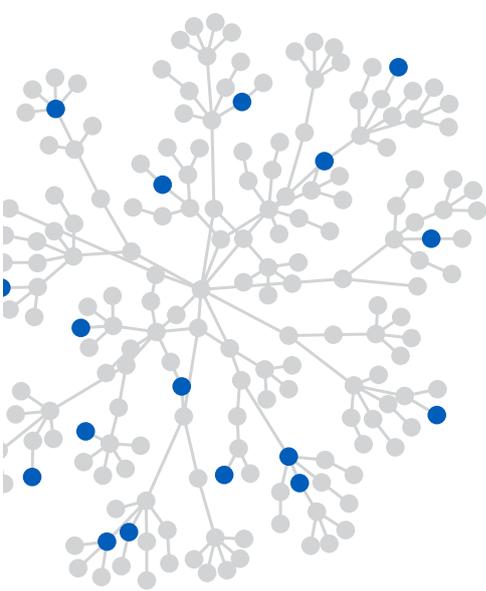
- partner with an organization that specializes in disability services;
- provide (when necessary) disability-accessible skills training;
- offer recruitment and job placement services;
- embrace a policy of inclusion and non-discrimination.

Then, the useful insights section serves as a quick reference for the lessons learned throughout the ten cases.

The conclusion identifies relevant issues and various observations that were made through the course of the publication.

Finally, the featured cases are included in their entirety at the end.





Introduction

In agreement with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), this guide recognizes and supports the fundamental right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others and includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.

The purpose of this guide is to:

1. Illustrate what companies are doing to include youth with disabilities in their workplaces or corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.
2. Provide specific information and steps so that other companies/employers can adapt or replicate the featured initiatives to their own companies' needs.
3. Identify how to overcome challenges and how to harness assets.
4. Encourage other companies/employers to take on specific actions to employ youth with disabilities and help them advance in their careers.

A word about language

Using proper language is important, as it is when interacting with anyone, with or without a disability. We can show respect or disrespect with the words we use.

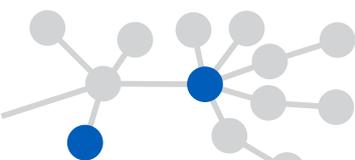
When referring to people with disabilities, the ILO uses the terms “disabled person” and “person with a disability” and their plural forms interchangeably to reflect the different and preferred use of these terms throughout the world.

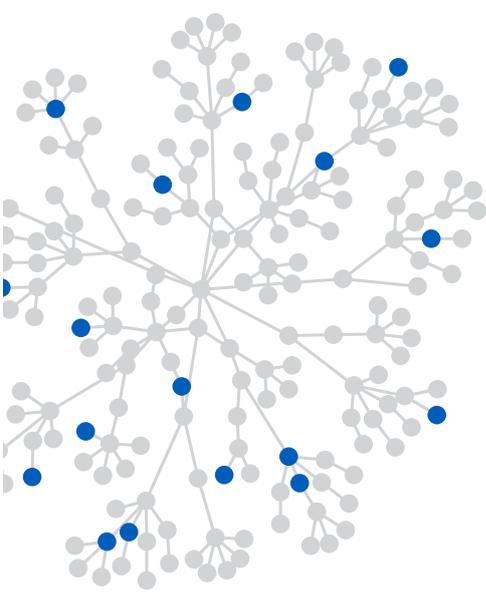
In some countries, what is referred to as “people-first” language is strongly advocated, with terms like “people with disabilities” or a “person with an intellectual disability”, and is considered the most respectful. It is important to refer to disabled people in the most respectful terms in your country or culture, using words that are preferred by disabled people themselves.

How to use this guide

The good practices highlighted throughout the featured cases are for companies interested in employing youth with disabilities. Even case studies involving a business or industry far removed from a particular reader's area of interest offer insights on employees with disabilities that are universal and most likely useful to all employers. We encourage readers to review each case for practical tips.

The company practices presented in this guide are not to be considered exhaustive. Companies are encouraged to adapt the examples and develop new initiatives according to the needs of their business.





The business case for hiring youth with disabilities

Imagine for a moment a young person who, for reasons beyond control, is marginalized from peers and, despite wanting to fit in, never has the opportunity to develop his/her potential. Perhaps this person's circumstance was the result of an accident or maybe a condition that came with birth. Regardless, this person grows up with the same desires in life – education, work, family and other milestones to celebrate – that we all share. Yet, this person's life is circumstantially routed into a world where ambition is not encouraged or enabled. Certainly a career, much less contributing to the world of work and a nation's development, is all too often considered illogical if not impossible.

Such is the reality for many youth with disabilities.

Now imagine that you could change those dead-end routes and thus affect not only the life of a young person denied opportunity, or many people's lives, but even the strength of your own business as well as the greater economy.

Growing evidence indicates that opening up the world of work to people with disabilities has an incredible range of benefits. By integrating youth with disabilities into their employee ranks, companies have reported positive returns to their bottom line, stronger company morale and higher performance among co-workers. Moreover, recruiters have learned to focus on the individuals' potential and not to be distracted by factors which are irrelevant to their ability to do the job, making them better recruiters.

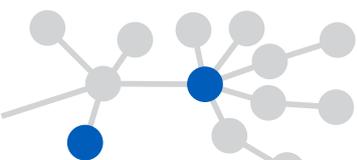
This guide goes beyond making the case for job training or hiring youth with disabilities. It shows employers how to re-think their options and learn how to take advantage of both a severely overlooked talent pool as well as a consumer group.

Employment trend

Rather than focusing on what disabled youth *can't* do, companies should focus and capitalize on the vast possibilities of what they *can* do. Disability is increasingly being understood as an important employment, consumer and human rights issue. As more and more private-sector companies discover the benefits of being "disability confident", the notion that disabled youth are difficult to employ has become an antiquated way of thinking. Businesses that demonstrate disability confidence realize improved productivity and enjoy recognition as a company with responsible business practices.

As Susan Scott-Parker of the UK Business Disability Forum explains, the two key good practices for employing disabled youth depend on companies becoming "barrier free". This refers to removing or adapting all processes that otherwise obstructs individuals with disabilities from competing for work and from becoming skilled employees. In addition, businesses need to learn how to make workplace adjustments that enable individuals to contribute. From adapting online application systems to specialized training accommodations, companies must recognize that when working with disabled individuals, sometimes treating people "differently" (by making relevant accommodations) means treating people "fairly".

Rather than focusing on a young person's disability, Scott-Parker stresses that companies must instead be willing to ask themselves: "What is wrong with *our* company? Why don't we know how to adapt the way we do things so that this person can do a great job for us?" She says to be disability confident a company must have disability know-how and realize what it means to treat everyone fairly, including disabled people.



Strategic and commercial benefits from including disabled youth

According to the UK Business Disability Forum, a member of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, companies that hire youth with disabilities will meet their strategic challenges by being more agile and responsive to the markets in which they operate.

A disability-confident business is one that makes room for employees with disabilities and helps them to grow as workers and individuals. In turn, the company grows as a business and attracts consumer trust. In return for seeking out the best workers, which includes those with disabilities, a company benefits from higher productivity and reduced costs. This results in innovative production, services offered and, ultimately, outstanding customer relationships and employee satisfaction and retention.

Figure 1. The Disability Confident business



Source: UK Business Disability Forum

In many of the case studies included in this guide, skilled youth with disabilities demonstrated themselves as the best people for the job and in some cases, even outperformed their non-disabled counterparts. Although not common, this was the situation for two of the featured cases: Tata Consultancy Services Advanced Computer Training Centre in Bangalore, India; and the Eureka Call Centre Systems in Singapore.

In Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), for instance, disabled youth achieved such high performance standards that they proved to be an inspiration to their non-disabled colleagues and even contributed to higher staff attendance rates.

TCS provides job training for individuals with visual impairments and job placement services. As a result, graduates have obtained employment in multinational companies and have successfully collaborated with co-workers (see p. 57 for more on the Tata Consultancy Services initiative).

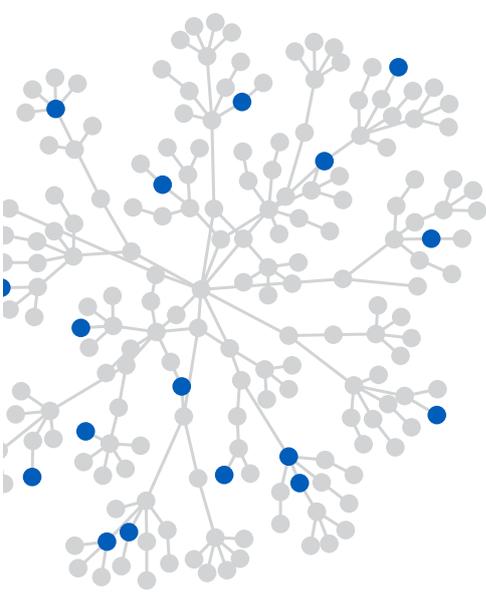
The Eureka case study demonstrates a comparative advantage from using assistive technologies, as in this instance, disabled employees actually outperformed their peers. According to the Eureka representative, as the business began to take off, the non-disabled agents began dropping out while the visually impaired hung on, even beyond the average staying period of two years for call centre employment. The Eureka representative recalled that the “visually impaired picked up really fast through the use of shortcut keys”. They achieved higher call rates than their non-disabled colleagues who used a mouse to manoeuvre the user interface.

“We would love to see this programme implemented in many places, not because it's the right thing to do but because it's the smart thing to do.”

Sreela Das Gupta, Tata Consulting Services

Box 1. The Eureka case

In the Eureka case, the performance of the non-disabled employee's was actually 50–70 per cent of what those with visual impairments were able to achieve. The Eureka representative recalled that one after another, all the non-disabled agents dropped out. Eureka also found that their disabled employees were punctual, rarely absent and enthusiastic about their work. Within a year of starting the initiative, the Eureka call centre was almost entirely run by visually impaired staff and its previous annual turnover rate of approximately 40 per cent had plunged to 2 per cent (see p. 34 for more on the Eureka initiative).



Good practices

Making a written commitment as a part of a company's core values is one step in demonstrating support for including youth with disabilities. A company's vision may indicate the good practice in their organizational development goals. Support also can be demonstrated through a policy of inclusion, affirmative action practices or by encouraging all employees to realize their full potential.

Based on the case studies featured, this guide proposes the following four-step approach to transition disabled youth into the work force:

1. Partner with an organization that specializes in disability services
2. Support or initiate a skills training initiative
3. Establish recruitment or job placement services
4. Develop a policy of inclusion and non-discrimination

Although each company's initiative was uniquely designed to meet the needs of their business, these four elements were observed to varying degrees in each of the featured cases.

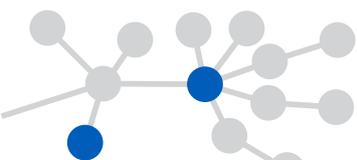
Partner with an organization that specializes in disability services

Including youth with disabilities into the world of work requires specialized consideration and planning. The planning phase is crucial to ensure that initiatives are not only effective but manage expectations both in terms of what a company seeks to gain as well as the training and support that will be provided to participants and their families.

The thought of undertaking such a specialized initiative may seem daunting or difficult to conceptualize. Therefore, the preliminary step of information gathering through collaboration with a disability organization is recommended to better understand the needs of disabled youth and the resources that are available to them.

Throughout the case studies, partnerships offered various creative and resourceful approaches for meaningful planning. This proved a popular strategy, especially considering that disability organizations are uniquely equipped to anticipate challenges and propose solutions. However, these organizations need the employer to explain what their company needs if they are to match the right young person to the right job.

Additionally, the assistance of specialized organizations was instrumental in locating disabled candidates with adequate skills, connecting to programmes with specialized transportation services and, in some instances, even providing additional sources of financial support.



Partnership in Chile – Núcleo Paisajismo

One example of effective partnership is featured in the case of the Semillero programme in Chile. Through this programme, the Núcleo Paisajismo landscape company has partnered with a school to train and employ youth with disabilities.

In particular, the Semillero initiative recommends creating a list of supportive businesses, government agencies, NGOs and other institutions that can provide additional resources and then to approach them for support as needed. As a result of the partnership with a school, the initiative has expanded to take on greater numbers of participants while continuing to promote inclusion, job opportunities and social integration (see p. 49 for more on the Semillero initiative).

Box 2

By creating individualized reports, the school partnership has a crucial role in honing in on the strengths and weaknesses of each participant in the Semillero programme. The reports include information on each participant's motor skills as well as psycho-emotional aspects. This approach was found to benefit participants and staff by allowing them to better understand how to work with each participant.

Support or initiate a skills training programme

Company involvement in skills training is only required when necessary. Various tasks and employment duties may only require a standard or slightly modified type of orientation for disabled youth to learn and perform a job. However, in instances in which disabled youth with adequate skills are lacking, a company may consider a skills training initiative.

The skills taught will depend on the needs of the company. Such training may provide instruction for participants to learn a particular task or may be more holistic to address several needed skills.

In addition, the various work environments may require that prospective job candidates develop particular interpersonal skills. For example, employees of a movie theatre need to be comfortable with interpersonal communication while those of an IT company must articulate over the phone or through assistive communication technology.

Supporting programmes in Norway, India and Brazil – Telenor, MphasiS and Serasa Experian

The two-year Telenor Open Mind programme in Norway begins with a three-month training period on computing, technical support, career coaching, resume development, interview practice and personal network development. Through the training, participants receive certification in computing at basic and intermediate levels. The remainder of the programme is an on-the-job training period with either Telenor or one of its subsidiary companies. In addition to developing technical skills, the Open Mind programme helps participants build up self-respect and a belief in their capacity to achieve.

An independent research organization found that the Open Mind programme had delivered a social-economic saving of at least 100 million Norwegian kroner (USD 15.9 million) from 1996 to 2006. Telenor's programming is an excellent example of demonstrating skills training commitment to the disabled community and its subsequent far-reaching results (see p. 60 for more on the Telenor Open Mind initiative).

Another initiative to help disabled young people access education opportunities in top-quality management institutions is the MphasiS corporate social responsibility programme in Bangalore, India. Upon realizing that they could not find enough candidates to fill positions that had been designated for youth with disabilities, the MphasiS IT services company helped one of India's most elite management schools set up an office to support disabled students and renovate the campus to be as accessible as possible to a variety of disabilities.

“The most important thing for the future is that the programme is not perceived to be a charity but that participants are expected to work like everyone else and become tired like everyone else.”

Programme participant, Telenor

“In the beginning, students came to me and were very tentative and very hesitant asking for something they needed, and we would tell them: ‘This is your entitlement – you must ask as it's your right.’ Over time, the culture has changed. Students have learned it is fine to ask for what they need.”

Rajluxmi Murthy, MphasiS



“For Serasa, the employment of people with disabilities is a matter of social inclusion and not one of charity. At Serasa Experian, all the employees are given duties that are of importance for the company, which means that the employees with disabilities aren’t there only to fulfil the quota requirements, but to also be included in the workplace together with the rest of the staff. And if they fail to achieve the company’s goals and aimed results, they can be dismissed from the company according to the same directives as any other employee.”

João Ribas, Head of Diversity & Inclusion at Serasa Experian and disability rights leader

In Brazil, Serasa Experian developed a high standard training programme, providing its disabled trainees with professional development courses in a variety of areas, including a soft skills component. Beyond providing training for its own potential disabled employees, the company took a step further and developed a partnership with 16 other major Brazilian companies and multinationals to supply them with the qualified disabled candidates they searched for but could not find.

Serasa Experian’s former employment programme for people with disabilities became an example of skills training for people with disabilities in a country where disabled youth encounter many barriers to education and consequently to the labour market.

Other featured companies have taken the approach of creating a specialized training programme within their own business. This type of programming focuses on matching required tasks with the particular skills of disabled individuals. Such an approach may include collaboration with disability organizations to troubleshoot challenges. Rather than having the organization manage the training, the company creates a training facility and provides skills instruction. Some companies may prefer this in-house training, tailored to their needs, while other companies may prefer to have an outside organization provide the training, though it is advised that the company is always involved to provide training guidance.

Establish recruitment and job placement services

Employment, either with the company that provides the training or an outside firm, is a crucial goal to ensure a programme’s success. However, it is important to consider issues that could interfere with participants’ realizing this objective. Some difficulties in finding employment may be the result of social bias and prejudice toward people with disabilities. Others may be the result of a lack of access to reliable transportation or a trainee’s ability to transfer what was learned to a workplace.

The employment component for disabled youth in the United States – AMC Theatres and Marriott

The AMC Furthering Opportunities Cultivating Untapped Strengths, or FOCUS, programme hires and trains youth with disabilities on the job with the support of a job coach. The programme uses a “FOCUS travelling interview” in which candidates tour a work environment as part of the interview process. FOCUS has found that the tour allows job candidates to better understand their surroundings and, as a result, they better understand the employment objectives.

The programme has successfully trained and placed more than 800 youth in jobs in the AMC movie theatres across the United States (see p. 25 for more on the AMC FOCUS initiative).

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD), set up by the Marriott hospitality chain, has been facilitating the transition from school to work for youth with disabilities through its Bridges programme for more than 20 years. Through a unique employer/business-driven programme, the hiring of disabled youth is based on the priorities and needs of the employer. After experiencing challenges with employee retention, Marriott developed a specialized two-track system for new recruits that focuses on their setting and reaching long-term goals, therefore cultivating job retention rather than simply work experience.

Today, the programme provides disabled youth with support for a period of 15 to 24 months. Bridges activities target youth and employers, with an objective of matching participants to appropriate positions but with a support network for the youth that helps them remain in jobs for a longer time (see p. 38 for more on Marriott’s Bridges initiative).

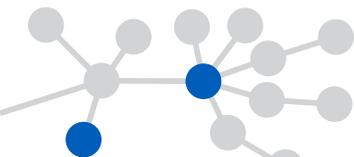
Because it is inevitable that some participants may require more training time, depending on the type of instruction and disability, all the programmes offered extended training periods to accommodate individual needs. Ensuing support in the employment search and job placement process also proved crucial.

“AMC has given Kyle a second chapter in his life, says his dad. He can now sink his teeth into some future with AMC.”

Bob Weafer, father of an AMC programme participant

“Every young person’s journey through the Bridges programme is unique to them. A key to success is being flexible enough, within the construct of the model, to customize our interactions with each participant and employer in order to meet their particular set of needs and circumstances.”

Mark Donovan, Marriott



Develop a policy of inclusion and non-discrimination

The practice of integrating individuals with disabilities into the labour force is increasingly common, yet many co-workers and even managers remain unaware or doubtful of the competencies of this undervalued labour pool. Consequently, the employment of disabled youth can be significantly improved by creating a work environment that fosters inclusion and non-discrimination. In addition to supporting an inclusive work culture among co-workers, this approach also involves removing all barriers confronting individuals with disabilities.

