

By Jackie Gast, Director

How would your hospital like to increase revenue by \$225,000 through cost savings? Cincinnati Children's Medical Center (CCMC) in Ohio did as a result of hiring a person with a developmental disability.

I recently attended the Maryland: Where Work Matters, Governor's Employer Summit in Baltimore. One of the presenters was Erin Riehle from CCMC who, in 1998, was director of the hospital's emergency department. Being in a position that enabled her to look at budget figures, Erin realized that most of the hospital revenue generated was from treatment of people who have chronic illness or are people with disabilities. Having trouble finding people to fill entry level positions and wanting to "give back" to those who help fund the hospital, Erin contacted an area technology and career development school searching for people with disabilities. She hired a young woman with Down Syndrome as a stock clerk in her department. She excelled in that position. From this success, "Project Search was created which trains and/or places disabled and low-income adults in health care jobs." (AHA [News:Hospital](#). Jobs Program Offers Model for Others, by Mary Ann Costello, 1/1/2002).

Today, Cincinnati Children's Medical Center employs almost 80 individuals with developmental disabilities where many are employed as sterilization techs and stock room techs, as well as in the traditional food service positions. They also successfully employ hundreds of individuals with hearing, sight and other impairments throughout the hospital.

The overall fallout of hiring people with disabilities has been amazing. For Erin, a business-minded individual, it has been revising her thinking process from prejudging abilities to giving individuals the chance to show they can do the job. Increasing expectations of employees with disabilities is key. In addition, the hospital has given selected service providers space at the hospital where they are on hand to help recruit and customize jobs if needed.

Universal Design has been another outcome. In many instances, replacing words with pictures to give directions benefits people with learning disabilities. In several departments, employees without disabilities prefer the picture method and continue to use it even though the person with a disability may have move elsewhere in the hospital. Universal design benefits all employees.

People with developmental disabilities take pride in their work and are very good at routine, complex jobs. Quality is typically excellent. The \$225,000 cost saving came by recycling instruments (a routine, complex job) that had previously been discarded. Erin states, "Performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions has increased dramatically." Human resource diversity numbers are much better as well.

Since emphasizing hiring people with disabilities, hospital satisfaction surveys have "gone through the roof" according to Erin. "Employees serve as role models for our patients and families. Families with relatives with disabilities have increased their gifts to hospital programs. The hospital has experienced increased local, regional and national recognition." Visit www.cincinnatichildrens.org and search "Project Search."

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month.