



Catie Malcom, right, owner of Catie's Creations in Silverdale, works with employee Danny Balough on T-shirt logos on Tuesday, November, 22, 2016. (Photo: Larry Steagall / Kitsap Sun)

## Trillium opening doors for all

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If there's a will, there's a way.

That motto can be applied to many situations, but especially when it comes to employment of those with intellectual or developmental disabilities, also known as IDD.

Everyone can work, if given the chance.

At least that's the outlook of Trillium Employment Services, a nonprofit employment agency in Washington.

"I have long believed that people with disabilities have capabilities that are untapped. The value of this work is seeing

how the community benefits," said Karen Williams, executive director of Trillium Employment Services.

Since 1983, the agency has worked with local businesses to integrate and employ those with disabilities into the workplace. In Kitsap County alone, 96 employers are considered "all-inclusive" when it comes to employment status, and also hire from Trillium's employee pool. From larger chains like Jimmy John's to local businesses like Catie's Creations, Trillium has placed clients in all types of industries on the peninsula.

According to an October Office of Disability report from the U.S. Department of Labor, 20 percent of the labor force has a disability, and the unemployment rate is more than double for those with a disability than those without — 9.9 percent of disabled residents are unemployed.

But with the help of agencies like Trillium — which receives referrals from state agencies that fund the employment contract for Trillium clients — that number could decrease once employers see the benefits of hiring folks with IDDs, said Jay Hamann, Trillium Employment Services communications coordinator.

"We want this to be a business decision," said Hamann, noting that applicants are screened for talents and abilities. "We want it to be smart for their business, and not necessarily hiring to do charity."

Rick Pedersen, market director of Town & Country Market on Bainbridge, agrees that Trillium carefully places clients.

"I've been very happy working with Trillium; they have been very supportive and thoughtful in taking the time to make sure we are matching people up to the best positions for their skills," he said. "It is great to be able to have opportunities for all people to work in our market when circumstances permit and for them to be successful, to reflect the communities that our stores are in."

For other employers, watching the growth and confidence of clients increase is the best part of the experience.

Catie Johnson-Malcom, owner of Catie's Creations in Silverdale, has loved becoming an all-inclusive employer since hiring on a Trillium client three years ago. For her, seeing her one disabled employee really enjoying his work has been the most joyful part of working with the nonprofit employment agency.

"Growing up in a small town in South Dakota, I always knew it was important to help everyone in the community," she said. "As a small business owner in Kitsap County, I still enjoy helping everyone in the community, including those with disabilities so that they can also feel like they are an important part of the community."

Because of her willingness to work with an IDD employee, Johnson-Malcom recently swiped Trillium's "Most Active Advocate Award" for her efforts in the community. Once she expands her business, she hopes to bring on more Trillium clients, she said.

Trillium has offices in King, Pierce and Clark counties, as well as Kitsap County, with an office location in Silverdale. Clients work in a variety of fields, according to Hamann, including doctors' offices, hospitality, food service, retail, health and wellness services and beyond. One of the clients Hamann has seen succeed through the years has worked in Boeing's mailroom for the last 23 years.

To Hamann, the success of the clients has to do partially with properly facilitating communications, but also in the attitude of the employers as well.

"We wholeheartedly believe that these employers are some of the best of our community. They look past the stereotypes," said Hamann. "They are making honest business decisions to provide this opportunity."

As a way to honor those employers — and possibly increase business patronage numbers — Trillium recently rolled out a window decal for businesses to use. Now, all patrons and passersby can see if an establishment is an "all-inclusive employer." It allows patrons to consciously choose to support an accepting employer, Hamann said.

In July, Trillium also launched an interactive inclusive employer finder map on its website. This tool allows users to see which employers hire those with disabilities. Search results can be organized categorically, including by county. Users can find businesses like Hop Jack's in Silverdale or Everybody's in Port Orchard hire the disabled.

"It's great to see the community impact," added Williams. "I believe fundamentally that we (all) want to contribute and belong. And, in America, to do that is to be a part of the workplace. It's great to be a part of an organization that's making that happen."

The interactive map is available for use now at [www.trillium.org/finder](http://www.trillium.org/finder).