Policy of inclusion and non-discrimination in China and Republic of Serbia – ACCOR Hotel and Delta Holding

In 2003, the Accor Novotel Atlantis Hotel in Shanghai began hiring employees with disabilities and simultaneously sensitizing its other employees to be aware and supportive of the disabled workforce. Their programme integrates disabled employees through one-on-one on-the-job training that they refer to as a “buddy system”. The programme supports young people with disabilities on the job and, on occasion, even accompanying them home. The Novotel Atlantis Hotel also makes it a habit to include family members as early on as the initial interview to ensure that the candidate receives positive reinforcement and encouragement to succeed at home.

The hotel introduces all new employees to their disabled colleagues informing them of their particular needs; the process emphasizes, however, that although all employees are to support one another, none are to be treated differently, regardless of having a disability or not. This aspect of making special accommodations while maintaining high expectations of all employees contributed largely to the programme’s success (see p. 22 for more on Accor’s initiative at the Novotel Atlantis Hotel).

In the Republic of Serbia Delta Holding created the Delta Foundation, which has partnered with communities to make a difference for young people with disabilities since 2007. Due to the heavy stigma associated with having a disability, the challenges for disabled youth extended beyond employment limitations.

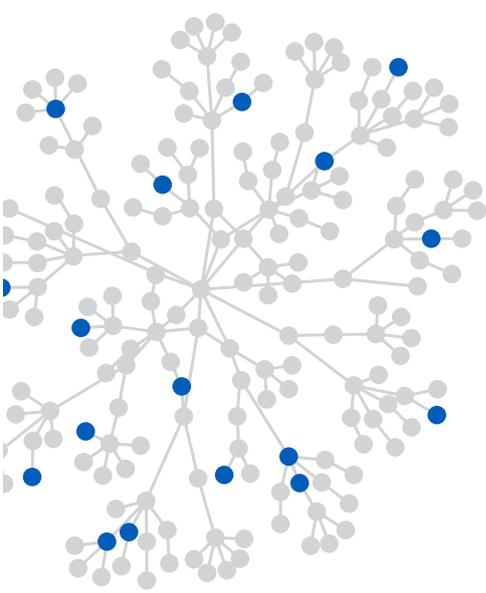
The Delta initiative promotes a supportive work environment for people with disabilities and sponsors social activities in the community that enable engagement between those with disabilities and those without. The Delta Foundation is regularly consulted by organizations, institutions and other companies interested in replicating its activities.

Inclusion is considered to be among the most important of the good practices. As previously noted, making a company barrier free is essential to treating disabled individuals fairly, and these barriers must be removed at all levels and systems within a company.

“Having any kind of disability, especially a mental disability, is a major challenge for youth in Serbia because very little support exists for them.”

Nadica Milanović, Delta Holding





Useful insights for employing youth with disabilities

Undertaking an initiative to support the employment of youth with disabilities might be perceived as daunting by many employers. But paramount among the many insights that industry leaders have offered throughout the featured cases is the realization that such an initiative is not as challenging as it might seem.

The following points were identified throughout the featured cases as important when planning an employment initiative for youth with disabilities.

Focus on what youth with disabilities can do, not what they can't.

Both employers and employees stand to gain the most from their relationship by capitalizing on people's skills and talents. Like with any other young person, focus on your young disabled candidates or employees' aptitudes and not on their disabilities.

Outline specific programme objectives and designate a timeline.

Start small; begin with a pilot phase and think long-term, not just recruitment. Give consideration for on-going policies, performance management systems, wage reviews, disciplinary systems and separation practices. Question every assumption you have about your jobs, how they are structured and what *has* to be done.

Consider creating an expert panel.

Depending on the complexity and ambition of the initiative, companies might want to consider establishing an expert panel composed of senior company staff, disability specialists, academics, and researchers and practitioners who can provide important guidance in developing a programme prototype and objectives.

Involve participants' support network from the beginning.

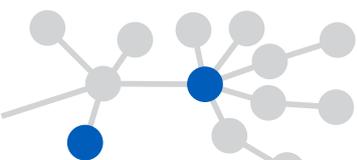
Including family members of youth with intellectual disabilities from the initial interview can enhance participant success. This is also a good time to address logistical issues such as how participants will get to and from work.

Offer flexible and inclusive training options.

Allow candidates extended training periods, provide training materials in various formats and involve recruiters in the training process. Consult disabled individuals regarding facility design and accommodation. Some candidates will experience a higher learning curve and require a longer training period than others. Since individuals with disabilities have a variety of learning styles, they should be allowed options to choose what works best for them during training. Also, including recruiters in the training can help ensure that instruction is meeting expectations and quality standards.

Ensure adequate supervision and support an engaging work environment.

Consider having one or more supervisors specifically dedicated to working as a coach or mentor to facilitate their transition into the workplace. Increase your employment retention by creating a workplace environment with a sense of belonging, security and fun social activities. Consider an incentive system both to assess the level of work progress and to encourage improved employment performance.



Ensure senior support and remove bias against people with disabilities.

Be sure that company executives support the initiative and organize skill-building workshops to sensitize non-disabled staff on working with individuals with disabilities. These efforts will help the initiative achieve long-term success.

Do not exaggerate what a programme can deliver.

Set high standards and hold participants and training staff accountable but be careful not to fall short of expectations, which can affect the credibility.

Hiring, advancement and retention practices.

Your company may find that it would be sufficient to simply make current hiring processes more accessible or consider a twin-track approach: mainstreaming the hiring process as well as offering disability-specific recruitment. Ensure that youth with disabilities will be able to advance within the company like all other employees and encourage their stay through employment incentives.

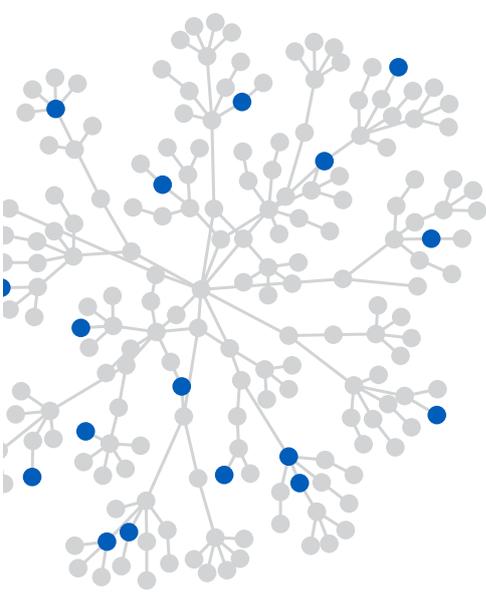
Communicate initiatives with media and disability organizations.

In addition to making a difference in people's lives and having a positive impact on a community, a company that hires youth with disabilities may enjoy positive recognition and support from public authorities and media outlets.

Upon implementing a programme, consider the following checklist to ensure that your company is disability accessible and disability confident:

- Are managers clear on what they and their teams need to know and do?
- Are all company facilities accessible to employees, customers and stakeholders?
- Are employees trained to welcome clients and co-workers with disabilities?



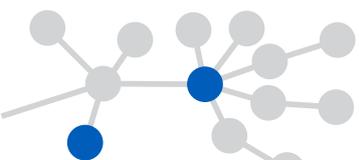


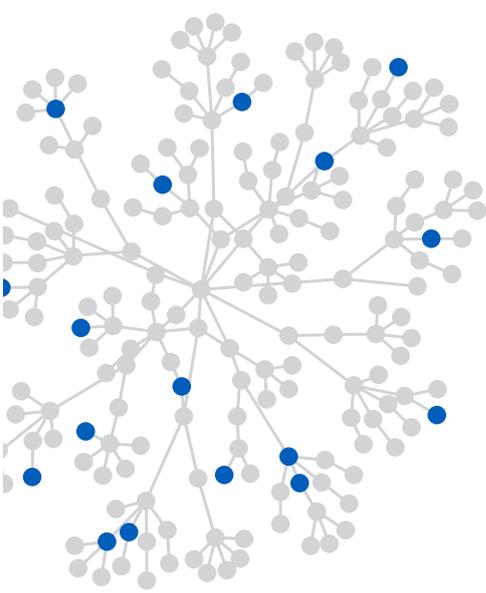
Conclusion

The initiatives featured throughout this guide reflect a progressive attitude among industry leaders regarding the capabilities and inclusion of youth with disabilities in the world of work. We hope that with the help of this guide, many companies will adapt and expand on the examples and good practices. As more companies integrate disabled youth into their workforce, they will most certainly experience commercial returns, sustained employee retention and improved morale in the work environment.

Undertaking initiatives to employ youth with disabilities means learning how disability affects the business, removing disability specific obstacles that prevent disabled people from realizing their potential and adapting so that individuals with disabilities can contribute. Rather than focusing on the disability, employment practices need to adapt and emphasize how disabled youth are capable of contributing to both the world of work and the long-term success of companies.

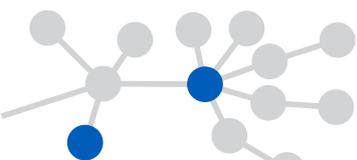
In the end, these inclusion efforts benefit not only the enterprise but also the individual and the societies in which these companies operate.





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ACCOR HOTELS – Novotel Atlantis internship and placement programme inspires Olympic potential among youth with disabilities in China

Introduction

Through their own unique and holistic approach, Accor's Novotel Atlantis Hotel has been developing the potential of youth with disabilities in Pudong, Shanghai, since 2003. As one of thirteen Accor hotels in the Shanghai area, Novotel Atlantis is distinguished for their unique approach to employing youth with disabilities. They attribute the programming success to community partnerships and individualized on-the-job training.

To date, 233 participants have graduated from their Disabled Trainee Internship and Placement Programme and 60 per cent have successfully obtained employment with Novotel Atlantis and other companies in the community. This programme was the first of its kind in Shanghai and in 2005, received accreditation from the Shanghai government as a Training Centre for Youth with Disabilities in Hospitality Services.

Good practice

Utilizing a threefold approach, the Novotel Atlantis Hotel provides disabled youth on-the-job training through a one-on-one "buddy system", in a discrimination-free environment while being treated the same as everyone else.

Getting started

The Hotel branch first began the initiative by collaborating with the Shanghai Pudong Disability Association, a community-based disability organization. During the initial discussions, potential skills among young people with disabilities were identified and paired with various employment tasks that are needed at the hotel. Through guidance from the Disability Association, the Novotel Atlantis Hotel was able to get a better idea of realistic expectations of participants and support that the programme should provide before going forward with the programme.

Candidates are typically recent graduates from a specialized vocational school for students with disabilities. They are between the ages of 18 to 20 years old and normally have mental disabilities though some have had physical disabilities such as hearing impairments.

During the interview process, the evaluator assesses their interest and personality traits for programme compatibility. The interview is treated seriously and candidates may undergo several in-person interviews before selection decisions are made. According to Grace Xiang, Accor's Director of Human Resources for Greater China, the Internship and Placement Programme includes participants' support networks from the start; "Parent or guardian involvement has proven to be a significant factor in [participant's] successful completion of the programme. We want to be sure that everyone involved is clear about expectations and that includes family members."

Once admitted, groups of 20 participants at a time are assigned to an experienced employee or "buddy," who assists them in learning the responsibilities over the six-month, on-the-job training period. Through this individualized assistance, participants receive not only training but also an understanding of how the hotel and its various departments operate. "Upon beginning the programme, participants are often overwhelmed by the work environment and all the hotel's facilities," explains Xiang. However, the buddy system helps the new recruits learn their responsibilities in a manageable way.

Through the "buddy system" the new employee learns how to put on a complicated uniform, how to access their personal locker and the employee cafeteria. On occasion, buddies may even accompany participants to ensure that they arrive home safely. Those working as "buddies" are experienced staff with specialized training and skills such as sign language and in some cases, have even been graduates of the Disability Trainee Internship programme themselves. Buddies are provided an allowance incentive for participating and for providing their individualized support.



Participants are integrated into positions that cover seven hotel departments based on their skills, aptitude and their disability. Participants may work in the kitchen where they learn to make Chinese Dim Sum dumplings. Other options include making pastries, dishwashing and cleaning of public areas such as lobbies and hallways. However, the most common and largest departments where they work are in housekeeping, foods and beverages. In these positions, participants learn the “do’s and don’ts” of their respective work environments.

Upon completing the programme, participants attend a career fair where they can explore employment opportunities with Novotel Atlantis and companies in industries that require related skills such as pastry, floral and laundry. Those who are hired by Novotel Atlantis Hotel continue to be treated equally and enjoy the same benefits as all other staff.

Going forward

Although the initiative has only been undertaken for Accor’s hotel located in the Pudong region of Shanghai, the Hotel chain hopes to expand similar initiatives to their hotels in other parts of China, though this may require particular accommodations depending on the location and their surrounding environment. For example, the Internship and Placement Programme gives particular consideration for participant travel to and from work in Shanghai’s Pudong district. Xiang states that the programme works for the Novotel Atlantis Shanghai because participants live nearby and can walk to work or take a short bus ride. However, this model would not work for their hotels in more rural locations, where commuting to work would be more complicated.

Accomplishments and impact

Novotel Atlantis Shanghai indicates that their initiative has not only made a difference for more than 200 youth with disabilities but that these individuals make many individual contributions to the Hotel. Aside from doing their job, certain participants have set themselves apart and in some cases, have literally made a name for themselves. One graduate whose job is to clean marble in the lobby and other common spaces, maintains such an immaculate standard that not only are no scuffs or marks left unresolved, but his work has donned him the nickname, “Marble Master”.

Moreover, Xiang indicates that the business benefits from participants’ positive character that makes an everyday difference and enhances employee morale. “We are very proud of this initiative,” explains Xiang, “it’s making a difference in the lives of these individuals and their families.”

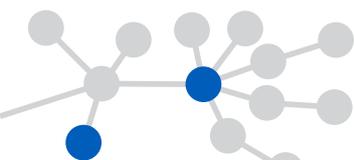
By allowing participants the opportunity to achieve something, the programme develops their confidence and self-esteem as well as a healthy spirit of competition. In fact, three programme graduates have gone on to compete in the Special Olympics and one was awarded “Most Valuable Player”.

Lessons learned and advice

Although the Disabled Trainee Internship and Placement Programme has had particular success with its buddy system, perhaps the most effective lesson learned through their example has been the effectiveness of an unwritten policy of respect and non-discrimination. Xiang states, “While our employees make accommodations for the challenges which workers with disabilities face, we have an unwritten policy that they are not to be treated different, which is demonstrated through a work environment of mutual respect.”

With regard for specific recommendations, Novotel Atlantis encourages others to take on similar initiatives and offers the following advice:

- **Partner with a disability organization in the community.** These organizations can provide valuable resources in terms of community contacts and funding resources.
- **Involve the participants’ support network from the beginning.** As described, participant success can be greatly enhanced by involving those from their personal lives.
- **Take into consideration how participants will get to and from work.** This is among the most important logistical issues to address since transportation can pose challenges including safety issues.



- **Identify and foster participant strengths.** Some participants have demonstrated significant attention to detail which can be utilized to perform employment duties such as maintaining high standards of cleanliness.

Next step

Novotel Atlantis plans to continue their on-the-job training programme and indicates that expanding the initiative will depend on future partnerships with the community-based disability association. Xiang indicates that this partnership is important for expansion as these organizations provide essential support.

The company is enthusiastic and hopeful that their training initiative will be replicated by other businesses and would like to see it eventually expand to other countries.

Contact

Website: www.accorhotels.com



AMC THEATRES – Doing well by doing good: Cinema leader creates business model for employing youth with disabilities in the United States

Introduction

AMC Theatres, a leader in the US movie industry has been undertaking innovative employment strategies for people with disabilities since 2010. Furthering Opportunities Cultivating Untapped Strengths (FOCUS), is AMC's own specialized training and employment programme for people with disabilities, and with more than 5000 screens in 350 theatre locations, the industry leader has taken their initiative to support youth with disabilities nation-wide.

According to the industry leader, the FOCUS programme not only hires and trains youth with disabilities but credits the dedicated and productive workers by employing them in positions where they are in direct contact with the customer. From working as greeters, operating concession stands, to checking tickets and maintaining the cleanliness of common spaces, auditoriums and bathrooms. Moviegoers interact with FOCUS employees throughout their cinema experience.

The theatre giants' interest in reaching out to disabled youth began with an unusual wake-up call. In 2006, a teenage girl with autism was asked to leave a competitor movie theatre for behaving in a way that was distracting to the other guests. The girl's mother called their local AMC theatre with an idea to turn the incident into an opportunity. What resulted was a partnership between AMC and the Autism Society, and subsequently, the Sensory Friendly Films programme. Now, running in more than 100 AMC theatres one Saturday morning a month, the movie theatre environment is adapted to accommodate youth with autism. This includes lowering audio levels to avoid loud noises that would otherwise be distracting and increasing lighting as the dark interior was found to over-stimulate youth with autism. In addition to these modifications, moviegoers are welcome to get out of their seat and move about the aisles – without being told to sit down.

The success of the Sensory Friendly Films programme encouraged AMC to create another partnership with the Autism Society, FOCUS. Chief People Officer and FOCUS internal champion, Keith Wiedenkiller, added that the AMC employment programme was "The next logical step growing out of our partnership with the Autism Society. And it is an expression of our commitment to the communities in which we do business."

The programme was originally intended for youth with autism but has since expanded to youth with other disabilities. As of 2010, the programme has trained and placed over 800 youth in jobs at its movie theatres across the United States.

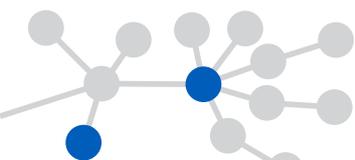
Good practice

By partnering with local disability NGOs, the major entertainment corporation developed a specialized training programme to employ youth with disabilities in positions that require regular interaction with the public.

Getting started

FOCUS started in July 2009, when AMC Chief Executive Officer announced the idea for an employment programme while accepting the Autism Society's Champions Award for their Sensory Friendly Films programme. Then, over the following 16 months, from 2010 to 2011, the idea transformed from a concept into a nationally implemented programme.

The development team, a panel of experts, took about 60 days to work out programme objectives, plan for anticipated challenges and decide on the pilot site. Thus, the pilot was first implemented in Leawood, Kansas, with Kyle, the first FOCUS trainee. That was more than three years ago though Kyle continues to benefit from the programme as a current employee today (see box 1, p. page 12).



The expert panel

One of the first steps in developing the FOCUS programme was to organize a panel of experts in collaboration with AMC's partnership with the Autism Society. The panel was responsible for developing the programme prototype and included senior AMC staff, such as the Director of Recruitment and the Director of Diversity and Inclusion. The specialists from the autism field included the Director of Programmes from the Autism Society, Director of Special Projects from the Autism Research Institute, and several well-known academics, researchers and practitioners from universities and the private sector.

