

# Service Provider Promising Practice

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TOPIC:  
Communication of Goals  
and Expectations

## Job Squad, Inc. (West Virginia): A Blog that Conveys the Importance of Community Employment

### Background

Job Squad is a medium-sized CRP that provides services to individuals in 13 counties within West Virginia. In 2005, responding to customer demands, executive director Brenda Hellwig and her staff received training from Griffin-Hammis Associates to offer community employment services.

Once trained, the career counselors at Job Squad found that their most successful jobs were matches between job seekers and small businesses that needed their skills and could provide natural supports. The team then started the Community Economic Development blog at <http://jobsquadinc.blogspot.com/>. This is a platform to communicate with employers, families, and individuals with disabilities interested in community employment in West Virginia.

### Implementation

A staff member proposed the idea for the blog as one way to update Job Squad's website and promote community employment to stakeholders, including potential employers.

As the executive director said, "We decided that we needed a blog that would be a good place for potential employers to look and see what we were doing. It was a way to tell our story and help potential employers see what we could do for them, [and] get them engaged in the process."

The idea for a blog was well received by the other career counselors. In subsequent meetings, they decided on the various types of information to be posted, and agreed to share responsibilities for developing posts.

The blog covers a variety of topics. For instance, Job Squad staff write about customized employment, changes in employment legislation, and use of Medicaid waiver funds. The blog also highlights happenings at Job Squad, such as their receipt of a new customized employment grant, as well as stories and videos of individuals they support in employment.

Other resources on the website address navigating Social Security benefits through the Ticket to Work program, and using the Plan for Achieving Self-Sufficiency to support employment.

Staff post to the blog at least once a month. The Community Employment Program Manager reviews them all before they are posted. Although Job Squad staff are the only ones who can submit posts, visitors can add comments or share the posts through email or social media.

Job Squad staff show their pride in the blog by regularly sharing posts and resources with employers, families, and individuals with disabilities.

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## Impact

Job Squad staff report that potential employers are more interested in hiring job seekers after watching videos featuring people with disabilities at work. A career counselor also reported that individuals and families have higher expectations of community employment once they are introduced to the blog.

As a collection of articles, tools and strategies, the blog provides valuable information for people in West Virginia and beyond. It has also become an excellent marketing tool for Job Squad.

## Suggestions for Replication

- » Employ technology to communicate program goals and values. Blogs and other online platforms can be easy to use and can impact a variety of audiences.
- » Maintain a blog to support a consistent focus on the importance of employment. Blog posts can serve as a record of a CRP's employment activities and knowledge gained through trainings.
- » Recognize the community-building power of blogs. A blog can be used to develop a sense of common purpose, build a lasting community of interest, and increase the knowledge base and capacity of the field.
- » Shine a spotlight on the valuable role of work for meaningful community inclusion through regular updates on employment to a wide range of stakeholders.

For more information on this practice contact [thinkwork@umb.edu](mailto:thinkwork@umb.edu)



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