DISABILITY TASK FORCE MEETING—June 8, 2023

HIRING STAFF WITH DISABILITIES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

 --Successful hiring strategies --Positive impact

On June 8th DTF hosted a panel discussion on successful hiring strategies and the positive impact of hiring staff with disabilities in their organizations. Panel members include:

* Janet Barbieri, Director of Programs, AANE
* David Estrada, JD, Co-Chair for Council on Disability Awareness. He is also the Program Manager that oversees Spaulding New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center, Exercise for Persons with Disabilities Program, and the Job Lab
* Jay Eveson-Egler Co-Manager Simpatico Mentoring Program, AANE
* Micah Fleisig Sr. Manager, Disability Services at JVS Boston
* Elyse Forbush, Director of Nutrition and Food Services at Spaulding Rehab Hospital Charlestown
* Taciana Ribeiro-Saab, Office Program Manager BCIL Dorchester

The panel discussed strategies their organizations utilized to hire staff with disabilities, including; recruitment of clients served by their organization; supporting staff if they choose to disclose their disability; and provision of accommodations and supports on the job. The panel emphasized the positive impact for their organization, increasing their ability to effectively meet their goals by hiring staff with disabilities.

Below are some highlights of the discussion.

One speaker discussed their diversity statement included in all job postings, which highlights individuals with disabilities served by their organization (see resources below for link). They also described the culture of their organization which supports successful recruitment and employment. All the organizations discussed the importance of having a safe place for those who wish to self-identify. One organization talked about including thought leaders in neurodiverse spaces and how important that is in this hiring process, especially in light of how hard it has been to fill positions since COVID-19.

Speakers emphasized the importance of thinking “outside the box” during the hiring process, and also utilizing Universal Design practices throughout the organization, such as: using bullets or numbers in the job descriptions, so it is easier to read; having flexible schedules; and a cooperative management style to be more inclusive in the workplace. They also discussed hiring staff who demonstrate the important foundational job skills, but have not had the opportunity to learn some of the more specific job skills required for a particular job. They had substantial success hiring enthusiastic, reliable staff with basic job skills and then providing targeted training regarding specific job skills required for the position. The panel also emphasized that many accommodations required are not costly, and in fact improve job performance of all staff.

Independent living centers are supposed to have 51% of their staff and board include people with disabilities. As a consequence, BCIL’s work environment culture reflects the community and makes it a desirable organization for employment. They provide peer mentors to help staff move up the ladder, professional development, and assistive technology.

The panelists also discussed the importance of being intentional about creating an environment where people feel safe to disclose their disability, if they choose to do so.

Thanks to all the speakers on the panel for sharing their successful strategies for employing and retaining individuals with disabilities, significantly strengthening organizational capacity.

After panel presentations, there was a Q&A and discussion with DTF members.

Click here for the [PowerPoint presentations](https://www.massadvocates.org/s/BMC-presentation-6-8-23.pdf).

Click here for meeting [video](https://youtu.be/nj-neeX2APc)

Resources:

* reasonable accommodations: <https://askjan.org/blogs/jan/2022/9/don-t-break-the-bank-low-cost-accommodations-do-exist.cfm> ​
* <https://whdh.com/news/artist-brain-injury-survivor-hosts-art-show-at-spaulding-rehabilitation-hospital/>
* Mass Cultural Council : charles.baldwin@mass.gov if interested in participating in site visits in June . Individual visits with a follow up survey, or group visits with a follow up discussion.

* ABLE Account/Attainable account <https://www.fidelity.com/able/attainable/overview?imm_pid=700000001560455&immid=100830_SEA&imm_eid=ep20809734569&utm_source=GOOGLE&utm_medium=paid_search&utm_account_id=700000001560455&utm_campaign=ASP&utm_content=58700002385715369&utm_term=able+account+massachusetts&utm_campaign_id=100830&utm_id=71700000022703760&gad=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-IWkBhBTEiwA2exyO9oCSb6tPw4Z47P0zZYIRc4XAgFoquVZj2E-KFPRIFLMfayuP6mbARoC3uMQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds>
* <https://www.exceptionallives.org/ma-guides/creating-a-disability-friendly-workplace>
* AANE job posting language statement: <https://www.massadvocates.org/s/AANE-job-posting-language-example-6-26-23final.docx>