The group outlined the following objectives for the FOCUS programme:

- Go beyond “compliance” to doing the right thing
- Eliminate barriers
- Provide access to integrated employment
- Enhance business
- The programme must be replicable

Challenges and solutions

From AMC's perspective, it was initially important that those hired into the programme met the same performance standards as all AMC employees. One of those standards was that all employees should be able to do all tasks in the theatre. However, during the programme-planning phase, the expert panel visited an AMC theatre and realized that the FOCUS participants would face unique challenges to complete all tasks in this work environment. In the same way that specialized viewing conditions were created for the autistic moviegoers, the panel recognized that autistic and disabled youth would face unique sensory stimulus challenges as employees.

In part to address the issue of sensory stimulation, the requirement that all employees must be able to do every job at the theatre was considered unnecessary and was subsequently eliminated. To further address sensory concerns, AMC initiated a specialized recruitment process, which they refer to as the “FOCUS travelling interview”, a hands-on, interactive interview that allows candidates to get a feel for the job during the interview process, so that they have a better understanding of the theatre environment and expectations on the job. “The biggest part of the interview comes when the HR representative walks the applicant around a movie theatre, showing them different jobs and helping them understand the work responsibilities. It's something we incorporated into our processes,” Wiedenkiller explains.

While surveying theatre managers about their experiences hiring people with disabilities, the panel learned that some managers had had negative experiences with job coaches. Prior coaches would arrive late or not at all while others did the work for the trainee instead of training them and worse yet, some did nothing. The role of job coaches – many employed by governments, schools and NGO programmes – is to support the employment of people with disabilities. Although most job coaches are well trained, these experiences and concerns had to be addressed.

Realizing that job coaches were needed to implement the FOCUS programme on a national scale, the panel decided that regardless of who employed the job coach, they needed to enter into a signed contract with AMC to clarify expectations of the coach and to give theatre managers the right to become involved when problems arose. This addressed the theatre managers' concerns by anticipating obstacles that may have otherwise inhibited the project.

Applications for employment are initially made online and require candidates to respond to a series of standard questions designed to assess behavioural responses in various situations. Some of the questions can be a bit abstract and hypothetical, making it difficult for youth with certain disabilities to understand. As a result, the questions were changed to be clearer and more easily understood. For example, “If you found a twenty dollar bill in the theatre, what would you do with it?” was changed to, “If we show you how to hand in money that you find here, would you be willing to do that?”

Those who make it through the first screening have a phone interview and for those that pass, there is at least one in-person interview. During the interview, managers assess the candidates' ability to meet what has been called the “eyes and smiles” criteria, or the “10-foot rule”. When AMC employees are within 10 feet of a patron, they are expected to make eye contact and acknowledge them in some way, usually with a smile. The team was concerned about whether some of the young people would be able to do that. However, as they learned from their first FOCUS recruit, Kyle, and many that followed him, it turned out that in many instances, youth with disabilities demonstrated better interpersonal skills than their colleagues.



Box 3. The first FOCUS hire

Kyle Wafer is an example of the FOCUS programme's impact and success.

Now 22, he joined FOCUS after graduating from high school when he was 18 years old and has since become a star at the AMC Theatre in Lee wood, Kansas and has no plans to leave.

It was a relief for his parents, Lisa and Robert Weafer, who previously worried about what was going to happen to their autistic son. "We wondered what was next for him after high school," Lisa says. "Now, he is stimulated. He has interactions with other people. To have a job in the community at a movie theatre is perfect." According to his mother, the employment experience has helped him become more independent, "It's something he can call his own - his own job. He's really super proud to have a job."

At first, FOCUS assigned Kyle to work at the concession stand but the position proved to be too busy and distracting for him, Lisa says. He was then assigned to work as an usher, a job where employees clean the theatre once the movie ends; this position fit his personality and stamina perfectly and he quickly adapted to the work.

Kyle is one of the top performers at the AMC Theatre and consistently receives outstanding scores. Shane Householder, the general manager at AMC Town Centre 20 where Kyle works says that the AMC Theatre could use an entire crew of

workers like Kyle. "Kyle is very outgoing. He'll talk to anybody. He's always smiling. He brings a positive attitude every day to every shift. His smiles are contagious. That's how he is, happy and hard working. He knows what to do," adds Householder.

"Kyle has proved that he's able to deliver, and they have a great employee," his father says. "He feels like a normal teenager. He's going to work and understands the value of work."

Once he was hired, FOCUS assigned a job coach to Kyle who helped with his training for a month.

An issue that became an immediate problem was the requirement to wear a watch and use it to stay on top of a complicated movie schedule. Previously, Kyle was not accustomed to wear a watch and had trouble learning to use it. In addition, the movie schedule form was very hard for him to follow. Subsequently, FOCUS came up with a solution: using a Universal Design method, they printed out a simplified card for Kyle with all the movie times for the 20 screens at the theatre. "And he looks at the clock on the lobby wall to know what time it is," says Lisa.

Kyle is happy with his pay check, too. He's a big Kansas State University Wildcats fan and likes to spend his earnings on tickets to attend the college games.

"What we really want for Kyle is to be functional in society, and FOCUS is giving him the opportunity to achieve that goal," Lisa says.

Going forward

The initiative began with an idea; one theatre, one partner, one employee, and an intention to serve one group of youth with disabilities, those with autism.

However, other managers and theatres quickly followed suit. Now, it just takes one call from a theatre manager to AMC's Theatre Support Centre headquarters in Kansas City, to initiate the process for a FOCUS programme. Once a theatre formally initiates the programme, their General Manager is provided with pre-qualified local disability employment resources, special in-house tools and is connected with centralized support from the AMC human resources department.

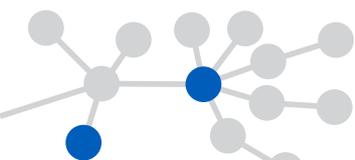
In the first year, the number of theatres actively participating in the FOCUS programme went from one to 70 with great interest in the initiative from both inside and outside the organization. By the end of the second year, the participating theatres went from 70 to over 150 and as of July 2013, every theatre across the US was participating in FOCUS with an average of at least two youth with disabilities at each theatre, or about 800 employed nationwide.

Typical new hires at AMC theatres tend to be 18 years old; however, youth in the FOCUS programme have tended to be slightly older. The general demographic is divided fairly evenly between males and females though the target disability groups have changed as the programme has expanded. Now, about half of the disabled youth are on the autism spectrum. Other employed youth with disabilities may have Down Syndrome, mobility impairments, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities or other challenges. (See box 2 on accommodating people who are deaf.)

AMC's experience employing youth with disabilities has demonstrated that these youth have a much higher retention rate than the typical employee. In fact, while the tenure for a typical associate was just over one year, those with disabilities average almost five years on the job.

No time limit is required for the length of employment and participants can move up from entry-level jobs, or may continue in their original position. Jobs are part-time and employees with disabilities earn the same wage as everyone else.

As FOCUS expanded both geographically and by recruiting candidates with different types of disabilities, so did their partners. In addition to the Autism Society, FOCUS also works with state vocational rehabilitation agencies, the non-profit Goodwill Industries International, school-to-work transition programmes with area schools, the Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School to Work programme (also featured in this publication) and other local NGOs to find candidates for jobs.



Training and supports

The average training period for new hires is usually 30 days. It is more flexible for FOCUS youth and can be extended for up to 60 days, allowing more time for review, repetition and to ensure understanding. However, the training material is exactly the same. Each new hire goes through an orientation session and classroom instruction as well as online and customer service training by the theatre's general manager.

For those with disabilities, especially those still in school, many new hires report to work with a job coach, somebody who is hired and paid by an outside agency. Such agencies include vocational rehabilitation agencies or school districts that originally encouraged the disabled youth to apply. The job coach assignment usually lasts about 90 days, 60 days of initial training, and a 30-day transition period for the employee to become independent.

"The job coach is usually a good thing," says Wiedenkeller, "They can be very helpful as an unbiased facilitator, who sets a good example and is a helper and a coach, in the true sense of the word."

Although AMC relied mostly on experts to develop the programme, it learned that it is also important to involve the participants' support network, such as their parents or other family members, to help these young adults overcome obstacles that can prevent them from doing a good job.

Regarding Universal Design, the theatres made numerous adjustments to remove communication barriers for their employees with disabilities. These initiatives included colour-coded job aids, simplified training materials and easy to memorize procedures. Moreover, AMC found that these accommodations helped all of their employees and ultimately, contributed to a better experience for their customers.

Box 4. Accommodations for people who are deaf

"One sure way to find candidates is to recruit them in their own communities," says Dan Glennon who was previously the general manager of a 30-screen dine-in theatre near Olathe, a suburb of Kansas City.

While working as general manager from 2009 to 2012, Glennon recruited ten deaf students in Olathe, which was known for having a large deaf community. "The FOCUS workers tended to be very loyal and stayed for a long time," recalls Glennon. In addition, Glennon's theatre hired

staff that could communicate with hearing-impaired youth through sign language.

Sensitive to the community's special needs, the theatre offered captioning devices at the patron's seat and headsets for people who were blind so that they could hear descriptions of what was going on. The company has deployed thousands of these devices nationwide in order to better serve their customers with vision and hearing impairments.

The business culture and the business case

For years, AMC has linked the pursuit of diversity with business success and specifically, the concept of innovation. To quote CEO Gerry Lopez, "diversity is about winning". In fact, when AMC rolled out its Guiding Principles, Wiedenkeller explains, "We were very intentional about expressing Diversity and Innovation as linked concepts ... one principle." In this respect, the development of the FOCUS employment outreach programme was consistent with the company's culture and its ongoing pursuit of ways to differentiate the movie going experience, as well as differentiate AMC from their competitors.

However, in the years following the rollout of the FOCUS programme, AMC came to realize that employing people with disabilities was about more than recruitment. A company must do more than just get disabled youth in the front door. One should be willing to understand and work with disabled youth on an ongoing basis.

AMC challenged the misconceptions of their managers and helped them to understand the benefits of hiring disabled youth in terms of productivity, attendance and ability to "step-up" and improve customer service. They also found that it was important to promote the business case, since the initiative will have an impact on human resources and budgets. Although it is too early to know the long-term impact of the FOCUS programme on profit and finances, anecdotal evidence from theatre management teams indicates a positive impact on employee morale and engagement, which has been statistically linked to improved performance at the theatre level.

In general, AMC sees a business opportunity in the numbers for both customers and their diverse workforce; more than one in five Americans have a disability and less than 20 per cent of them are employed. One in 88 children is born with autism. 92 per cent of consumers view companies that hire people with disabilities more favourably than companies that do not. Furthermore, given that disabled people hired through the FOCUS programme



have exceeded all expectations and considering that people with disabilities and their networks represent one trillion USD, the business case is clear.

As for costs, “A programme like this is easier than you think, cheaper than you think, and more value added than you could ever imagine it would be,” says Wiedenkeller. In fact, most of the hard costs involved with setting up the programme, were financed by partnering agencies. AMC’s investment has mostly involved time and training during the start-up phase, with negligible ongoing resource allocation.

In Wiedenkeller’s words, “FOCUS has been good for our business. It’s an enhancement to what we do. We all want to feel like what we are doing makes a difference and I think we are.” AMC’s customers seem to agree. Wiedenkeller has received dozens of positive letters from guests who’ve noticed AMC’s enhanced efforts to employ youth with disabilities and general managers’ report hundreds of positive comments from theatregoers.

AMC’s work culture is very team oriented, he says. “If you speak with our crew members, they would talk about individuals and not mention any disability.”

Box 5. FOCUS: A managers’ perspective

Disabled youth who work with FOCUS are having a big impact in Los Angeles at the Burbank 16, one of AMC’s highest profile locations.

The theatre was approached two years ago by the Marriott Foundation, which runs the Bridges from School to Work programme, an initiative that screens youth with disabilities for employment.

Diversity at AMC is spelled with a Capital “D,” says Jeff Zarrillo, general manager of the Burbank 16. “In AMC’s world, diversity is very important,” he adds. “Anytime you expand diversity, you make your company a better place to work. You feel a better sense of self and community and sense of teamwork.”

Burbank 16 is AMC’s busiest theatre on the West Coast with 16 screens and 1.7 million customers a year. Five disabled youth have been hired in the last two years and continue to handle their jobs well, he says. Their responsibilities include ticket taking at the box office, working the concession stands, cleaning the auditoriums, stocking the bathrooms and greeting customers.

“But there are always challenges”, Zarrillo says. This includes additional training for disabled youth to become comfortable in their jobs and sometimes requires one-on-one training. In the Marriott Bridges programme, before the interview process even begins, each candidate is assigned a job coach to prepare them for the interview process and work responsibilities. The coach assists the candidate until he or she is comfortable in their job. Zarrillo considers this an added benefit to working with a partner like Bridges.

During the interview process, Zarrillo confirms that candidates understand the demands of the job. “Do they understand issues such as how long they will be expected to stand and temperatures,” Zarrillo wonders. “We want to make sure there is no problem with intense lighting or working on their feet for long periods of time. We give them a tour of the stadium seating and make sure they can walk through dimly lit areas. We’re always making sure that we’re explaining any hurdles they may run into,” he says.

Accomplishments and impact

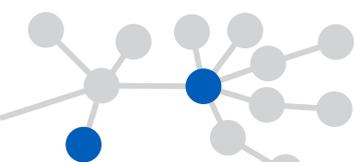
The figures and testimonials demonstrate the impact that FOCUS has had on youth with disabilities, giving more than 800 people with disabilities a chance to learn a job, be a part of a team and interact with the public in an accommodating environment that embraces diversity.

Besides giving them a chance, it is a great relief to the families and friends of these young adults to know that their children, relatives or friends can have a fuller, more secure life that includes employment and all the benefits that go along with having a job.

On the community level, FOCUS has become a very popular programme as word spread about its impact and success. Neighbours and friends heard about the programme and wanted to find a way to get their children and friends’ children signed up for it.

Within the company, FOCUS has had a significant impact on the way that business is done, for their customers and on their corporate culture. As noted, measures put in place for the FOCUS hires, such as Universal Design and adapting recruitment approaches, have benefited everyone. “It’s helped change the company’s culture,” states Wiedenkeller. “FOCUS came at a time when the company was making strides in the diversity area and it added fuel to the fire. I think FOCUS and the Sensory Friendly Film programme helped reinforce the realization that diversity and differences are good.”

Any business that interfaces with the public like AMC does, wants to know about the impact on the customer or patron. In the words of one theatre manager, “Our guests greatly embrace the fact that we employ people with disabilities ... as a result, we get a great return.” Senior management reports that it’s a way to engage with the community, as well as tap into a reliable and undeveloped human resource.



The FOCUS programme is drawing national attention with AMC receiving awards for its pioneering work from state and local entities as well as the US-based Business Leadership Network. Moreover, Wiedenkeller has presented AMC's FOCUS programme at local and state conferences to give companies a better idea of how disability inclusion is good for business. He calls it "doing well by doing good."

Lessons learned and advice

While every company has to evaluate what they want to do, how much time and money it would cost and what kind of labour pool is available in their community before embarking on a plan, Wiedenkeller advises, "Don't be afraid to start a programme like this. There's always a fear associated with this type of programme, around not wanting to screw it up or the fear of litigation. Remember it's a partnership and a process. There is no secret recipe."

Through their experiences, AMC recommends particular consideration on the following points for companies interested in starting and promoting similar programmes:

- **Get support from company leaders.** A programme to hire disabled youth will not flourish if top executives are not on board. Also important, individual general managers will be better able to carry out the programming if they are allowed autonomy to provide necessary management at the store level.
- **Collaborate with outside organizations.** You cannot do it alone. Any company taking on this challenge must have support from organizations that they can count on, including associations that deal with disability issues and community organizations committed to the issue. "Organizations that you have previous good experience with, or have good references from people you trust, are the right ones to work with on this kind of project", says Wiedenkeller. In AMC's case, it was the Autism Society which had the same goals in mind as those of the movie giant and, as the programme developed, other organizations were added. However, Wiedenkeller cautions, "Be ready to say no. Unfortunately, there's such a need out there that some advocates can become overzealous ... and you simply cannot have a relationship with every service provider group out there." In the US, only five million disabled individuals are employed out of 26 million. "That means many groups are hungry for willing employers, and you can get overwhelmed by their calls," he adds.
- **Start small.** The FOCUS programme started with just one theatre before rolling out to others, and eventually implemented nation-wide. AMC indicates this was effective as after it succeeded in one theatre, others became interested in replicating the initiative.
- **Think long term, not just recruitment, advises Wiedenkeller.** Think through ongoing policies, performance management systems, wage reviews, disciplinary systems, separation practices, and so on. Question every assumption you have about your jobs, how they are structured, what *has* to be done. "A programme like this forces you to question those paradigms," he says. "Be flexible. Be willing to step back and ask: 'Why do it this way? Why not do it differently?'"
- **Set high standards.** Be clear about expectations for onsite support such as job coaches and hold them accountable to meet those standards.
- **Promote the business case.** AMC's Keith Wiedenkeller states "Make sure it's good for business, not just a feel-good plan. The business case for hiring people with disabilities is strong, though you've got to be able to make that case. Every business person wants to know 'What's in it for me?', if you can't answer that, you don't have a business case."

Next steps

AMC is always looking for ways to improve FOCUS. It recently improved theatre-level training for managers and crew. The next steps are to see how these adjustments work before moving forward.

As indicated by previous AMC manager, Dan Glennon, the present and the future are enhanced by hiring people with disabilities: "Regarding disability and diversity, the advantage of AMC FOCUS, and the addition of more associates with disabilities, has helped further operations, enhanced engagement and led to future success."

"We'll continue to grow the programme. It's good for business and good for everyone involved," Wiedenkeller says. "We're more than happy to share key learning with other organizations."

Contact

Website: www.amctheatres.com/corporate/diversity-inclusion



DELTA HOLDING – Successful sustainable development through innovative CSR activities in the Republic of Serbia

Introduction

The Delta Foundation, founded by Delta Holding, has been partnering with the community to make a difference for young people with disabilities in Republic of Serbia since 2007. At first, initiatives focused on vocational rehabilitation, social protection, education, culture and health with an ultimate goal of social inclusion and employing people with disabilities in the company. The foundation has since sharpened their focus and is excited to unveil two new CSR initiatives: a practical training partnership with the Trade High School, which recently began in September 2013, and the Centre for Inclusion, Innovation and Integration, which began in November 2013, both in Belgrade.

With an emphasis on specialized education and training, Delta Holding seeks to support those with physical and intellectual disabilities so that they may develop the necessary skills to become employable and engaged in the community. For the present academic year, the Delta Foundation has been supporting the training of three youth with intellectual disabilities in a pilot programme with the Trade High School, and anticipates 10 participants for the 2014–2015 academic year. The recently initiated Centre for Inclusion, Innovation and Integration was a result of the successful partnership with the Youth with Disabilities Forum, a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the inclusion of marginalized groups into civil society.

