



More and more businesses say yes to employing people with disabilities – Part 1

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More and more businesses throughout the country are changing their hiring practices and discovering the win/win advantages of employing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Like anyone else looking for a job, job candidates with disabilities need to have the right type of skills that will match the needs of the employer. Not only are there several non-profit agencies in the Puget Sound area that have built their businesses over the years with their defining purpose to help those with disabilities succeed in the business world, but school districts have also come along and built programs to aid those with disabilities. Their goal is to train students with disabilities how they can be productive members of the society.



Tahoma Transition Program Tahoma's Transition Program will be very busy for the 2013-14 school year with 17 students eager to learn.

Recognizing the importance of training people with disabilities to become as independent as possible has touched the Tahoma School District over the years. Potential students for the Tahoma Transition Program begin to be identified at 15- ½ years old. The Transition Program is for after high school – traditionally 18-21 – and then they exit. The program has been developed to encourage as much independence as possible in each student so they can become more productive and valued members of the community and workforce.

While working within the Transition Program, students not only learn living skills such as personal care and fixing simple meals, but they also enjoy seeing where some of their food comes from by raising a garden. Then when it comes to learning tasks from simple to complex, computer technology has come into play through the use of iPads provided by the School District – with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) occasionally supporting this use once students are employed. Step-by-step cues are programmed into an iPad that a student can follow from the beginning to the end of a specific task. For example, a student learning how to take out the garbage can be given several steps with a picture and verbal directions for each step.

During their time in the program, students are encouraged to set goals; strive for improvement; communicate with clarity and precision; listen, interpret and evaluate; and skillfully use tools, resources and technology. Students are also encouraged to become complex thinkers by using their imaginations and reflecting on past learning experiences, which they can then apply to new experiences. Exploring and taking risks is yet another important part of the program along with learning how to generate questions that will help to deepen their understanding of the world around them.

Each school day is full, with students spending time in the classroom tending to their various school responsibilities as well as being transported to one of several businesses where they are able to practice socially appropriate behaviors and job skills. Some of the area businesses that have opened their doors to the Transition Program include: Safeway, Johnsons Do It Center, Wooden Feather Farm, Puget Sound Skills Center, Head Games Hair Salon, Lake Wilderness Arboretum, Critterqueen Rabbit Rescue, Maple Valley Food Bank and Emergency Services, and several locations within the Tahoma School District.

As students prepare to transition out of the school environment, some may be able to go on to community college while others, who require a little more one-on-one coaching, might elect to go forward with an outside employment vendor. One of the area agencies working closely with the Tahoma Transition Program is Trillium Employment Services. Thirty years in the business of listening to their clients before placing them in jobs they can thrive in means the world to Trillium staff.



More and more businesses say yes to employing people with disabilities – Part 2

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One of the non-profit organizations in the Puget Sound area that is working hard to match people with disabilities with the job needs of several businesses in the Maple Valley area is Trillium Employment Services.

Opening its doors for business in the state of Washington in 1983, Trillium originally came from a University of Oregon demonstration project that consisted of a group of people with developmental disabilities employed at a local manufacturing company, Physio-Control, as heart defibrillator assemblers. When completed, the project revealed that people with significant disabilities were able to take on the rigors of producing quality products in the business world.

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National legislation came as a result of the success of the project, which then paved the way for others with developmental disabilities to break out of the sheltered type of employment they had been working in and moved them towards integrated, community employment. More and more businesses were inspired to employ people with significant disabilities as they observed success story after success story and also saw how their business needs could be met.

As one of the pioneer supported employment agencies in the country that took on placing people with disabilities into the workforce, Trillium has been committed "to realizing a community that celebrates inclusion and diversity through innovative leadership and partnerships."

Its unique approach to employment involves understanding a business's labor needs and company goals and recruiting a candidate who would be a viable team member. Trillium can help a business fill a niche labor position, save time and costs of recruiting and training, and achieve workplace diversity goals. Currently, Trillium supports over 200 businesses in Western Washington with recruiting and training services.

Time and again, businesses have commented that their employees with disabilities have an outstanding work ethic, bring improved morale to the team, and have a positive impact on customer loyalty, in addition to the contributions through their job duties.

Trillium has a team of Employment Consultants who provide tailored recruiting and training services to the business and on-site job coaching to the employee to ensure successful placements. Employment Consultants are available as an ongoing resource to the business to help with training or personnel issues, consult with annual reviews, and identify additional tasks.

Trillium believes communities are strengthened when individuals with disabilities are a part of the workforce. Several local Maple Valley businesses can testify to the business benefits of employing someone with a disability. Trillium is celebrating thirty years of building an inclusive community in South King County and has been posting anniversary stories on their Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Trillium-Employment-Services/167157820769>) to share their participants' anniversaries at their jobs.



More and more businesses say yes to employing people with disabilities – Part 3

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Over the course of the last two weeks, readers have been given a glimpse into the efforts of Tahoma School District and one non-profit organization, Trillium Employment Services, when it comes to working with people with disabilities and helping them move towards a more independent lifestyle that includes meaningful employment.

In this Part 3 and final part of the series, readers will meet five people with disabilities in the Maple Valley area who are making an impact on the business community that has embraced them. Prior to introducing them, it is interesting to note that on Tuesday, August 13, KOMO TV ran a story on one of Trillium's clients Herb Bartlett (link at end of article). Working with Physio-Control (a company which produces emergency medical equipment) in Redmond, WA, Bartlett delivers the mail to various departments within the business. It was reported that this beloved employee has worked for Physio-Control for 30 years. In the beginning, he was part of the pioneering effort through the University of Oregon and Trillium that launched the first program bringing people with disabilities into the work place.

