

Businesses can benefit by hiring workers through supported employment

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Do you know about supported employment? Do your employees represent the diversity of the Kitsap community, including people with developmental disabilities?

The Bremerton Bar and Grill can answer yes to both of these questions. That's because Bremerton Bar and Grill partnered with Trillium, a nonprofit employment agency, to hire Greg as one of their dishwashers. The partnership is what makes supported employment attractive to businesses, which want to have a diverse workforce, but prefer the support in recruiting and training employees with disabilities.

For Bremerton Bar and Grill, a job coach helped train Greg when he was new and provided ongoing support, such as communication with new managers. Ultimately, the benefit to the business is that they have a reliable dishwasher who hasn't missed a shift since he started almost two years ago — a great asset in the restaurant industry!



A part-time employee who was placed at Trader Joe's in Silverdale through a supported employment program does his job keeping merchandise properly arranged on store shelves. (Photo courtesy Trillium Employment Services)

Many local companies are finding that by hiring people with disabilities they are tapping into a population of workers who are excited and motivated to work. Working in partnership with an employment agency that specializes in recruiting and training people with disabilities means there is a team invested in ensuring the new employee is successful and meets the needs of the business. This partnership yields cost savings in recruitment and turnover.

Additionally, with 20 percent of the population experiencing a disability, businesses are also recognizing people with disabilities and their families as a consumer base and want to create workplaces that reflect the community where they market their products and services. According to a national survey conducted by the University of Massachusetts and the America's Strength Foundation, 92 percent of the American public view companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not.

Trader Joe's in Silverdale had a hard time keeping up with facing merchandise in their busy location. They brought on an employee who now works six hours a week during their busy times to do just this. This niche position helps the store maintain the positive shopping experience for customers and allows other staff to focus their attention on customer service and cashiering.

These businesses have made a commitment to including people with developmental disabilities in their workforce, and through supported employment services, have realized several bottom-line benefits of this businesses decision.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. A slate of Kitsap companies have been selected to receive an Outstanding Employer Award, presented by the Community Employment Alliance and the Association of Washington Business Institute at a luncheon at the Kitsap Conference Center in Bremerton on Oct. 2.

The Outstanding Employer Award honors Washington state businesses that have made exceptional efforts to employ people with disabilities and serve as role models in their industry and community.

Among the businesses selected for the 2013 award are these Kitsap businesses — Boat Shed Restaurant, Gold Mountain Golf Course, Hop Jacks Restaurant, The Learning Tree, Ootopia Coffee Roasters, Walgreens Bremerton, and Kitsap YMCA. Congratulations!

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