Good practice

By collaborating with non-governmental organizations and associations of persons with disabilities, the Delta Foundation seeks to support a work environment that is inclusive of persons with disabilities. Their support for people with disabilities is through pre-selecting participants, supporting their education and subsequent job placement. In addition to becoming gainfully employed, Delta also seeks to aid persons with disabilities to engage in regular social activities and become involved in the community.

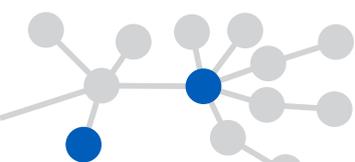
Getting started

Since the Delta Foundation was established, the company has developed and improved on initiatives that had already existed while initiating new ones. The initial idea for collaboration between the Delta Foundation and the Institution for People with Disabilities originated from a simple initiative where box cartons were utilized by disabled individuals to create a sustainable business and which was supported through technical cooperation efforts among Delta Holding members. Through this cooperation, Delta Holding indirectly employed persons with disabilities by buying the carton-based products for company needs.

The first initiative undertaken by the Delta Foundation in support of youth with disabilities was titled the Disabilities Awareness Programme and was a vocational rehabilitation programme which ran from 2008 to 2009, before the Law on Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities¹ came into force in 2010. This programme sought to provide support for education, social inclusion and employment within Delta Holding. Realizing that these CSR initiatives were not just an opportunity for the company, but crucial for youth with disabilities, the Delta Foundation sought to expand on these programmes through local partnerships in Belgrade.

Speaking about their new initiatives, Ms. Nadica Milanović, Project Manager with the Delta Foundation highlighted the significance of these programmes, “Having any kind of

1. The Law on Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities came into force in May 2010 and established a quota system for employing people with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia. It applies to all employers in the Republic of Serbia, and according to Article 24, companies with 20 to 49 employees should have at least one disabled employee; those with 50 to 99 employees, two disabled employees and for those with 100 or above, one more disabled employee per every successive 50 employees.



disability, especially an intellectual disability, is a major challenge for youth in the Republic of Serbia because very little support exists for them.” Milanović explained that the Delta Foundation is committed to supporting this otherwise vulnerable group and has a CSR manager as a team member who, together with Human resource department, ensures that this important programming is carried out.

Practical training initiative with the trade high school

This collaborative pilot programme with the Trade High School in Belgrade began in September of 2013, and seeks to improve the employment and social integration of youth with intellectual disabilities, who are between the ages of 16 and 19 years old. Currently, the Delta Foundation is providing practical training support for three students with intellectual disabilities, as well as one mentor (Delta employee) and one professor (Trade High School employee).

Students are provided with a practical training instructor who aids and supervises their education as well as provides motivational support. Additionally, Delta Holding assigns mentors to students who provide additional support. Upon completing the training, graduates are assisted with job placement in packing-oriented positions and other warehouse related work.

The educational programming lasts from one to four years, depending on the student’s particular needs and circumstances. Instruction and vocational training is provided by teachers from a variety of professional backgrounds. Additional assistance is provided by support staff and therapists.

Box 6. Testimonials from a supervisor and a participant

Nebojsa Milovac, Logistic Assistant (mentor): “Students have the same job as other employees and work three days per week, six hours per day. They transitioned nicely into the working environment and have good communication with their colleagues. Their work is indistinguishable from the work of other employees, and in some cases, they are actually more meticulous than their peers. They complete their tasks with 100 per cent accuracy. We are planning on recruiting them at the end of the training, these employees are always welcome.”

Stefan Jovanovic, Student: “We do not have the opportunity to learn these things in school. Mentors teach us how to work and help us deal with obstacles. I would like to work here after the training period and I would recommend this programme to all my classmates.”

Centre for Inclusion, Innovation and Integration

This most recent undertaking was created through collaboration with the Youth with Disabilities Forum, a non-profit organization that the Delta Foundation has partnered with since 2008. The Delta Foundation provides financial support to make the Centre accessible to persons with disabilities. Without Delta Foundation’s support, the Centre could not continue their activities.

The Centre aims to serve all individuals with physical disabilities, young people in particular. Training is based on company needs and is subsequently offered through a defined schedule at the Centre. The Centre provides logistical and operational capabilities for all organizations that need it. These services are provided free of charge for people with disabilities and include legal services, volunteer services, useful information for daily life and work and job-placement services.

The Centre also offers an “Info web platform”, which merges the listed activities so that people with disabilities will be able to acquire all needed information about employment opportunities and rights with regard to social protection and services at a local level. Within the scope of the “Info web platform,” there will be online counselling where people with disabilities can ask the Centres’ team of experts specific questions regarding social and economic concerns and access information on community inclusion services.

Among the activities offered, the Centre organizes a range of trainings, workshops and seminars to directly strengthen the capacity and potential of organizations and individuals. Also, within the scope of the Centre there are cooperative working spaces and virtual office services designed for all individuals and organizations in need of a workspace.

As a part of their collaboration, Delta Holding has access to the Centres facilities and resources, to develop and implement various types of activities.



Challenges and solutions

Among the biggest obstacles to the development of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Serbia are low levels of disability awareness, inadequate business skills and a lack of effective support mechanisms. The absence of cooperation among the business sector is also a challenge. Milanović indicates that if businesses embrace collaboration, that social entrepreneurship and in particular, corporate social responsibility, could develop in a sustainable way.

The Delta Foundation states that the major problem that people with disabilities in the Republic of Serbia face is the lack of access to education. Although they report that the majority of people with disabilities have had some primary education, they indicate that high school and university education are rare. The Delta Foundation indicates that because of this lack of education, individuals with disability are restricted to employment opportunities in warehouses or retail stores.

According to data from 2013, there were 19,142 unemployed people with disabilities and about one-third had received only a primary education. The Delta Foundation highlights that according to the World Bank only 13 per cent of people with disabilities are employed, 10 per cent employed by NGOs and only one per cent in the business or public sector.²

Going forward

Since the featured programmes are in their early phases, the Delta Foundation first plans to implement them and later, will evaluate the results. Their continued programming and expansion will depend on their respective performance and effectiveness. However, in the coming period, the company plans to utilize initiatives to improve existing employment procedures for people with disabilities in the company and further develop their work on disability awareness programmes.

The company has adopted corporate social responsibility as a business principle, which it pursues through its commitment to quality products and services such as environmental protection and community relations. In this way, Delta is committed to improving their CSR projects in parallel with company growth. Subsequently, Delta is recognized in the Belgrade community and consulted by organizations, institutions and other companies for their good practice initiatives. In fact, the international Disability Matters award 2012 was awarded to Delta Holding for their professional rehabilitation programme for persons with disabilities.

Milanović expresses enthusiasm and excitement for the recently initiated programmes and states that the Delta Foundation is hopeful that these efforts will have positive results for young people with disabilities.

Lessons learned and advice

Although their initiatives are in the early stages, Delta has already learned various lessons and they recommend that these be utilized for similar programming elsewhere:

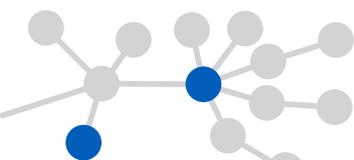
- **Establish good relationships with the stakeholders.** These relationships will make it easier to acquire support for projects that are good for the company and community.
- **Develop good practice partnerships with community groups and non-governmental organizations.** Companies can benefit and utilize additional resources by partnering in the community.
- **Start small, begin with a pilot phase.** When dealing with a limited budget, testing a project through a pilot phase can indicate results and effectiveness before committing substantial funding and resources.

Contact

Delta Holding website: www.deltaholding.rs

Delta Foundation website: www.deltafondacija.rs

2. Special report on discrimination against persons with disabilities in Serbia, Republic of Serbia Commissioner for Protection of Equality, 2013, <http://bit.ly/WhZdx6> [accessed 8 July 2014].



EUREKA CALL CENTRE SYSTEMS – Through the use of assisted technologies, visually impaired staff outperform their non-disabled colleagues in Singapore

Introduction

“Are you mad?” reflected the blind youth when offered a job as an agent in a newly opened call centre. “I *can’t* even see the computer screen!” The owner of the Eureka call centre in Singapore was not mad, but in fact, enterprising. He intended to hire visually impaired persons to work alongside non-disabled agents, which seemed like a good idea at the time, until the non-disabled workers all left because they could not keep up. Not only did the owner adapt the call centre to be made up exclusively of staff with disabilities, he expanded into a training call centre to help others with disabilities, particularly visually impaired people, to gain the necessary skills that would make them employable.

Good practice

Adapting business practices to be operational by persons with visual disabilities.

“I always felt that if you don’t give people a job, they don’t really have membership in society, they can’t participate, they don’t have the friends that you can make in a workplace and they don’t have an income.”

Alvin Nathan, founder, Eureka Call Centre Systems Pte Ltd

Getting started

In 2003, Alvin Nathan set up the Eureka call centre to manage appointments for financial planning clients in Singapore. It was a new initiative and a shift from the financial services company that he had been running. Then, in 2008, facing the challenge of a high staff turnover rate and guided by his sense of corporate social responsibility, Nathan initiated a new business model for the call centre. Understanding that people with disabilities experience unique challenges in finding meaningful employment, he paused the operations to reinvent the call centre to be operated by employees who were visually impaired.

In practical terms, this meant creating a new system that would allow visually impaired people to receive and make calls as well as schedule appointments for financial planners. Nathan and his IT manager approached programmers based in the Philippines for assistance with the innovative project. Although the programmers had never undertaken such a project, they eventually adapted the Eureka system by creating shortcut keys and scripted responses. These system changes took place while Eureka was closed for four months.

Though not yet fully staffed, Eureka now has the capacity to employ 50 call centre agents and offers turn-key solutions with outbound call centre operations as the primary business activity. Since 2009, Eureka has worked with special education schools and volunteer welfare organizations, to provide employment opportunities and on-the-job training for persons with disabilities. Moreover, Eureka is one of two Centres for Training and Integration in Singapore that trains and places people with visual disabilities with partnering employers in the call centre industry.

Recalling his decision to create a commercially viable business that employed a visually impaired staff, Nathan explained, “I knew of people trying to help people with disabilities get jobs; I thought something based on charity wouldn’t be sustainable. You can raise the hopes of these people but after a few months you might have to close operations, that was the last thing I wanted.”

Alvin Nathan, founder, Eureka Call Centre Systems Pte Ltd

Planning

Upon shutting down Eureka to make the operational shift, Nathan and his two managers began visiting various organizations in Singapore that were working with people who were visually impaired. Through these visits the team observed various attempts at solutions. These included screen magnifiers, which were effective for people with limited or low vision. They also learned of computerized voice synthesizers and screen readers. However, the



team decided not to go with voice synthesizers because they were found to easily misinterpret words, especially in Chinese.

The team then began researching other available technologies. Licensing costs for some programmes were financially not viable though they also found open-source software. Accessible services were utilized from both Apple and Microsoft and ultimately, the team paid licensing fees to obtain other needed software. “Microsoft is very supportive of the visually impaired,” says Nathan. “They gave us access to development software that was helpful initially.”

Once Eureka obtained the software to accommodate any level of sight impairment, they next needed to integrate it into the call centre. Upon meeting a Filipino programmer at a regional conference with a speciality in call centre programming, Nathan believed that they could make necessary software adjustments.

After much experimentation, they designed shortcut keys, based on the most common call centre responses: no answer, customer not interested, customer doesn't want to be called, etc. In total, nine shortcut keys were created for likely responses.

During the third month of the development period, visually impaired volunteers who were considering full-time employment were brought in to help test the new system over a period of two weeks. Worker feedback was recorded and adjustments were made. This included redesigning the user interface to make it more simple for the visually impaired to navigate. Sam Acosta, Eureka's IT manager, recalled, “We did a lot of trial and error. It was time-consuming, I wouldn't say it was very hard, but it was a long process. At times, we were blindfolding ourselves and trying to imagine how people who are blind would use the system.”

In all, the programming and accommodations services included:

- re-programming the user interface;
- create shortcuts and hotkeys;
- integrate screen reader and voice synthesizer for totally blind persons;
- use screen magnifiers and high-contrast displays as well as 22-inch wide screen monitors;
- enable home-based working situation with real-time monitoring.

Finding and selecting candidates for employment

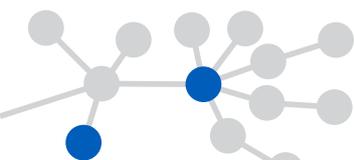
While the jobs for non-disabled workers were advertised in the newspaper, this was not a viable strategy for finding visually impaired staff. “We didn't have any policy on hiring disabled persons,” said Charis Low, the Eureka call centre manager. Low visited several organizations in Singapore working with visually impaired people, this included social workers and even hospitals to pursue disabled employees for their job opportunities. “I left brochures with all those organizations and social workers,” she explained. She also hosted a few open-house events in the Eureka office, to explain employment possibilities at the company to hospital and welfare services staff in contact with disabled people.

Initial interviews were done by phone. Low was concerned with getting a feel of each person's attitude for the work and their determination to pick up a new skill. “We don't see the person; we don't know the impairment or even the age or education qualification. We just talk with the person and listen to how they sound. We want to select staff with equal standards and without bias.”

Second interviews are conducted face-to-face in the Eureka office, to see if the applicant can use the assistive technology and how accessible the workplace is to them. “If there was additional assistive technology that we might need to put in place, we wanted to see if it was possible,” added Low.

To begin the new Eureka operations in April of 2009, Low eventually hired eight persons with disabilities and 12 non-disabled persons. Some worked in the Eureka offices and half of them worked from home. Currently, there is only one home-based visually impaired agent. Low recalled, “Surprisingly, we thought there would be a lot who would be interested (in working from home), like some people with physical mobility limitations, but there weren't.” Not surprising, however, was that, since staying home meant being out of touch with society, it was the last thing the disabled candidates wanted.

As the business began to take off, the non-disabled agents began dropping out while the visually impaired stayed on, even after the average staying period for call centre work of two years. Low explained, “The visually impaired picked up really fast, through the use of the shortcut keys and the hotkeys. They produced higher call rates than the non-disabled employees who use a mouse to manoeuvre the user interface.” Non-disabled agents productivity was 50–70 per cent of what the visually impaired agents were achieving with



the shortcut keys. One after another, all the able-bodied agents dropped out.” Only one remained as a call agent.

Low explains, “The agents with disabilities are punctual, rarely absent and totally enthusiastic about their work.” Within a year, the Eureka call centre was almost entirely run by visually impaired staff. Eureka’s previous staff turnover rate of approximately 40 per cent per year sunk to two per cent per year.

Becoming a training centre

A year into the new company, Nathan was approached by the Enabling Employers Network of Singapore and asked to consider using the Eureka call centre and technologies as a training facility. The Government would support the initiative with grant funding. As a person who was passionately interested in creating more opportunities for workers with disabilities, it was an offer he could not refuse. In July of 2010, Eureka expanded its operations as the Centre for Training and Integration.

In total, Eureka has trained 41 persons with disabilities since April 2009; 19 of them younger than 30 years old. Of the 41 disabled persons, 25 were visually impaired and 13 of them were younger than 30.

Within two years of reinventing Eureka, “the business became more successful than our best expectations,” said Nathan. Before the change, productivity of ten agents was 200 appointments a month, making an average of 250 calls per day. Since the change, the agents with disabilities make around 500 to 550 calls a day and 600 to 800 appointments a month.

The Centre for Training and Integration process:

1. Volunteer welfare organization referrals and walk-in applications are received.
2. Phone interview takes place.
3. Face-to-face interview takes place.
4. Potential candidates enrolled in three-day assessment and orientation programme.
5. If accepted, the trainee can sign up for a six-month “internship”.
6. Monthly progress is monitored in a report.
7. Final assessment at the end of the six month training.
8. The graduate is submitted for placement with partner employers.

The training course

The call centre internship lasts six months and each batch allows five to eight persons. It is kept small to focus on individual skills. Initially a new batch started every six months but now it is every three months. Low handles the recruitment, most of the training and the training materials. Senior agents also contribute to supporting the new trainees through a “buddy-system”.

The Eureka training provides:

- An allowance during the internship and the course fee sponsorship.
- Job placement assistance after graduation.
- Opportunity to learn professional telemarketing skills.
- Practical call centre work experience.

Eureka is planning an even greater expansion of its business. “We are thinking big, we want to include more people with disabilities. We want to expand to 100 - 200 seats. We started with visually impaired and then physically disabled, maybe next we will look to work with persons with other types of disability too,” said Low.

Accomplishments and impact

By reinventing their company, Eureka discovered various strategies that led to positive results. They found that traditional retention incentives, such as monetary reward, recognition and career advancement, held little sway over their agents with disabilities. Rather, a sense of belonging, security and a fun social environment at the work place were more important factors in recruitment and retention. Eureka managers also quickly learned that their employees’ social lives were largely intertwined with their work lives. The managers



thus adapted the work environments to include after-work leisure activities such as karaoke and massage machines, picnic lunches and even trips abroad.

Training materials were determined to be most effective when prepared in different formats to allow options for trainees to use what works best for them. Examples include recorded scripts, soft copy scripts used with a voice synthesizer, enlarged font size in Arial black font. “Ice-breaker” games were also found to make people feel at ease and confident during learning activities.

While the assistive devices allowed visually impaired telemarketers to make 100 per cent more dials than the non-disabled telemarketers, the technology, however, needs to be simplified to be much more useable and effective. By simplifying its system, Eureka improved its dialling efficiency among both non-disabled and visually impaired telemarketers by 90 per cent.

Technology can greatly streamline many manual processes, such as having reduced ten operations steps to three steps in the outbound dialling process by implementing the system shortcut keys and web-based hotkeys.

