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Developing Community Partnerships to Reach Underserved Diverse Populations

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Developing Community Partnerships to Reach Underserved Diverse Populations

Abstract
[Excerpt] Like much of the U.S., Massachusetts is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Studies show that the state's future population growth will come through immigration. Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds has historically been a challenge for our service systems. With changing demographics, it is more important than ever. Workforce and disability staff may feel uncertain about how to reach these potential consumers. One effort agencies have made is to increase the diversity of their own staff. While this is important, there is an additional strategy you can try: building connections to local community-based or faith-based organizations.

Keywords
disability, economic growth, labor market, Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, public policy, economic independence

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Issue 2, 2005

MassWorks

Focusing on the integration of disability, workforce development, & employment services

From the Editor

This issue of MassWorks highlights an innovative approach to enhancing services for individuals from diverse communities. The high unemployment rate and barriers to employment experienced by people with disabilities are well documented. For people from diverse communities, these barriers are compounded by factors such as language, cultural norms regarding work and disability, and difficulty accessing services. Community partnerships can provide a unique opportunity to improve services for individuals from diverse racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

—Cindy Thomas
Director of Employment Services
Institute for Community Inclusion

RESOURCES

National

U.S. Dept of Labor Center for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives
www.dol.gov/cfbci

Disability and Cultural Diversity
www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/ek98/disabili.htm

National Council on Disability Diversity Outreach Toolkit
http://ncd.test.janmedia.com (see "FBCOs")

Massachusetts

Mass. Office for Refugees and Immigrants
www.mass.gov/ori

State Office of Minority and Women Business Assistance
www.somwba.state.ma.us

Multi-Cultural Independent Living Center of Boston, Inc.
www.milcb.org

Job Networking in Diverse Communities
(ICI Research to Practice brief #RP37 www.communityinclusion.org/publications)

Developing Community Partnerships to Reach Underserved Diverse Populations

The Issue

Like much of the U.S., Massachusetts is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Studies show that the state's future population growth will come through immigration. Meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds has historically been a challenge for our service systems. With changing demographics, it is more important than ever.

Workforce and disability staff may feel uncertain about how to reach these potential consumers. One effort agencies have made is to increase the diversity of their own staff. While this is important, there is an additional strategy you can try: building connections to local community-based or faith-based organizations.

The Strategy

Often the first place people from culturally diverse backgrounds go to get help, outside family and friends, is a local community-based or faith-based organization (FBCO). Regardless of their size, these organizations understand the needs of their community and have gained the trust of community members who may be reluctant to access mainstream services. When FBCOs and mainstream disability organizations develop partnerships, both groups have a unique opportunity to serve individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

For disability and workforce organizations, the first step is to identify the FBCOs in your community. This step is often the most challenging. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone and introduce yourself and your agency. After you make contact, taking time to get to know one other is essential to developing credibility.

- Visit each other's agencies.
- Identify the leaders and "gatekeepers" in both groups.
- Learn what "disability" means to each partner.
- Identify resources and opportunities for collaboration.

As organizations get to know each other, initiatives can develop. In Massachusetts:

- An FBCO translated forms and signs for a Career Center to make the center more welcoming to individuals who spoke English as their second language.
- Staff from a clubhouse and an FBCO identified local minority-owned businesses that could be contacted for potential job leads.
- A local vocational rehabilitation office designated a bilingual, bicultural staff member to visit a local FBCO regularly and share information about VR services.

—continued next page

Faith-Based Organizations, Social Services, and Religious Activity

With the federal government's recent faith and community initiatives , many people are concerned that taxpayer dollars will be used to fund religious activities. However, FBCOs cannot use a direct federal grant to fund religious worship, instruction, or proselytizing.

EVENTS

May 16: Employment Law and People with Disabilities: The ADA and Beyond. Training from ICI. Contact andrew.glazier@umb.edu or 617/287-4337.

May 18-20: Effective Supervisory Skills. Training from the University of Hartford RCEP. Contact RCEP@hartford.edu or 860/768-5148.

June 16-17: Self-Employment and Customized Employment. Training from the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability. Contact http://iod.unh.edu or 603/862-4117.

June 20: Personal Assistance Services in the Workplace. Online webcast from Virginia Commonwealth University. Contact tcblanke@vcu.edu or 804/828-2197.

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This newsletter will be made available in alternate formats upon request.

- FBCOs identified radio broadcasts and community events that would be good outreach vehicles for a disability organization.
- FBCO staff conducted information sessions on specific cultures; in turn, Career Center staff gave an orientation to FBCO staff on workforce services.
- An FBCO and Career Center applied for a grant to provide English for Speakers of Other Languages services at the Career Center.

By working together, FBCOs and disability and workforce organizations can better serve the growing population of individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts from diverse backgrounds.

Visit www.massworks.org
for more information about training on issues related to employment and disability, or to read this brief online.

Case Study

A disability agency and a faith-based organization serving African newcomers began to identify services to assist members of the FBCO's immigrant and refugee community. The FBCO had a very limited understanding of disability issues and knew nothing of the services available, so the disability agency introduced the FBCO's director to several state agencies. The director learned about the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and immediately thought of a young woman with significant physical disabilities whom he had never considered employable. He contacted MRC and went with the woman to her first appointment to help her begin to develop vocational goals.

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