It was people like Bartlett who blazed the trails to make it possible for people with disabilities to gain meaningful employment. Following are some stories from the Maple Valley area where people with disabilities have made a positive impact on the businesses and community where they are employed.

Transitioning out of high school a year ago, Tahoma grad, Giovanni Morehead, chose Trillium Employment Services as the agency that would help him find a good job match. In order to assess his job skills for future employment, Cedar creek Covenant Church agreed to lend a helping hand. During his three-day assessment period, Morehead, who competed in Special Olympics basketball with a team that took 2nd in State competition, helped with such tasks as stacking chairs, data entry, physical labor, and much more. By the time he finished with his assessment, Morehead was noted as having a huge range of skills.

According to Pastor Kenton Johnson, Morehead was a great worker who went above and beyond their expectation. Pastor Johnson was thrilled that although the assessment period is over, he has stayed connected with the church family, coming to church and contributing to the tasks at hand when asked to help. Pastor Johnson also went on to state that in a very small way the experience was making the community a better place, and that what had transpired between Morehead and the church was good for all. Trillium staff had the privilege of supporting Morehead at an interview at Costco in Covington three weeks ago. They were thrilled when Morehead was offered the job pushing carts and helping up front! He began his new job two weeks ago.

Stephanie Lloyd has been employed with CAF Environmental Solutions for over a year. Working once a week for two hours, she folds and stuffs very important material safety data sheets into packing sleeves that are eventually placed on the outside of five gallon buckets filled with environmentally friendly outdoor cleaning products. Lloyd's Trillium job coach not only gives her space to accomplish the task before her as independently as possible, but also encourages her to reach her personal goals. Lloyd has made incredible growth over the past year of employment: she began the year stuffing fifty pouches and is now completing over 300 each shift. This is the result of one-on-one job coaching and effective goal setting.



CAF Operations Manager, Jared Behunin, first observed a Trillium client while out to lunch at Trappers Sushi in Covington. Intrigued with Trillium and sharing the values of hiring a person with disabilities, Behunin contacted Trillium to find out if his business could qualify to hire a person with disabilities. Trillium and CAF worked together to identify a need within the business—the material safety data sheets—then Trillium found the perfect candidate for the job. Behunin, happy with Lloyd's work ethic, stated that she is not only one of the team, but that she is considered family. As she masters her skills, Behunin is looking at how they can expand her responsibilities.

More and more businesses say yes to employing people with disabilities – Part 3, con't.

Working at Hop Jack's for the past fifteen months, Tina Maduska's specialty is in food prep. Upon finishing her schooling at Kentwood High School, she did not know what she would do. But today, through the help of Trillium, she is working 4-6 hours/5 days a week at Hop Jack's. Noted as continually learning and improving, she stated that it feels good to get a pay check and that it helps her to feel good about herself. One day it is her hope to step up to being a host who greets customers.



General Manager for the Maple Valley Hop Jack's branch, Spike, stated that Maduska has grown in her personality quite a bit since arriving. He is pleased that she takes the company's vision seriously enough to point out various aspects to those employees who might not be living up to that vision. Spike also pointed out that her presence has really enriched the "family" at Hop Jack's.

Since coming out of the Tahoma Transition program, Julie Olsen has been working for Safeway for the past 7 years. Her 18-24 hours a week job involves bagging groceries, bringing carts in, and making sure the check stand areas are clean. However, what she likes best about her job is working with the customers, including bagging their groceries and helping them take the groceries to their vehicles. Not only does she enjoy the customers, but she became friends with Tari Davison (pictured right) – long time Maple Valley resident and Safeway employee as well.



For years, Safeway has been a big proponent of employing people with disabilities. Even locally, the 4 Corners store currently employs seven in-store employees with disabilities such as Olsen. Although Olsen is fairly independent, her Trillium coach checks in with her now and again to see how she is doing as well as checks with her bosses to make sure all is well.

Following their Halloween opening nearly a year ago, Dameon Sims began working for Farrelli's in mid-December. Although his main job is washing dishes, he has also been known to help make some of the food, fold boxes and stock in the front. Taking two busses to get to work, there are times he arrives early enough to enjoy talking with customers as they arrive and depart. However, when it is time to do his job, he is happy to head back to his area where he begins his workday washing dishes.



According to management, Sims is so good about following the company's core values that he is even better than some of the younger employees who work for the business. Like all employees, he went through an interview process where he was one of three candidates for a job. The owner was so impressed with Sims' ability that he was hired.

These are just a few of the positive stories coming from local businesses hiring people with disabilities. Since work on this article began, several more adults with disabilities have been hired by Maple Valley area businesses. Newly hired Trillium clients include Skyler Daniels at Maple Valley Fitness and Brittany Trial at Papa John's Pizza.

As those at management level shared testimonies of their people with disabilities employees, it was quite clear that they were very pleased that they had opened their doors to them. Not only were the employees good dependable workers, but these adults were found to have given back more than expected to the businesses – so much so that they were considered as family.

As one official stated – in a small way, being able to hire people of disabilities was the business' way of giving back to the community. But more and more, the experience is proving to be a win/win for everyone. People with disabilities are shining in their ability to be productive members of society, while businesses are discovering the many blessings that come with hiring a person with developmental disabilities.

For more information about Trillium, check their webpage at: <http://trillium.org>

Also, see KOMO TV's special story on Herb Bartlett at: <http://www.komonews.com/news/local/Every-day--you-see-him-it-actually-makes-your-day-better-219498661.html?tab=video&c=y>