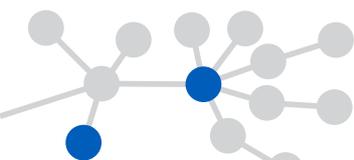
Lessons learned and advice

For companies interested in replicating or adapting this initiative, Eureka recommends consideration for the following points:

- **Equal footing.** Training expectations and standards for key performance indicators (KPIs) should not be lowered for people with disabilities. Training and selection must be focused on ensuring productivity gains and meeting KPIs. The Eureka experience has shown that people with disabilities eventually learn to function at the same, if not higher, productivity level than non-disabled persons.
- **Encouragement.** Many people with disabilities do not have the benefit of job experience. As a result, they sometimes experience low confidence, low self-esteem and benefit from encouragement. All management staff are expected to be understanding of the needs and restrictions of people with disabilities and how important encouragement is for staff performance.
- **Innovate and adapt.** Disabilities vary. Among the visually impaired, someone may be totally blind, another may have tunnel vision, while yet another can see only large fonts in yellow on black colour contrast. Among the physically impaired, there are wheelchair users and others who have a single finger for their hand. Companies should be prepared to invest in technologies that are essential to “level the playing field,” as far as productivity among people with disabilities is concerned.
- **Inclusive designing.** When building applications for people with disabilities, it is best to involve them from the beginning on with any project. They will give better suggestions than others who can only try to imagine what it is like to be in their shoes.
- **Office environment design.** Ensure safety and comfort of staff with disabilities. The work area must be secure and near a fire exit. There must be a meeting place and employees with disabilities should have a non-disabled colleague assigned to help them during an evacuation. No loose wires can hang from the ceiling or lie on the floor. Do not make changes to the office layout or furniture arrangement without informing every staff member with a disability. Do not leave doors halfway open. Staff and management should be made aware of space required for wheelchair use.
- **Prepare non-disabled staff.** Orient other staff to include and welcome new staff members with disabilities. Communicate the inclusive changes planned to all employees in the company. Some trainees with disabilities may have a longer learning curve and management must be prepared to give more time and patience during their training. Have non-disabled employees who will be working closely with someone with a disability attend a course on how to work with people with specific disabilities.
- **Recruitment.** Seek out various channels of reaching people with disabilities, such as voluntary welfare organizations, hospitals and schools.

Contact

Website: www.eurekaccs.com



MARRIOTT – Bridging the gap from school to work in the United States

Introduction

For more than 20 years, the Bridges from School to Work Programme (Bridges) has engaged with companies to support the employment of youth with disabilities. Created by the Marriott Foundation in 1989, Bridges has facilitated the placement of more than 13,000 young people with disabilities into competitive employment with some 3,800 employers across the United States. The road to achieving those results has been full of twists and turns, but many lessons have been learned along the way.

“At the end of the day, (Bridges) creates opportunities for individuals, be they managers, line workers or youth with disabilities to have first-hand experience with one another. And it is there that the real change takes place as stereotypes and unfounded fears evaporate and people start seeing each other simply as people with lots to offer.”

Mark Donovan, Vice Chairman, The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities

Good practice

Components and practices of the Bridges programme have evolved over the years, but two key principles underlying its efforts have remained unchanged.

- **Bridges is an employer/business driven programme; the priorities and needs of the employer will always be paramount.** While Bridges' mission is to foster employment opportunities for youth with disabilities, the only effective way to do this is to consistently meet the business needs of the employer. Employment relationships that do not meet these needs will almost always fail.
- **Successful employment relationships are built on capabilities, not disabilities.** Employers do not hire people based on what they can't do; if youth are to compete successfully in the labour market they must lead with what they have to offer – their abilities, interests and experience.

Getting started

More than 250,000 young people with disabilities exit special education in the US each year, most with dismal employment prospects. At the same time, business has always said that finding and retaining quality employees is one of their leading, and most challenging, priorities. Bringing these parties together in mutually beneficial employment relationships would appear to offer great promise.

In 1989, the Marriott family (of global hospitality fame) established the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities (MFPD) with a mission to 'enhance employment opportunity for young people with disabilities.' Marriott Corporation had had great success hiring people with disabilities, and it was felt that MFPD could be a means of sharing lessons learned with the broader business community while contributing to brighter futures for disabled youth. Using input from focus groups involving key stakeholders, the participation of leaders in the field from around the country, and research of best practices, the Foundation developed Bridges from School to Work as a vehicle to address its mission.

Bridges assumes that people with disabilities can be employees with capabilities, but chances for success are greatly enhanced if several key factors, outlined below, are addressed. Each of the programme's component parts, as it currently operates, was designed to address one or more of these factors.

- Both the individual and the employer must be prepared for, and fully committed to, making the employment relationship work.
- The job match must be right, with the skills, interests and experience of the employee meeting the critical job needs of the employer.
- Appropriate support must be available, especially early in the employment relationship, to cultivate its success.

Bridges was piloted in Montgomery County, Maryland in early 1990 before expanding to the urban centres of Chicago and San Francisco later that year. The original Bridges model offered a short-term (3 to 6 month) introductory period where youth participants received job-readiness training and were placed into internships in hopes that those internships



would lead to permanent employment. This approach resulted in many positive outcomes and was quite effective over the short-term.

However, the programme found that longer-term results were not as positive. “When we went back to see how former Bridges participants were doing a year or two after they had been placed in their internships, we found many of them right back where they had started - unemployed,” says Donovan. Other challenges arose as well. In many cases, the idea of hiring people with disabilities was not a popular one in the workplace.

Fear of the unknown, and some suspicion about the requirements of the newly passed Americans with Disabilities Act, created resistance from some employers. Such resistance was, of course, exacerbated during times of economic downturn. Additionally, many of the participating youth had significant socio-economic challenges based upon the environments in which they lived. In most cases, these challenges worked counter to the objective of getting a job.

And the need to develop diverse and stable funding sources to support the ongoing operation of Bridges, particularly in times of economic upheaval, has always been (and always will be) a concern.

Addressing such challenges has forced MFPD to regularly re-evaluate how it does what it does, ultimately creating better solutions and making the model stronger.

Going forward

Learning from experience, and the challenges that have accompanied the initiative, the Bridges programme has evolved into a significantly different model than it was in 1990. The introductory period with youth now spans 15–24 months rather than 3–6; staff are developing competitive placements rather than short-term internships with business partners and the focus is not just on placement, but on what comes after to help assure vocational growth and long-term employment success. Working with youth with disabilities, typically 17–22 years old, and with community employers that range from local business to industry, Bridges proceeds along parallel tracks to ultimately bring the two together, in successful employment relationships.

With youth

The programme most often recruits young people through the local school system, though other sources are used to reach out-of-school youth. Bridges is non-categorical relative to who it serves, which means that disability type and severity level are not primary considerations. The key requisite is simply that the young person demonstrates a genuine commitment to successful employment.

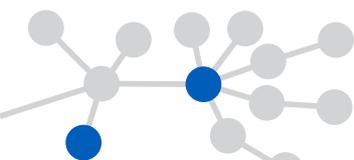
Once enrolled, Bridges staff spends time with the new participant to assess interests, skills and experience. Additionally, a range of pre-employment training is offered to support critical job seeking and employment skills. These skills are typically not job specific, but encompass the many ‘soft skills’ (reliability, hygiene, dress, appropriate social interaction, etc.) that so often lead to success or failure.

At the core of the programme-participant relationship is a career development planning process that helps the youth identify long-term vocational goals, define their assets and deficits relative to those goals, and set short-term action plans to help assure forward movement. Updated quarterly throughout their Bridges experience, this process provides an evolving roadmap to guide the vocational journey.

With employers

Bridges reaches out to employers on an ongoing basis, marketing what the programme offers to help them meet their business needs. As highlighted earlier, the programme works to assure that relationships with employers emphasize business needs rather than charity or sympathy. “Our outreach to employers is based on the fact that we can offer them enthusiastic, pre-screened applicants with the skills to meet specific needs that they, the employers, have,” Donovan says.

Staff then proceeds to find out as much about the critical job requirements of a given employer as possible. Concurrently, they probe to discover and address any resistance or concern that may exist within the organization, from top management to line supervisors and potential co-workers.



The job match and beyond

Most important to the entire process is finding the right match between the crucial needs of a specific job and the interests and skills of the individual. If the match is right, the employment relationship almost always prospers; if it's not, success is nearly impossible. However, through experience, disability has been found to have very little to do with either outcome.

Placement is only a first-step. Bridges continues to support both employer and employee, post-placement, to help the relationship take root, and to encourage continued vocational growth and development. The penultimate objective is to develop enough momentum for the individual that the first job grows into a self-perpetuating career path that can last a lifetime.

Now, her supervisor says, "Patricia has become an integral part of our team. Not only in the way that she learned her job but more importantly, the passion that she has shown for our residents is what really sets her apart. The growth that Patricia has shown as a person and team member has been profound." As a result, Patricia is now an invaluable, full-time employee receiving a good wage and complete benefits.

Box 7. The Story of Patricia: Yes I Can

"My classmates called me dumb. I knew I wasn't dumb," says Patricia. All her life, Patricia has been hearing people say, "You can't do that." And all her life she's been responding, "Yes I can."

Her mother says it was clear early on that despite her cognitive challenges, Patricia's determination would guide her to exceed the expectations of others.

When Patricia enrolled in Bridges in 2010, she had done some volunteer work in the community but she wanted a 'real' job. Of course there were still some who said, "You can't do that," but they didn't really know Patricia.

After some significant work on her job seeking and employment skills, Patricia was hired to work part-time in the kitchen of a retirement centre. She initially found the demands of this 'real' job quite draining. It was a real challenge for her to learn her new duties and to maintain a balance between her personal life and work responsibilities.

Though in just a few weeks, Patricia began to excel. Her hard work and determination was paying off shortly after and as a result, she was given additional responsibilities and shifts. However, where she shined the brightest was with the residents, many of whom experience various stages of dementia.

The Bridges Programme in action: A large employer

UPS hires Bridges candidates to help move packages

The UPS facility at Baldwin Park, California, has been hiring participants of the Bridges programme into entry-level jobs for 10 years. Participants are initially employed as package loaders and unloaders though are provided with opportunities to advance. It is one of many UPS facilities that have together hired more than 300 Bridges trainees across the country since 2000.

The relationship has been great for the facility, which handles 100,000 packages a day, according to Human Resources supervisor Byron Bravo. "We have had nothing but success with our Bridges hires," he says.

It starts with a Bridges staff referring pre-screened candidates to UPS to interview for available positions. If the match is good for all, they join the team. All new hires spend a week in the UPS classroom learning the job and are assigned a mentor. Once on the job, Bridges staff continues to check in with all who are involved, offering support to assure long-term success and growth.

For some this is just a part time job and a good work experience, but for many it becomes a career.

Sal Suarez, for example, joined UPS more than 15 years ago. Sal grew up in a drug and gang infested area of East Los Angeles and struggled in school with a significant learning disability. Recognizing that Bridges and UPS was a way to a better life, Sal began in the Bridges programme as a part-time loader. However, with tremendous effort (his learning disability continued to be a challenge) and support from both Bridges and his employer, Sal was able to take on new positions and responsibilities.

Now, Sal enjoys a steady, high-paying position as a driver and serves on the safety committee, teaching on-the-job safety to others. In addition, he is married and a father of three. According to Sal, the UPS and Bridges partnership are a success because both are "committed to success".



The Bridges Programme in action: A small business

Paper carton supplier embraces youth with disabilities

Union Packaging LLC, located outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a small company that makes environmentally friendly paper food containers and exhibits a strong commitment to community stewardship and workplace diversity. They initiated a partnership with Bridges several years ago and have since hired, trained and placed more than two-dozen young people through the programme. Currently, seven Bridges youth are employed out of their staff of 95 employees.

“Our business is growing with new customers,” says Michael Pearson, CEO and President. “As our business grows, there will be a need to add more people to the organization. The Bridges programme will be used to source these new employees.”

Ironically, this relationship that grew largely from the company’s social commitment, endures because of the business benefit it provides. “The Bridges hires have been dedicated employees and have helped stabilize our employee turnover in entry level positions.” Pearson says, “Some have moved on to better paying jobs. We have been a start for them. Unequivocally, it’s a good programme. It helps our bottom line. It helps us do good things for society. Bridges is a solid organization that’s been around for a while and they know what they are doing.”

Box 8. Bridges by the numbers

Demographic data of participants

Gender

- 57% male
- 43% female

Ethnicity

- 64 % African American
- 25% Hispanic
- 7% Caucasian
- 4% Other

Disability type

- 67% Specific learning disability
- 9% Intellectual/ Developmental disability
- 8% Emotional/ Behavioural disability
- 8% Sensory disability
- 3% Orthopaedic disability
- 5% Other

Source: MFPD

Accomplishments and impact

More than two decades after the first Bridges pilot, the programme has expanded considerably. It now operates in Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Montgomery County (MD), Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington DC. Each year, Bridges serves about 1,000 youth with disabilities, works with more than 350 employers in various sectors of the economy and collaborates with hundreds of different partners, including workforce development, vocational rehabilitation agencies and high schools.

Since 1990, the programme has served over 18,000 youth with disabilities, placing more than 13,000 into competitive employment with almost 4,000 different employers. As the programme has evolved, its focus has increasingly been on retention and longer-term vocational growth and indications are that, with appropriate follow-up support, those factors are positively influenced.

Preliminary data from a research partnership with the Social Security Administration indicates that young people who receive job placement by Bridges, in aggregate, work more, earn more, and receive significantly less in Social Security Insurance/Social Security Disability Insurance benefits in the years after they leave the programme, than their peers who do not participate.

Lessons learned and advice

Bridges offers a proven and effective model for assisting youth with disabilities into the workforce. All indications are that once they are productively employed, the likelihood of their continued vocational success increases. This programme does not necessarily translate directly to a company interested in building their own initiative to employ more individuals with disabilities. However, MFPD executives offer some suggestions, drawn from experience with Bridges that may be useful to companies undertaking a similar initiative.

- **Start small and do everything possible to assure that early efforts will be successful.** Building a small initiative into a substantial programme requires an initial base of credibility in order to convince sceptics that they should be supportive and become involved. Such a base is created from early success. Once underway, the ‘envelope’ can be stretched, the effort enlarged and bigger challenges taken on. Such stretching will inevitably involve occasional ‘failures,’ but if credibility in the project has been established, small setbacks will be taken in stride. If, on the other hand, the effort runs into a failure from the start, the reaction may be, “This is a bad project, let’s dump it!”
- **Assure that all efforts meet the business needs of the employer.** To do otherwise is to create employment relationships that will be at considerable risk of failure from day one.
- **Focus on what people can do, not their limitations.** This is crucial. Employers are interested in hiring people that can perform functions and fill needs that will help them achieve their business objectives. Disability is not the important issue and if the job match is right, should be rendered largely irrelevant.

- **In marketing a programme like this, do not promise what it cannot deliver, that just leads to disappointment and unhappiness.** Bridges does not claim that young people with disabilities will magically be better than any other employees. It does claim, however, that if their abilities and interests are well matched to the job needs, then the participant will help the company meet their business objectives.

Next steps

While helping 1,000 youth each year is admirable, and makes a real difference in those lives, it is fairly small-scale compared to the quarter million young people finishing special education in the US each year. As they approach their 25th anniversary, Bridges is exploring ways to expand the reach of their programme within the parameters of finite resources. That exploration is taking a variety of forms, including partnering with individual states to bring the programme to places it doesn't currently operate and offering advice to other communities that may wish to undertake a similar effort.

Bridges regularly presents its programme to audiences around the US and occasionally, the world. They welcome invitations to participate in conferences and forums that address the employment of people with disabilities. Bridges programme staff looks forward to supporting the efforts of other organizations interested in this critical issue.

Contact

Bridges website: www.bridgestowork.org



MPHASIS – An ambitious policy of inclusion for youth with disabilities in India

Introduction

When Mphasis could not find enough qualified candidates for the jobs it wanted to fill with people with disabilities, it decided to target the education barriers that keep youth with disabilities in India from competing in the country's labour market. Mphasis realized that if it, or any company, wanted a pool of competent youth with employment potential, it had to become a part of the process to train them.

Mphasis is an IT Services Company based in Bangalore, India and has partnered with organizations to provide education and employment opportunities for disabled youth since 2008. As of mid-2013, Mphasis has supported the training of 225 young people with disabilities and has hired 176 of them. With a workforce of 37,000, the organization reports more than 0.8 per cent employees with disabilities.

The company was created in 2000 as the result of a merger between a US-based consulting company and an Indian IT services company. In 2008, Hewlett-Packard became a majority owner. Mphasis provides infrastructure technology and applications outsourcing services as well as development, integration and application management and support services.

Mphasis ranks seventh among information technology companies in India's Fortune 500 rankings and currently has more than 37 offices in 21 countries. Presently, the company primarily focuses their inclusion practice for people with disabilities in India as their largest workforce is located there. Among several initiatives and partnerships, Mphasis collaborates with the premier Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore to enrol qualified students who happen to have a disability.

Mphasis uses its CSR programme to enrich its own services while at the same time helping young people with disabilities to finish high school, find placement in good learning institutions and subsequently, enable them to successfully compete in the job market.

Good practice

Through focused targeting and inclusion, Mphasis helps disabled youth find placement into institutions of higher learning and subsequently obtain employment.

Getting started

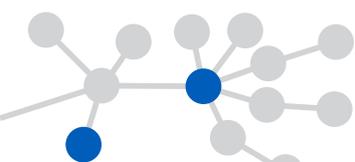
Few Indian companies in 2007 were as open to inclusion as Mphasis. Senior leadership believed that talent and competency existed among all types of people. Additionally, in a workforce survey, a majority of the 8,000 employees said that they wanted the company to go a step further than charity and actually hire people with disabilities. The organization then hired disability expert Meenu Bhambhani, who had World Bank and advocacy experience, to lead its CSR programme and help the company develop its inclusive policy.

However, Mphasis faced a shocking reality.

During a recruitment drive to fill 100 software engineering and 200 back-office positions, which included a focused drive for persons with disabilities, only ten applicants with disabilities were interviewed from the candidates with the necessary technical skills for the engineering jobs and only one of them qualified. For the back-office positions, only seven of the 57 applications received from people with disabilities actually qualified. Those who did not qualify had weak communication, analytical and comprehension skills, which were critical for the job.

Mphasis realized something needed to be done so that young people with disabilities could develop their employment potential.

Bhambhani referred to that recruitment drive as a "learning experience". She already knew that less than 2 per cent of people with disabilities finish education of any kind successfully in India and that less than 1 per cent is employed. Bhambhani wanted a company policy that pledged equal opportunity employment, accessibility and reasonable accommodations. Although the human resources chief officer wanted a goal of 5 per cent of the



MphasiS workforce to be people with disabilities, he was concerned the company would not be able to deliver on the policy that Bhambhani wanted. His approach was to first bring in more people with disabilities and let them ask for a company policy on equal employment and accommodations.

Making job applicants hireable and expanding the graduate pool

Thus at that point, recalls Bhambhani, the most pressing challenge was where MphasiS would find a skilled workforce with disabilities. “There are more people with disabilities who aren’t graduates, who aren’t work-ready but who could be trained to become employable. We thought we could look at the barriers that stopped people from ‘up-skilling’ themselves, from becoming work ready,” she says.

What followed was an outsourced three-month training pilot in Bangalore to make many of the recruitment drive applicants hireable for back-office work. The pilot led to similar trainings in smaller cities, in a programme now known as Project Communicate. It was not long, however, before the trainers ran out of potential trainees. “We wanted to train more and more candidates but their availability was less and less. We couldn’t find candidates because the drop-out rate from high school of children with disabilities is high,” recalls Bhambhani.

