

ESBLN Eastern Shore Business Leadership Network
By Jackie Gast, Director

Where are they? This is the question businesses in our local area have been asking in regard to the availability of people with disabilities who are ready to work. Many progressive businesses are sold on the employment benefits which include prescreened candidates, higher retention rates, comparable attendance and productivity rates. Demand is there but the supply side needs improvement. Fortunately, progress is being made.

A great experience was had for those who participated in the lower shore job fair for people with disabilities coordinated by the Worcester County Development Center (WCDC) at the Worcester County Library, Ocean Pines Branch on March 30. Katie Clogg, Supported Employment Coordinator, WCDC and coordinator of the job fair with the help of job coach, Duwann Mills was relentless in her mission to make the event a success. Her hard work paid off. Over seven different agencies including WCDC, Dove Pointe, and Wicomico County Public Schools attended from the tri county area, and approximately thirty qualified candidates participated. Five employers including Peninsula Regional Medical Center, Lankford-Sysco, Best Temps, and the University of MD, Eastern Shore were present. Atlantic General Hospital and Worcester County Human Resources provided applications. The ESBLN and Salisbury Chamber assisted in providing advisement, employer contacts, and publicity for the event. Employer comments were that the event was "very well organized with a friendly staff and friendly environment."

We've already gotten some feedback from a participating job candidate. While attending a recent meeting, I happened to mention the success of the fair. Don Hackett, Executive Director of Dove Pointe, also at the meeting, reinforced the success in that one of their clients had a scheduled interview as a direct result from the job fair. The event was "very positive... one that Dove Pointe certainly benefited from and enjoyed participating in." Be sure to watch for this event next year, tentatively scheduled for April 2007.

The ESBLN is also "Putting Ability to Work" by contracting with LSE's (Lower Shore Enterprises) High Schools High Tech Program to develop a Wicomico County Accessibility Guide. High school diploma track students with disabilities along with their supervisors have been visiting area restaurants and hotels to see if they are accessible to people with disabilities. The purpose of this guide is informational only and does not necessarily reflect ADA compliance. It's possible for a business to be ADA compliant but not accessible. Obviously, being accessible is the preference! The guide is for visitors with disabilities, and their friends/relatives who travel with them, to let them know whether or not they can get in the door, dine at a table, get through the aisles or use the bathrooms. In addition, the guide will include whether or not the business has wireless capability for laptop use. As a restaurant or hotel, consider this free advertising for your business. Look for this guide in early summer 2006.

Putting Ability to Work – Employers helping employers. For more information, e-mail esblnjg@aol.com or visit www.esbln.org.