

Service Provider Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Customer Focus
and Engagement

Able Opportunities and the Work Independence Network (Washington): Creating an Individual Placement Model Focusing on the Needs of Both Job Seekers and Employers

Background

Able Opportunities is a certified vendor for the state of Washington's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities Administration, Division of Developmental Disability, and Department of Labor and Industry. The Work Independence Network (WIN) began in 2005 as a partnership between Able Opportunities, Harrison Medical Center, and Kitsap County Developmental Disabilities to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) find jobs.

Through WIN, Able Opportunities strives to meet the needs of both job seekers and employers through the use of innovative business model tools, including cost-benefit analysis and production charts. WIN's goal is to help people with disabilities find meaningful work in their communities that pays at least minimum wage, while ensuring the satisfaction of the businesses hiring them.

Within the WIN project model, staff members from Able Opportunities conduct outreach with local employers to create or carve out jobs for people with disabilities. The cost-effectiveness of the arrangement is emphasized to the employer, as well as the workforce diversity that results from hiring employees with disabilities. Able Opportunities works with the employer to provide any necessary job accommodations. The process used in the WIN model to delegate tasks, analyze costs, and write job descriptions is documented at the Able Opportunities website: www.ableopps.com/win_program

Able Opportunities approached Harrison Medical Center, the largest hospital in the area, and proposed a business case for hiring employees with disabilities through the WIN project. This approach demonstrated

to human resources managers at Harrison Medical Center that hiring people with disabilities could help the staff to use their time more efficiently.

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Implementation

First, job developers from Able Opportunities and HR managers from Harrison Medical Center drew up a memorandum of understanding www.ableopps.com/mou, setting out their expectations. Next, the HR managers selected the rehabilitation department as the best place to pilot the WIN project. They reviewed staff responsibilities and determined several tasks to delegate so that skilled hospital staff could focus on more specialized duties.

For example, rehab staff members were responsible for keeping patients' rooms stocked with various supplies. Able Opportunities staff conducted a cost analysis that showed that if this responsibility was delegated to WIN employees, the department would save money, and the rehab staff could spend more time on direct care with patients.

Reviewing the tasks that could be delegated, the HR managers created two part-time positions within the rehab department. One position combined a variety of cleaning and stocking jobs; another was a series of clerical tasks. Able Opportunities arranged for a job coach to work on site to help new employees learn their tasks and ensure that everything was done to the satisfaction of the department staff.

The individuals hired through the WIN model worked with the job coach to develop and maintain production



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charts to gauge their accomplishments. Department staff documented that each WIN employee afforded co-workers up to an additional hour and a half to spend on patient care. This model was later replicated in the labor and delivery department.

An early challenge to the WIN model was management-level staff turnover, leading to inconsistent support for the WIN project employees. The job coach and HR staff referred to the production charts and cost-benefit analysis to demonstrate the impact of the WIN employees on the efficiency of their department and increase management-level support for WIN.

The WIN partnership has remained strong over the years, and there are plans to expand it to other large employers. Able Opportunities continues to work as a consultant within Kitsap County, using the WIN project as a model for placing individuals in meaningful jobs while meeting the needs of employers. The WIN model has been replicated at an outdoor school in Bainbridge Island, also in Kitsap County.

Impact

The partnership between Able Opportunities and Harrison Medical Center has opened up a variety of new opportunities for job seekers. The jobs created through WIN have been stable, and have matched the preferences of the employees supported by the WIN program. The on-site job coach has made it possible

for WIN employees to receive support and to further develop skills. At least four employees supported by the WIN program have increased their hours and earnings through further skill development, having been hired by an additional department.

The impact on Harrison Medical Center has also been positive. Besides saving the center time and money, the WIN employees have added to the diversity of the department workforce. Some patients have commented about the positive perception this diversity creates for the hospital. For Able Opportunities, having an on-site job coach to address the needs of employees with disabilities and their employers has favorably impacted the agency's reputation among regional employers and disability service agencies.

Suggestions for Replication

- » Visit the “project replication page” to see the documentation Able Opportunities and its partners created to support the WIN model.
- » Look for a large employer, with a diverse array of roles and responsibilities available.
- » When approaching employers, focus on the customization possibilities, and emphasize that the arrangement created is designed to meet their specific needs.
- » Use cost-analysis models to present measurable findings to potential employers that show the return they may see on this type of investment.

For more information on this practice contact thinkwork@umb.edu



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