So other projects emerged, mostly to showcase to the Government what could be done to help young people with disabilities. A pilot programme called A School for Me (*Nanagu Shale*) set out to help children with disabilities move from segregated to inclusive education with the help of accommodations, thereby facilitating their empowerment and their integration into mainstream society. In the past four years, the programme increased enrolment of out-of-school children with disabilities in regular school and established school readiness centres that help young people with disabilities transition from home-based education to regular schooling.

To help students who manage to graduate high school move on to institutions of higher learning, Bhambhani recalled her experience in the United States where she got her master’s and PhD degrees in disability and human development, specializing in social policy. As somebody with impaired mobility, she had benefited from the school’s Student Disability Services office, which facilitated the full participation of students with disabilities in campus life by providing reasonable accommodations and academic support.

“I realized a support system made a real difference for a disabled student,” Bhambhani says. In India, she had received no such support. Working with the premier Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, MphasiS helped set up the country’s first campus-based centre for assistance, the Office of Disability Services.

Going forward

MphasiS used its CSR funds and partnered with NGOs to work with the prior applicants who had been deemed unemployable and train them in the skills that the company needed. They initially collaborated with the Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre, an NGO in India that promotes equal opportunities for disabled and non-disabled persons, and with the Bangalore Association of People with Disabilities.

Piloting employment training

The ensuing pilot project began in 2008 and included 22 of the applicants who had previously applied for the back-office positions. Most of the participants were people with an orthopaedic disability. For three months, trainees underwent a series of English language and computer courses that prepared them to work in an office environment as well as technical training on computer hardware, software, networking and basic troubleshooting to become employable through the use of non-voice business process outsourcing and information technology processes.

Skills training focused on computer typing, English reading, comprehension and analytical abilities. The MphasiS training and recruitment team spent the first week of the training ensuring quality and expectations. Thereafter, a team member returned once every week and then once every ten days. At midterm, the MphasiS recruitment team assessed the candidates and training on weak aspects was intensified. Upon completion of the training, MphasiS had priority in selecting participants and recruited 17 trainees. The other five trainees found jobs in other companies through job placement assistance from the Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre.



English literacy training for deaf students

Many people with hearing impairments are not able to secure employment due to their lack of English proficiency. As a result, MphasiS partnered with the Noida Deaf Society to educate deaf youth and train them in English literacy and the technical skills that would lead to greater employment opportunities. As of 2012, MphasiS supported the English literacy training of 250 deaf youth. Of them, 27 found permanent jobs within the company, while the others found jobs in other companies and establishments in and around Delhi.

Project Communicate

Because so few children with disabilities manage to graduate high school, the only requisite for most MphasiS jobs, it did not take much training to saturate the market in Bangalore. The first phase of Project Communicate ended with a week-long train-the-trainer programme aimed at strengthening the capacity of NGOs working in the field of training and employment of people with disabilities. After this programme, in 2009, MphasiS offered to support any NGO willing to manage the training in three medium-sized cities, where it operated call centres. “We thought we would have access to a skilled talent pool if we invested in those cities,” Bhambhani explains. Placement takes place in whichever city the training is conducted because the trainings are conducted in the local language – the call centres used voice-based systems, which rely on the local language.

MphasiS then partnered with EnAble India to launch the second phase of Project Communicate. EnAble India is a pan-Indian NGO that works towards the placement of persons with disabilities in the corporate sector. This collaboration allowed the execution of Project Communicate, a pre-employment training programme targeting people with disabilities from rural areas that have a secondary school education. A total of 31 trainers from 10 different cities were trained.

Assisting disabilities in top-quality institutions of higher learning: Office of Disabled Services

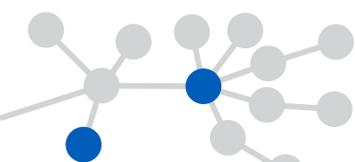
When only one of the ten candidates who applied for the skilled engineering technician positions was qualified in the original recruitment drive, MphasiS learned that the quality of engineering education was weak for most students in India, where only half of the graduates are determined to be employable. MphasiS set its next sights on helping high school graduates with disabilities find placement in quality institutions. In 2009, institutions rarely accepted anyone with a severe disability, such as blindness or deafness, let alone had accommodations for people with physical disabilities (the assistance launched in 2010).

MphasiS collaborated with the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore (IIMB), one of India's most reputable business schools, to establish the Office of Disability Services (ODS). In a short time, the ODS created an all-inclusive academic environment to support students with disabilities.

The Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) approach

With a student population of 420, IIMB takes in up to 12 disabled students per year (in line with the government-required quota). “We were taking students but we didn't have a formal policy in place to assist them,” explains Rajluxmi Murthy, a professor and the faculty head of the Committee on Disabilities. “We did not even understand what it meant to give them access.” Murthy recalls students often asking for help, such as a visually impaired student who repeatedly asked for copies of presentations ahead of time, to view on his laptop because he could not see it when shown at the front of the classroom. Although a few faculty members found the student “demanding”, the others found the situation “not right”. “We should be making provisions for him,” they realized. The college director agreed. “Once the institute decided to do this, once the director decided yes, it is something we want to do,” explained Murthy, “a committee was established and came up with a policy.” Additionally, students were consulted and specified what they would like to have as accommodations.

MphasiS provided the funding to set up the Office of Disability Services and to fund assisted devices and other accommodations, even motorized wheelchairs (procured using IIMB funds), to showcase what could be done to enable even young people with severe disabilities the opportunity for post-graduate management education. IIMB now finances the assistance, but according to Murthy, the support “doesn't require much funds”.



Box 9. A vision impaired student sees incomparable opportunity at IIMB

Vineet Saraiwala, 22, is in his first year at IIMB, working towards a post-graduate diploma in management. His sight is down to about 20 per cent now, due to retinitis pigmentosa, a cellular degenerative disease that gradually destroys vision. To pass the IIMB entrance exam, considered one of the toughest in India, Vineet worked with three volunteer housewives over Skype, each taking two-hour shifts over a four-month period to explain the tables, graphs, quantitative data and verbal skills that he would be tested on.

“The day I came to IIMB there were volunteers to help me learn to manoeuvre around the campus, but my parents did all those things. My mother was there with me for seven days. People here are emotionally concerned for us, like our parents. We don’t even know their name, and without our asking, they are helping us. Look at the whole campus, start with infrastructure. There are paths you can take. Other institutes aren’t at all accessible. Professors are sensitized to our needs. Providing soft copies is a big issue

because if you get them on time, you’re on par with all other students. I’ve heard from other people in other institutes that their professors aren’t so friendly. For us, they will scan an entire book. One person is completely dedicated to that scanning job. One person does personal typing for me. The scribe beautifully explains the visuals, like x-axis and y-axis. There is nothing like that in other institutes. People who are visually impaired are few who get into higher education, even more so among the premium institutes, like the IIMs. You can’t say people don’t have talent because they don’t have opportunity. IIM Bangalore is the best place for disabled students to be, actually, it’s the only place. I had other offers and I chose Bangalore because of the environment. One small thing: IIMB is the only institute that provides a written assurance of providing whatever facility I need. Having a policy in writing makes you feel much more secure. No other institute provided me anything written beforehand.”

The first chairperson of the Committee on Disabilities drafted the policy and presented it to the faculty, who found it reasonable. Implementation, says Murthy, went smoothly. In the three years since the assistance began, the school has been receiving and accepting applications of candidates with more severe disabilities, in 2013, it was six.

The policy that IIMB adopted, promises students equal access and reasonable accommodation for any need. It was unprecedented. The policy alone attracted students (see box 10). IIMB then established a plan for implementing the policy, which opens with a preamble: “IIMB wishes to honour its obligations to support students having disabilities. We recognize that the post-graduate programme, and other long-duration academic programmes offered by the institute, are very demanding programmes intellectually, physically and emotionally. IIMB therefore wishes to provide support to students with disabilities so that they can participate in the post-graduate programme [or other available programmes] to their fullest potential.”

Accomplishments and impact

In addition to achieving inclusiveness for youth with disabilities beyond their organizational goals, as previously mentioned, MphasiS has demonstrated significant progress and served as an example in hiring people with disabilities.

The company’s commitment to hiring people with disabilities has resulted in a sixfold increase in the number of people with disabilities employed across all its offices. From 2007 to 2010, the number of disabled workers within the company grew from 56 to 350. According to Bhambhani, “Today, a lot of companies are open to hiring persons with disabilities and they seem to have emulated our model of collaborating with NGOs and training people with disabilities on skills needed by the industry.”

2Impact at IIMB

Rajluxmi Murthy, who chairs the IIMB Committee on Disabilities, says: “I can see a change, we’re getting students with more severe disabilities, such as those with nearly no vision, hearing impairment, muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy. We have two students whose mothers stay with them to assist them and we provide them with suitable accommodations. Another student is severely hearing impaired and so is her speech. Another student has muscular problems that cause his hands to shake. Students we are enrolling now are far more affected than before.”

To further improve inclusion and accessibility on campus, the Committee on Disabilities hired an independent organization to audit its services. One team member who was visually disabled and one who was mobility impaired toured the campus to observe its manoeuvrability and spoke with students and faculty. They made suggestions regarding the display of signs and lighting. The purpose was to learn how the campus could be



improved. The study comprised a disability access audit that benchmarked the facilities against national accessibility standards and a disability inclusion assessment, in which they reviewed the processes, teaching and communication methodologies intended to include people with disabilities in academic and social activities.

Such a proactive position characterizes the auditors' conclusions: there is a strong commitment towards inclusion on the campus, which is largely accessible. According to Rashi Shashaank, one of the founders of v-shesh, which helps people with severe hearing and sight impairments prepare for and find employment as well as audit corporate workplaces, "It's amazing to see how they have retrofitted changes in old buildings and made them as accessible as possible on such a large scale. Of all clients we have worked with, IIMB is probably the most pro-disability."

Lessons learned and advice

By partnering with specialized NGOs, company trainers received specialized training instructions to help in designing a specialized curriculum.

MphasiS also found that transportation and accommodation for disabled people was one of the many significant challenges to training in India. To address this obstacle, the Association of People with Disabilities provided the training space and accommodation so that trainees would not have to travel.

Additional strategies that had favourable results:

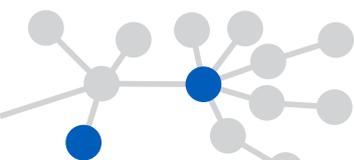
- Involvement of the recruitment team at every phase of the training helps ensure that instruction meets expectations and quality standards.
- Assessment of candidate performance in the middle of pre-employment training helps to identify weaknesses and intensify the training in those areas.
- Due to their limited educational experience, people with disabilities will be likely to have a higher learning curve, even with basic soft skills, and may benefit from an increased duration of training to ensure that they learn and find employment.
- There were concerns in 2007 and 2008 when MphasiS undertook these initiatives. Some people thought it would be costly to provide accommodations and were unsure of funding sources. If they hired deaf persons, they would have to have a sign language interpreter at all times. The top-down approach worked: The team leader said, "I want disabilities on my team and you have to make it work." Which they did. Moreover, the team even learned basic sign language.

Lessons from IIMB

- The larger the population of students with disabilities in a particular institution, the more common their needs are and thus the easier it is to share resources. For example, once a textbook or a presentation is scanned, it does not have to be done again.
- Becoming an inclusive institution of higher learning is not the burden that it initially appeared to be. While there are sometimes divided opinions on whether a student needs this or that, the cultural attitude has completely changed and the faculty and staff at IIMB are willing to make the extra effort to understand what students need from them.
- Having a policy on providing equal access and ensuring that it is implemented rather than an environment in which assistance is provided to students on an ad hoc basis or as a "favour" gives the process accessibility and credibility.
- Many infrastructure challenges for disabled people are not visible to the general staff; they need guidance and auditing by people with disabilities to make their facilities truly manoeuvrable.

Lessons learned and advice

- **Senior leadership buy-in is very critical.** Diversifying a workplace with disabled staff will not work unless there is support from the top.
- **It makes sense to have someone experienced with or knowledgeable of disability issues when coordinating efforts for a company.** This is instrumental at the policy, systems and



process levels and in terms of reaching out to employees with disabilities and coordinating with teams of persons with disabilities.

- **There must be an adequate budget** to provide reasonable accommodations.
- **Include disabilities in all aspects of corporate functions.** Including human resources, corporate support, CSR, administration, facilities and estate planning. Consider people with disabilities as consumers of services and products, it will help in the holistic and seamless inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

Next steps

At Mphasis, says Bhambhani: “The Government has enacted a Companies Act that mandates that 2 per cent of profit be invested in CSR. We want to spend more, and definitely disability is something we want to continue supporting. We are working on a five-year strategy to execute that vision. Our current focus is to expand on what has worked and replicate it in other cities, other districts and other states.”

At IIMB, says Murthy: “There are certain kinds of issues we don’t know how to handle, such as a student with vision difficulty in the class of a faculty member who says, ‘Most of my teaching material is visual so what am I to do? Help me.’ This is my challenge now. We want to have a forum to find new ways and different ways to do things. We were the first IIM [there are several across the country] to open up disability assistance. A few other IIMs now have a similar set up. We hope to disseminate awareness of what we are doing, maybe through a forum in which others doing similar work could all share what they’re doing. We’re hoping to trigger other such centres.”

Box 10. Synergizing other CSR initiatives with disability

Separate from its disability work, Mphasis funds an entrepreneurship programme to provide seed money to disadvantaged people with good ideas. One such enterprise is the Kick-Start Cab, which provides taxi service for people with disabilities.

One of the challenges for the company in hiring people with disabilities is providing the transport to and from work that is promised to all employees. People with moderate disabilities use regular cabs, but wheelchair users face a unique challenge because there are no accessible cabs anywhere in India.

A female participant in the Mphasis entrepreneurship programme wanted to start something similar in Bangalore as the all-women’s company in Delhi; she wanted to train women and transgender persons to be drivers.

Meenu Bhambhani, the head of the Mphasis CSR programme, explains “We asked, ‘What will you be doing that is different? Can you include people with disabilities?’

We thought this would be a good initiative to support. She could become a supplier of workers with disabilities to other companies. Then the idea evolved over several months to provide service for people with disabilities as well as senior citizens and other people who needed transportation assistance to rehabilitative services and hospitals. In a survey she conducted, 96 per cent of respondents said they need accessible transport; 62 per cent said they were willing to pay a premium for it. She started in June 2013 with one cab and then acquired a second one, both of which have a swivel chair to accommodate wheelchair users who can stand. She has initiated modifications for a third cab that will be able to lift a wheelchair into the van. Mphasis is funding the modification of the cab. If this company becomes a vendor, it will be able to provide service for us. If this works well, we would want to showcase it to other cab companies and other automobile manufacturing companies. There is a model and there is a need.”

Contact

- **Mphasis website:** www.mphasis.com
- **IIMB website:** www.iimb.ernet.in



NUCLEO PAISAJISMO – Sowing the seeds of change: A landscape company grows not just gardens but also the skills of youth with disabilities in Chile

Introduction

Since its launch in Chile in 1980, the landscape company Núcleo Paisajismo has focused on treating people with respect through a culture of inclusion. Under the guidance of founder Fernando Borquez and now his sons, working in partnership with the local community is considered “standard operating procedures” at Núcleo Paisajismo. In 2012, the company went a step further by partnering with a local school in a pilot initiative to integrate 13 youth with disabilities into the workplace. After almost two years, the partnership is thriving and has expanded to provide employment for more youth with disabilities at Núcleo Paisajismo.

The “Aha” moment for Núcleo Paisajismo was the recognition that people often have more skills than meets the eye. The diversity of its workforce and its community-focused policies are a reflection of that reality.

Good practice

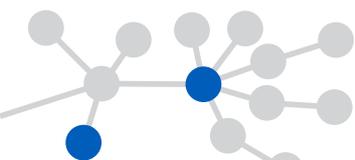
Núcleo Paisajismo is the largest landscaping company in Chile, specializing in the design, construction and maintenance of green areas. The company is committed to accepting anyone who wishes to work with them, planting seeds and maintaining gardens, whether or not the individuals understand the biological process behind gardening. Experience also shows that for the most part, cognitive delays do not impede the acquisition of skills needed to excel in gardening.

Recognizing the potential for a rewarding partnership, Edith Moyano, Director of the Mother Earth School in Lo Barnechea, Chile, approached Francisco Javier Arrieta, General Manager of Núcleo Paisajismo, in 2012 with the idea of hiring a group of students from the school’s gardening course for a trial period. The school provides instruction and experiential learning for young people with cognitive disabilities and was looking for opportunities to facilitate their integration into the world of work.

The proposed partnership brought up a number of concerns for Núcleo Paisajismo: Could the company adequately integrate persons with cognitive disabilities into the workforce? Would they be good, productive workers? Would the community, both internal and external, accept them without prejudice? The management team also raised concerns about whether they would be able to provide effective supervision and guidance to meet the new workers’ needs and ensure their ability to work safely without risk of accidents. Given that the company had no precedent to follow as a guide or reference point, the concerns were all the more acute.

A professional team from the company assessed workplace inclusion by exploring the following questions: What types of work could these young people undertake? What parks, plazas or other green areas were best suited to these workers? What conditions were necessary to ensure a safe work environment for these young people? A series of meetings were held to discuss the findings and both the operations and human resources departments of the company visited the school to observe the skill levels and unique needs of the students slated for inclusion in the pilot programme. They each reported back to General Manager Arrieta giving their support for undertaking this partnership with the school, to integrate these youth into the workforce at Núcleo Paisajismo.

Arrieta gave the green light for this partnership and with that the Semillero (Seedbed) programme was born. Meetings between the leadership of Núcleo Paisajismo and Mother Earth School established procedures for the Semillero programme that would allow the students to split their time between school and work. This was designed to ensure a healthy partnership not just for the company and the school but moreover for the newest employees of Núcleo Paisajismo team.



Getting started

Both the company and the school were concerned about ensuring adequate supervision and support for the youth, recognizing that without this it would be difficult for them to thrive in their new roles. To address this potential challenge, Núcleo Paisajismo asked Mother Earth School to provide an individualized report for each student indicating their strengths and weaknesses including both physical motor skills and psycho-emotional aspects. These reports were then used to prepare the supervisor of the group and to organize the initial orientation and on-going support for new employees.

Another challenge that presented itself was transportation. The company recognized that for many of the young people, it would be challenging to travel to and from work on their own. The solution to this challenge was found through the support of another company in the community. To avoid potential delays and absences among the group, the school was able to partner with a local mining company, which donated a vehicle to transport the group from the school to work and back each day.

An incentive system, linked to the cognitive skills of the young people, was put in place in order to motivate them in the workplace. This was based on a tailored assessment of the behaviour expected of each worker. The following checklist of behaviours was developed to be included in each evaluation:

- Demonstrate good conduct
- Respect others
- Listen carefully
- Follow all instructions
- Ask if you do not understand
- Meet goals
- Do the job right the first time
- Work together

Each person was assessed on a daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly basis by the Núcleo Paisajismo supervisor in collaboration with the educator from Mother Earth School. A symbol of a happy face was given for a specific behaviour if behavioural expectations had been met and a sad face if they had not. Whomever had the best weekly performance would be recognized with a diploma and the best worker overall would receive a gift at the end of each quarterly evaluation period.

Then, in consultations between the departments of operations and organizational development, they assessed the most appropriate workplaces for participants in the Semillero programme. This decision was based on visits to all of the work sites of Núcleo Paisajismo in the community of Lo Barnechea including town squares, parks, and other public spaces. In the end, it was determined that the best work site for the group would be Bird Boulevard Park given the low vehicular traffic, limited risk of accident and type of gardening tasks required. This assessment provided a solution to the company's challenge of finding a safe and appropriate site for the youth to work.

Going forward

“In the beginning, we simply considered the inclusion of persons with cognitive disabilities as a good business practice while at the same time, allowing these young people to learn about the world of work,” says Arrieta, “We never imagined that through this partnership, our perspective on corporate social responsibility would change completely.”

At the onset of the initiative, participants in the Semillero programme were regarded as youth from a specialized school who had received training in gardening at a basic level. The company viewed helping these young people as a part of its overall commitment to the community and social development, regardless of their actual skill level or productive capacities. The company soon learned, however, that these new employees could do everything that Núcleo Paisajismo required of its workers. As a matter of fact, it was the company itself that was a major beneficiary.

To support the process of integrating these 13 young people with differing levels of cognitive abilities into the workforce, Núcleo Paisajismo allocated a supervisor to the group along with an educator provided by the school. They worked hand in hand to ensure the young people understood their job responsibilities and the expectations of the company. In the early days of the programme, the supervisor submitted an operations report noting that the group's productivity was low in comparison to other groups in the company. It was



decided to evaluate again at the three-month mark while continuing to work with the group, employing patience, support and respect to foster their development in the workplace.

However the skills and abilities of the group were growing by the day. They began demonstrating improvements in their daily work plan and were soon surpassing the production goals that had been set. The group not only acquired workplace skills but also increased their physical capabilities as a result of the outdoor routine of gardening.

“I really enjoy working with this group. My favourite parts of gardening are raking leaves, watering and weeding,” remarks Semillero participant Maria Sofia Rojas.

Another Semillero participant Silvia Torres Riquelme says, “I enjoy working at Núcleo together with my friends from school.”

The supervisors of the Semillero group assessed not just their workplace performance but other factors as well, including absenteeism, turnover, and commitment to work tasks. The results were surprisingly positive. At the end of three months, the group was again compared with the other workers. This time the results of the evaluation demonstrated that their performance was above average and benefited from a strong task-orientation and a commitment to quality service.

Accomplishments and impact

As the programme continued, the company observed a significant progress in the level of production, quality of work and skills of the group, which is comprised of 13 workers. Eight of them showed advanced performance, three intermediate level and two a basic level, compared to their fellow group members.

Every one of the 13 youth from Mother Earth School who started the Semillero programme successfully completed the trial period and still continue to be employed as permanent workers at Núcleo Paisajismo. With a job turnover rate of zero within the group, the company has recognized that these newest employees are highly dependable workers.

Both the neighbourhood council leader Maria Elena Alvear and the mayor of Lo Barnechea Rafael Araneda have expressed their appreciation for the programme. Residents have praised what they say is a wonderful initiative, which promotes inclusion and offers job opportunities and social integration for the participants of the Semillero programme.

“It’s a great initiative that refreshes the spirit and the soul and shows that together we can combat inequality,” states Araneda.

Parents of Semillero participants are among the most pleased with the initiative. It is the first time that they see their children as active contributors to society being permitted to grow their personal dignity and see possibilities for their future. The parents are particularly appreciative to Núcleo Paisajismo for facilitating this opportunity.

Co-workers of the new employees conveyed that they are surprised and impressed at how well the participants in the Semillero programme work. They originally thought that the young people would encounter many difficulties in learning their new job responsibilities and would quickly get tired and bored. On the contrary, they note with admiration that the young people have mastered their daily tasks well. One co-worker remarked, “As an employee and as a parent, I’m happy for these young people and their families. I hope they continue to work with us for a long time and are able to accomplish their goals, both personal and professional.”

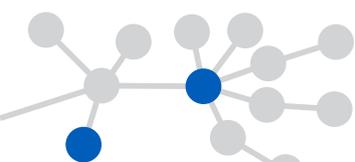
“The perspective here at Núcleo Paisajismo on workplace inclusion has evolved as a result of this programme. It has opened a space for real dialogue and exchange in the workplace. Even more so, it has increased the self-esteem and skills of the programme participants,” remarks Claudia Borquez, Head of Organizational Development at Núcleo Paisajismo.

Commenting on safety, Alvero Vicuña, Head of Risk Prevention, mentions, “The group had early difficulties complying with regulations and proper use of protective equipment. However as the work progressed, the level of compliance increased and the group became more attentive to following the required security procedures.”

Walter Olavarria, Deputy Manager of Human Resources, states, “Our commitment to be a company without discrimination is reinforced by the success of these young people. Implementing initiatives such as the Semillero programme allows our ideals to become a reality. As we gradually moved beyond the initial fears associated with starting this programme, we recognized the benefits we gain both as individuals and as a company from the increased diversity of our workforce.”

“This demonstrates that there are enterprises which are committed and serious in their initiatives to support persons who have been historically marginalized so that they can have a successful and dignified work experience; there should be more opportunities like this for youth with disabilities.”

Community member, Lo Barnechea



Lessons learned and advice

“Every innovation requires courage,” states Operations Manager Rodrigo Infante. For Núcleo Paisajismo, the inclusion of youth with disabilities in the workforce meant charting new territory and learning lessons throughout the process of this pilot programme.

The following are several recommendations from Núcleo Paisajismo based on their experience with the Semillero programme:

- **Ensure adequate supervision and support for youth with disabilities entering the workforce.** It is important to have one or more supervisors dedicated to working specifically with the young people as a coach and mentor to facilitate their transition into the workplace.
- **Recognize that individuals have different learning styles and utilize various approaches to teach new job responsibilities.** One size does not fit all. Engage different methods of training and information-sharing in the workplace. Be patient and encourage new workers to ask questions if they do not understand.
- **Develop a plan to recognize and respond to the unique needs of each worker.** Understanding the psychological profile and specific physical and social-emotional development of each person will allow for better preparedness and response to these unique needs. Provide supplementary training for supervisors of persons with disabilities to ensure that they feel equipped to respond correctly in specific workplace situations.
- **Employ an incentive system to motivate the youth in the workplace.** An incentive system is useful both to assess the level of work progress and to encourage constant improvement on the job. Furthermore it serves as an important reminder to the youth that there are established expectations for their performance at the company.
- **Work in partnership with other businesses and agencies in the community to strengthen the programme.** Inclusion of youth with disabilities in the workforce is most successful when a collaborative effort among various partners is adopted. Create a list of supportive businesses, government agencies, NGOs and other institutions that could provide additional resources and approach them for support as needed.

“The results produced in this programme have really changed my perspective and shown that it is important to view others without the filter of prejudice.”

Francisco Javier Arrieta, General Manager

“Giving advice to others is a challenge because each company’s experience will be unique but what we can say is that this type of initiative to include youth with disabilities into the workforce is well worth the effort required because the benefits are multifold,” states Olavarria.

Next steps

Following the success of the first Semillero group, a new group of 15 youth with disabilities from Mother Earth School received job training earlier 2014 and are being integrated as new members of the workforce at Núcleo Paisajismo. This group is also undertaking various gardening responsibilities and thus will be able to benefit from the experiences of the first group of students who are now entering their second year with the company.

In both new and existing projects, Núcleo Paisajismo is assessing the possibility of replicating the pilot project. “We have several municipalities that aren’t just willing but indeed enthusiastic about replicating this initiative,” notes Infante.

His hope, having seen first-hand the positive outcomes of this pilot programme and the learning gains of the company in the process, is that this experience can serve as a model for other workforce initiatives that target the inclusion of youth with disabilities.

Contact

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SERASA EXPERIAN – A matter of social inclusion: The Employability Programme for People with Disabilities in Brazil

Introduction

Serasa Experian, the largest credit bureau in Latin America and a reference for credit information in Brazil is also a reference when it comes to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace, including youth.

In 2001, the company launched a programme for the integration of people with disabilities into their workforce and has since successfully qualified 200 participants with disabilities. Seven years and many success stories later, Serasa took a step further in 2008 and expanded the scope of its programme by partnering with 16 other major companies and the Special Secretariat for the Rights of People with Disabilities of the State of São Paulo.

Disability inclusion is now a core value of the company, which currently employs 93 people with disabilities. Today, Serasa Experian plays a leadership role in disability inclusion in the workplace in Brazil, a role that is recognized by the local authorities, other companies and the disability community.

Founded in 1968, headquartered in São Paulo, Serasa possesses the most extensive consumer and company credit behaviour databases in the country. In 2007, the Irish group Experian bought control of Serasa, renaming it to Serasa Experian.

Good practice

Serasa provides youth with all types of disabilities with a chance to acquire the skills they need to succeed through a paid traineeship programme that also opens the doors to 16 other major companies.

Getting started

When the Employability Programme for Persons with Disabilities (EPPD) was launched in 2001, it was meant to introduce people with disabilities into Serasa's workforce as both a corporate social responsibility initiative and a response to legislation.

Since 1991, Brazilian private companies with 100 or more employees are required to fill 2 to 5 per cent of its posts with people with disabilities. In 1999 – nearly a decade later – a federal decree finally regulated the law and created an inclusion policy for the country which motivated Serasa to set up its programme. This legal push contributed to ensure Serasa Experian's top management support and endorsement of the programme, which is a key element for success. Top management also saw an opportunity to improve the company's image through the programme.

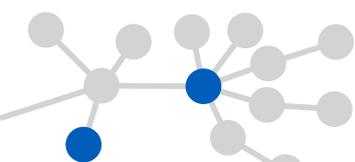
According to João Ribas, founder and manager of the Serasa programme and a wheelchair user himself, "Companies in Brazil complain that it is very hard to find qualified people with disabilities. This lack of skilled candidates is a major obstacle for these companies to employ them". So the programme took that into account from the very beginning and was set up as a paid traineeship intended to qualify the participants and improve their soft skills, with a view to employ them upon completion.

The EPPD methodology

Much of EPPD's success came from its clear goals and strategic methodology. Setting an overall objective, defining a target group and creating a structured curriculum were key in keeping track of progress and achieving the programme's main purpose.

It was very clear to João Ribas from the very beginning that the programme should be about quality rather than quantity. Hence, the entire programme was shaped around the goal of focusing on a few individuals, developing their potential and skills, with a view to hire them.

As a programme intended to qualify and employ people with disabilities, the first criterion for the target group was easy to define: candidates with all types of disabilities. Nonetheless, from the beginning, the company also took into account the importance of



Box 11. An enabling environment

Another key element of the success of the programme was the physical accessibility of the company's premises. Accessibility was taken into account from the very early stages of the programme and in 2003, Serasa's headquarters in São Paulo (where the majority of the employees with disabilities work) was certified as fully accessible according to the national accessibility standard NBR 9050. Serasa was the first company in the country to receive the official certification, which is not mandatory according to the current legislation. Moreover, information and communication accessibility is also provided at Serasa Experian, including computer screen reader software for Blind users, Braille signs, interpreters of Libras (Brazilian sign language) at meetings and conferences, and so forth.

In addition to providing accessible communication, information and physical environment, Serasa also foresees all kinds of individual accommodations to candidates when required, including adjusting tasks and schedules, as well as office equipment.

For Ribas, accessibility and reasonable accommodation should not be seen as a burden on any company, but as an investment. According to him, these investments pay off because they remove barriers, concrete and abstract, for all employees, disabled and non-disabled. A barrier-free, welcoming environment is enabling for everyone and has a positive impact on performance. "This programme contributes to an inclusive work culture among co-workers," Ribas adds.

ensuring a balance among different types of disability, in order to prevent an overrepresentation of certain types of disability that are perceived as "easier to accommodate", such as hearing impairments.

In order to participate in the programme, disabled candidates had to be at least 16 years old, be enrolled in high school or university and possess basic computer skills. In the beginning, there were concerns that these requirements did not match the Brazilian reality, as the majority of people with disabilities encounter huge barriers to education. According to the Brazilian Census of 2010, 61 per cent of people with disabilities aged 15 or above had little or no education, 7 per cent had graduated from high school and only 1 per cent had a university diploma. In Serasa Experian for instance, out of the 93 people with disabilities currently working there, only around 15 per cent graduated from university. The remaining 85 per cent either graduated from high school or were still attending it.

However, even with these requirements, the programme attracted more candidates than it could accommodate. The selection criteria were not picked at random, as to create an initial filter and ensure the quality over quantity approach.

"For Serasa, the employment of people with disabilities is a matter of social inclusion and not one of charity. In Serasa Experian, all the employees are given duties that are of importance for the company, which means that the employees with disability aren't there only to fulfil the quota requirements, but also to be included in the workplace together with the rest of the staff. And if they fail to achieve the company's goals and aimed results, they can be dismissed from the company according to the same directives as any other employee", says Ribas.

Therefore, the traineeship opportunity was seen by the company as a real investment in people and in the company itself. Disabled candidates were regarded and treated as any other candidates; they were given tools and an opportunity matching their profile to an actual post and were expected to perform in order to earn that post.

Initially, the traineeship offered by Serasa lasted for a total period of six months, comprising two months of lectures and courses, and the remaining four months included 4 to 6 hours per week of on-the-job training in a selected area that best matched the skills and wishes of the candidates. Furthermore, the traineeship offered a stipend to all participants.

Going forward

As the programme continued, the company saw a possibility to expand it and attend the demand for qualified candidates with disabilities in the Brazilian labour market at a larger scale. As Ribas says, "It would be reasonable to presume that companies would be reluctant to hire employees that would cost them more than other options."

Thus, in 2008, the programme was expanded externally, resulting in collaboration with 16 partner companies and with the then recently created Special Secretariat for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the State of São Paulo. Deloitte, Dow, PwC, Goodyear and Bristol-Myers Squibb were among the multinational partners of the programme. Serasa actively sought these partnerships, guided by its strong conviction that people with disabilities, when provided with the right tools to succeed, are an asset to companies and that the private sector has a major role in social inclusion and societal transformation. "The partner companies recognized the expertise of Serasa Experian in training people with disabilities



and, in 2008, started to support us in financing the courses for the selected candidates,” explains Ribas. The companies saw potential in the programme and perceived it as an investment rather than a cost. According to Serasa partners invested around one million Brazilian Real to ensure a high quality training programme.

It is important to note that the full endorsement of the programme by Serasa Experian’s top management ensured Ribas both complete freedom to manage it and funds to ensure a high quality, widely known and recognized disability inclusion programme in Brazil. Seven years into the programme, Serasa had already built a name in the field of disability inclusion in Brazil, which contributed to attracting both an ever increasing number of qualified candidates and other companies interested in partnering with Serasa for its supply of professionals with disabilities and its acquired knowledge and expertise in the field.

Following the expansion of the programme to include other enterprises in 2008, the duration of the traineeship changed to a total of four months, comprising one month of courses and on-the-job training at Serasa, followed by three months of simultaneous internship and trainings at a partner company (trainings four days per week, internship one day per week). Candidates were accompanied throughout the programme through regular meetings with their mentors.

The programme comprised 415 hours of professional development courses that included: computer classes, Portuguese language, basic accountability, financial mathematics, professional behaviour, among others. To be offered an employment opportunity within Serasa and its partners, candidates had to achieve the minimum grade of 7 out of 10 in each course of the programme and have a minimum of 75 per cent attendance rate.

“Participants were tested in all courses in order to measure their professional development. Those who failed the minimum grade or attendance requirements were not appointed in Serasa or in any of its partner companies. In addition to the skills candidates acquired, commitment was regarded as determinant element for us,” Ribas explains.

At Serasa Experian, the employment of people with disabilities is seen as a “two-way street” agreement. On the one hand, the company offers candidates an enabling environment and the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to succeed. On the other hand, it is up to each individual to show commitment, to work hard and to develop into professionals. It is not about the disability; participants must show results and work towards the goals of the company in order to build a career, like any other employee.

Accomplishments and impact

In total, around 200 people with disabilities graduated from the programme since 2001. During the first seven years, Serasa Experian trained 12 candidates with disabilities per semester, and following the expansion in 2008, the number of participants increased to 30 per semester. Many of the 93 people with disabilities currently working at Serasa Experian are graduates from the traineeship programme.

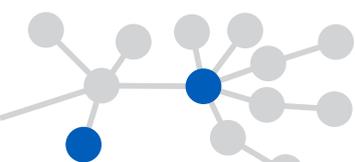
Eduardo, who has a physical disability, was one of the participants. He joined Serasa’s programme in 2011 at the age of 18, and has worked at the company since his graduation. Today he works in the area of marketing and sales.

“The Serasa inclusion and diversity programme helped me to grow in my career and it was my first real step into the job market. Before that, I was working as an informal employee, without any rights or benefits”, says Eduardo. To him, this opportunity not only helped him find a job but also motivated him to develop even further: “After I started to work for Serasa, I decided to enrol in university, in which I am still studying.”

Another participant of the programme was Priscilla. She has a severe visual disability and started her traineeship in Serasa in 2005. At the time, she was 24 and had already graduated from university. Priscilla completed her training in early 2006 and has been working for the company ever since, in which she now has a management position. “Practically everyone was offered a fixed position in the company after completing the training,” she tells. “The programme helped me gain the basic knowledge I need for my job and it started my career in the company.”

Success stories aside, Ribas explains that retention within Serasa was not a goal per se. For him, if a graduate from the programme leaves the company for a better post or decides to start their own business, the programme achieved its goal because it is about “qualification, professional development, moving forward in life”.

According to corporate citizenship manager Andrea Regina, aside from the impact on individuals and their lives, one of the most important achievements of the programme is that it helped the company effectively integrate people with disabilities in their workforce, bringing diversity to the workplace. In Serasa, people with disabilities are expected to be treated with respect in an environment accessible for all, where people can perform at their best.



Today, Serasa Experian offers Portuguese courses for persons with hearing impairments and Libras (Brazilian sign language) courses to managers. It also seeks to innovate in raising disability awareness among staff through a number of actions. For instance, the company provides a course for managers and team leaders to help them better understand people with disabilities, and to include them in a more strategic and conscious way into their work. “It’s not uncommon that false expectations and poor preparation lead to prejudice and a discriminating attitude. There are many who simply aren’t informed or used to dealing with disability,” says Andrea Regina.

According to the programme’s managers, since the vocational training offer for people with disabilities has increased in Brazil, the company no longer offers the traineeship programme. “But the employment of people with disabilities within Serasa Experian continues,” Andrea Regina adds. In recent years, companies often recruit through public and private agencies, NGOs, DPOs and other types of associations, which now also train candidates with disabilities and offer placement services.

“Nowadays, this programme is still considered to be one of the best examples in Latin America in terms of vocational training for people with disabilities,” says Ribas.

Partnerships and knowledge sharing

Partnerships with multinationals, major Brazilian companies, public authorities and civil society continue to happen for Serasa Experian in a different way. Since 2003, Serasa hosts every year the People with Disabilities Employability Forum in São Paulo which became in 2009 an official partnership between Serasa, the São Paulo State Secretariat of the Right of Persons with Disabilities and the Secretariat of Labour and Employment.

In May 2012, with the support of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, Serasa Experian launched the first business network in Brazil for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace. Two years later, the Business Network for Social Inclusion (*Rede Empresarial de Inclusão Social*) initiative has taken off; the network’s 70 current member companies meet monthly, and its steering committee meets on a weekly basis. In Addition to Serasa Experian, ILO Global Business and Disability Network members Accenture, Accor, Ernst & Young, IBM, Novartis and Sodexo are among the members of the initiative, which also includes other multinationals such as Siemens and Hewlett-Packard, and Brazilian giants such as Grupo Globo, Grupo Pão de Açúcar and Natura. Member companies of the Brazilian network debate and share experiences and difficulties encountered in hiring and training persons with disabilities, actively engaging in involving government authorities.

Lessons learned and advice

Based on their own experiences, Serasa Experian encourages other companies to replicate their programme and general approach to disability inclusion; offering the following specific advice on what the company considers key for any initiative to succeed:

- **Seek support from top management.** Top management approval and support of an inclusion programme of any kind, regardless if it includes training or not, may prove essential to securing funds and to raise visibility and awareness of the issue internally and externally.
- **Raise disability awareness internally.** Supervisors and co-workers’ attitudes can greatly affect the integration and performance of the disabled employees. Fostering an inclusive environment is an important aspect of success.
- **See costs as investments.** Because in the end, inclusion pays off for the individual, the workplace and the company as a whole. Focusing on costs may be discouraging, but when the initiative is regarded as an investment, advantages stand out.
- **Be clear about goals from the start.** Defining a goal and a strategy proves useful to keep track of what works and what doesn’t, and to adapt, change or refine when needed.
- **Be open to share knowledge and foster partnerships.** There is no need to reinvent the wheel and do it on your own. Knowledge sharing and dialogue with other companies, organizations or the public sector will very likely answer your questions and provide you with information that you may struggle to find on your own.

Contact

- **Serasa Experian website:** www.serasaexperian.com.br
- **Business Network for Social Inclusion website:** www.redeempresarialdeinclusao.com.br



TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES – Encouraging young talents with disabilities to shine through obstacles in India

Introduction

Since June 2008, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in India has been enabling people with visual impairments to compete on equal terms. The Advanced Computer Training Centre (ACTC) has sought to provide individuals with visual impairment with necessary training that had previously not been offered. The ACTC is one of the initiatives of TCS Maitree, a work-life balance programme that promotes cultural and social events and activities, as well as community development projects such as the ACTC.

Recognizing that subsequent employment was essential for the initiative to have a true impact, TCS recruited 20 ACTC graduates and helped place nearly 60 graduates into other companies. Since its creation, ACTC has seen over 100 students complete the course over the last four years with 65 per cent successfully employed in areas such as: Infrastructure Services, Internal IT & Service Management, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Learning & Development. Graduates have become successfully employed in eight multinational enterprises, being able to successfully compete with their co-workers.

However, in addition to the specialized training and job placement services, what makes the ACTC programme truly unique is their inclusive work environment, treating participants with disabilities the same as any other colleague. Respecting the dignity and integrity of those they serve, the state-of-the-art training facility seeks not to do their participants a favour but rather, to offer an opportunity, so that they may obtain the necessary skills to realize their employment potential.

Good practice

Tata Consultancy Services provides specialized training and job placement services while treating everyone equally.

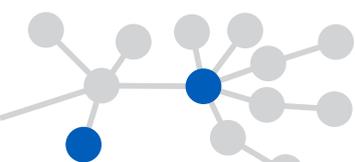
Box 12

Employment opportunities were created within TCS and other organizations, with a special emphasis that visually impaired employees would not receive preferential treatment. Sreela Das Gupta from TCS's HR Strategic Initiatives in Diversity and Inclusion states, "The ACTC approach intentionally excludes preferential treatment of workers with disabilities because while they may need certain support, they are employees like you and me." With respect to the methodology of the initiative, Das Gupta explains it as a "shift from a sympathy paradigm to a business paradigm". Moreover, TCS has found that including persons with disabilities in their labour force adds an element of enthusiasm to the work environment.

Getting started

The initiative began in 2006, by TCS Maitree employees who volunteered every Saturday at the Victoria Memorial School for the Blind. While teaching English conversational skills and basic computer skills, the volunteers identified a gap between the computer trainings that were offered and skills that were needed for employment in the IT & ITES industry. Recognizing the employment potential among those they tutored, TCS Maitree pioneered the ACTC as a one of a kind training programme for visually impaired persons at the M.N. Banajee Industrial Home for the Blind in Jogeshwari, Mumbai and Mitra Jyothi in Bangalore.

However, like all new undertakings, TCS had their concerns about the training initiative: would they be able to find people with visual impairments that would be up to the challenge? Where could they look for participants? What should be the process for admitting participants and how would they determine eligibility to apply? There were additional



concerns about expectations and how the transition of participants from training to job placement and employment would occur.

TCS has demonstrated innovation and resourcefulness in approaching these challenges, utilizing platforms and specialized technologies to achieve beneficial results for participants and subsequently, the ACTC programme itself.

Programme design

The programme was designed in such a way that it identifies IT and ITES skills that could be performed by people with visual impairments, while simultaneously identifying businesses in need of the skilled labour. In this way, ACTC provided not only the skills training but also the crucial employment connection, where participants could utilize their newly acquired skills.

ACTC admits around 15 candidates following a rigorous, nation-wide selection process. Those admitted to participate are required to have basic computer skills as well as basic English language skills. Participants then undergo a 45-day ACTC training with a BPO and IT-based curriculum. Among the IT skills training, a broad range of infrastructural services are provided which include administration and operating systems, computer networking, help desk technicalities, training on Microsoft Office Modules and setting up IT Infrastructure for large organizations like TCS. Within the BPO section, participants receive attribute-based training, focusing on behavioural patterns, customer orientation, analytical and communication skills, quality and time management and orientation on career mapping.

However, because most participants lack professional employment experience, instruction also features training in self-confidence, soft skills and corporate behaviour. Moreover, training provides an assessment of six behavioural competencies, structured problem solving, industry domain training from business leadership teams and guest lectures by other corporations and organizations.

In addition to empowering participants through the ACTC training, the programme also recognized the more subtle need of supporting awareness and sensitizing the IT and ITES industry of this alternate pool of talent while promoting their inclusion among various organizations.

Das Gupta states that this is a particularly relevant issue provided the cultural context in India, “disability carries a great social stigma in India and as a result, there are very few learning centres for people living with disabilities.” Das Gupta adds, “In India, gaining access to the IT industry is difficult for a person bordering the poverty line, though nearly impossible for those who in addition, are visually impaired. The ACTC offers its unique contribution, by providing skills development for people with disabilities while creating an environment of acceptance.”

Going forward

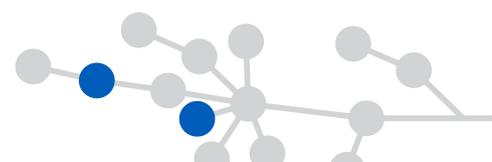
Das Gupta explains that while TCS plans to continue the ACTC training, they would like the participation and graduation numbers to increase: “We would like to see higher numbers, to be able to take the programme to a bigger scale.” The TCS table 1 below demonstrates the rates of attendance beginning with the pilot in 2008 until the most recently recorded session in the autumn of 2013. In total, 124 trainees have participated since the ACTC began and a total of 77 have obtained employment.

Table 1. Trainee rates of attendance

	Pilot	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Total
Held between	April-May 2008	June-July 2008	Feb-Mar 2009	May-June 2009	Mar-April 2010	Nov-Dec 2010	Aug-Sept 2011	Feb-Mar 2012	Aug-Sept 2012	Feb-April 2013	Aug-Sept 2013	
No. of trainees attended	9	16	16	15	12	9	11	11	8	10	7	124
No. of trainees employed in TCS	1	6	1	2	0	1	3	4	0	2	0	20
No. of trainees employed with other companies	5	7	12	9	8	4	7	2	0	3	0	57

Notes: 1) Trainees who are now employed with organizations such as TCS, Wipro, Standard Chartered, HCL, Indian Overseas Bank, DOW chemicals, National Association for Blind, Oriental Bank of Commerce. 2) Number of trainees who opted for higher studies is 6.

Source: TCS



Accomplishments and impact

The impact of the ACTC programme on its participants has been literally life changing. Today, 400 visually impaired people work with established companies across India, a number which the ACTC initiative intends to grow. Among the participants that have graduated from the programme, the story of Urvish is particularly impressive and serves as motivation to others with visual impairments.

Urvish was a participant from the first group to undergo the ACTC training and expressed how the programme gave him hope when he needed it and as a result, is now a full-time employee. His visual impairment was caused by injury and illness; by the age of 19 Urvish had lost the ability to read, write and even recognize people. This condition was very difficult for him to accept, he reports having felt miserable and was engulfed by negative thoughts. Urvish recalls that life was difficult, and it went on like this for a couple years until he learned of the TCS Maitree advanced computer training course for visually impaired people. He refers to the enthusiasm that he felt from that programme as a “ray of hope”, and that getting accepted to the programme was, “by far the happiest moment of my life”.

He recalled that this first opportunity of working in the corporate world was very challenging at first, as everything about it was new to him. However, Urvish saw it through and has now completed more than five years of employment. “I am a different person now, a lot more confident. I receive much appreciation for my work and my team and bosses are very supportive of me,” recalls Urvish. “Today I have my own family. I cannot imagine where I would be today if not for this opportunity.”

Lessons learned and advice

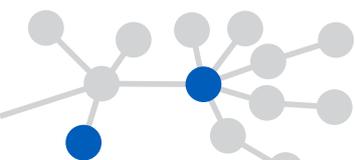
Das Gupta explains that implementing the programme is primarily twofold: “The first part is creating and implementing the programme and the second is communicating with employers for job placements.”

With regards for replicating such a training, Das Gupta stresses the importance to simultaneously build awareness and remove bias against people with disabilities, one way to achieve this is by creating acceptance through skills building workshops.

It is clear that TCS is pioneering new futures for the visually impaired. Their hope is that ACTC, the only training facility of its kind in India, will be replicated elsewhere. “We would love to see this programme implemented in many places,” Das Gupta states, “not because it’s the right thing to do but because it’s the smart thing to do.”

Contact

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TELENOR – From the classroom to employment and beyond: Telenor Group CSR initiatives supports the employment of people with disabilities in Norway

Introduction

Telenor Group, headquartered in Oslo, Norway, is one of the world's largest mobile operators and has been undertaking training initiatives in support of people with disabilities since 1996. Primarily focused on supporting people with physical disabilities, Telenor demonstrates commitment to participant success by offering two years of training and job placement programming.

The Open Mind programme in Norway is an HR initiative that offers two-year on-the-job training for people with physical and specific mental disabilities. Participants develop technical skills while learning how to use career resources to pursue employment opportunities. Serving as a bridge to employment, 75 per cent of Open Mind participants have successfully obtained permanent positions within Telenor and other organizations.

Although this guide particularly features the Open Mind programme at the Telenor headquarters in Norway, similar corporate social responsibility initiatives have also been undertaken by Telenor in Malaysia, Pakistan, Republic of Serbia and Sweden.

Good practice

Telenor provides participants with training through a work-plus support framework in a classroom setting, followed by real work training and then follow-up measures. In this way, the programme acts as a springboard to working life for people with disabilities and gives them the knowledge and experience they need to break out of an existence as social service clients and take part in normal working life.

Getting started

The Open Mind programme was initiated by an IT company called April Data which was later acquired by Telenor Group in 1996. Even prior to becoming a part of Telenor, the CEO of April Data started what was to become the Open Mind Programme in 1994. The initiative has undergone various changes since it was integrated into Telenor. In the beginning, it was a “project” but by 1999 it had become a “programme”, with funding provided equally by the country of Norway and Telenor Group.

Going forward

The Open Mind initiative continues to offer opportunities to individuals with disabilities who have an educational level corresponding to high school or a relevant equivalent education. Although young people with disabilities who lack work experience are given priority for enrolment in the programme, ages of participants have ranged from 19 to 50 years old. Those accepted primarily have physical disabilities such as reduced mobility, visual and hearing impairments, though individuals with mental disabilities such as depression and anxiety have also completed the programme.

The programme is offered three times a year and is implemented over two phases. First, participants in groups of five undergo a three-month skills training, which is then followed by a 21-month on-the-job professional development period.

During the three-month training, participants undertake a variety of courses with Telenor on subjects ranging from computing, technical support, career coaching, resume development, interview practice and personal network development. This course gives candidates certification in computing at basic or intermediate levels. Candidates also follow a communication programme called “Unique as I am”, which focuses on personal development aims and the expectations of work-life, and a “Getting into work” course, that takes up matters such as job applications and information about the labour market.



Telenor Manager, Ingrid Ihme, indicates that in addition to the valuable technical skills offered, participants also learn to believe in themselves; “It is common for people with disabilities to believe that they can’t work because a lot of them never have.” This is an important aspect to the programme since in addition to learning technical skills individuals need to believe that they are capable of replicating them in a professional environment and on equal footing with their peers.

Following the course instruction, participants are then placed in on-the-job training for a 21-month period with Telenor or in one of their subsidiary or partner companies, such as Storebrand, Gjensidige Nor, Manpower, IBM, Brixs and Making Waves. The wide range of companies offer various types of work-placements available to participants in Trondheim, Kristiansand and Bergen.

Many of the participants have said that upon completing their training period, they would like to continue in a regular job with Telenor because they feel comfortable there. However, this has also been interpreted to indicate that these individuals would benefit from employee integration efforts.

Ihme also indicates that the Open Mind programme is supported by Telenor’s non-discrimination policy toward all employees and applicants for employment. The policy states that all aspects of employment are governed by “merit, competence, suitability, and qualifications, and will not be influenced in any manner by gender, age, race, colour, religion, national origin or disability”. As a result, Telenor’s workforce reflects diversity and the active inclusion of disabled workers.

Accomplishments and impact

Telenor has benefited through its Open Mind programme by mobilizing untapped human resources, finding motivated and qualified employees and seizing greater economic returns.

In fact, an evaluation done by the Foundation for Scientific and Industrial Research, an independent Norwegian research organization, found that the Open Mind programme had delivered a social-economic savings of at least 100 million Norwegian kroner (USD 15.88 million) during the period 1996-2006. The social economic savings consisted of direct economic benefits obtained by Telenor from the productivity of disabled employees and indirect benefits derived by society for not having to distribute social security payments to people with disabilities.

Telenor recognizes that many people with disabilities become disillusioned after having negative experiences with working life. Making one of the challenges the Open Mind programme faces is to motivate participants to seek work with other companies and to prepare them for everyday work life outside of Telenor.

By treating people who have participated in the programme like all other employees, Telenor fosters a work environment of equality. In this respect, people with disabilities are treated just like everyone else although they are perhaps more vulnerable in that it may be more difficult for people with disabilities to find a new job than it is for others. This presents the challenge of finding the right balance between giving people with disabilities a chance to work in the same conditions as others, while taking into account their special needs.

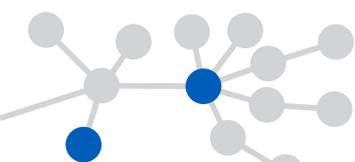
Following the success of Telenor Open Mind in Norway, similar programmes were launched in Malaysia and Sweden in 2007, Republic of Serbia in 2008 and Pakistan in 2009. These programmes follow the basic principles from Open Mind in Norway; however, each programme operates as an independent programme. For example, Telenor Malaysia, also known as DiGi Telecommunications, is Malaysia’s third largest mobile telephone company. After adopting Telenor’s Open Mind programme under the name of Open Hearts in 2007, DiGi became the first telecom company in Malaysia to offer computer skills training and work courses for people with disabilities.

The latest edition of the Open Mind programme was undertaken in Khuddar, Pakistan. Along with its goal to hire disabled persons in Pakistan, Telenor aims to enhance awareness about the abilities of people with disabilities and promote their inclusion in everyday life with the support of assistive technologies. To attract talented individuals with disabilities, Telenor Pakistan advertised through recruitment ads and launched a disability-accessible career website. The company also added accessibility features when constructing their office building and the Sales & Service Centre in Islamabad, to accommodate the needs of all of their employees and customers.

In 1999, Telenor was awarded the Budstikka prize by the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion for its Open Mind programme and efforts to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce. In 2006, the company was recognized by the Norwegian Multiple Sclerosis Association with an award for their contributions to promote the inclusion of disabled persons into society.

Ihme states the benefit of the Open Mind programme is threefold: “First it benefits our company, then it benefits the participant to be productive and finally it benefits society by creating another taxpayer..”

Ingrid Ihme, Telenor Manager



Lessons learned and advice

Telenor indicates that the Open Mind programme largely succeeded in meeting its principal objectives of acting as a springboard to working life for people with disabilities. Ihme states that the initiative has been a positive experience, both for their company and the community at large. Although she acknowledges potential administrative challenges that may arise when attempting to replicate such an initiative, Ihme reassures that such challenges are manageable.

Below are various points worth consideration for companies interested in undertaking similar initiatives:

- **Create a training environment that fosters social integration.** It is important that both participants and company staff are accepting of one another. This will improve participant productivity and their ability to seek and obtain employment with other companies.
- **Communicate CSR programming initiatives with local media and community organizations.** The Open Mind programme reports that as a result of making their initiatives known to the public, they have enjoyed positive recognition and support from local politicians and media outlets.
- **Do not be discouraged about start-up costs to get the programme operational.**

Next steps

Telenor indicates their support for the Open Mind programme to be replicated by other companies. While this initiative will continue in Norway, a new joint venture known as Grameenphone, involving Telenor and the Bangladesh-based Grameen Telecom Corporation, is considering expanding into Bangladesh. Presently, Telenor's corporate social responsibility unit is collaborating with Grameenphone, aiming to establish a project team.

Contact

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