



Abigail Liu at DVA (see story on page 7)

Partnership Success *Working Together to Achieve Customized Employment*

The essence of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) is the promotion of partnerships so that the One Stop Career Centers established by the Act can offer, under one roof, an expanded array of coordinated and personalized services to individuals needing assistance to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Consequently, the success of One Stop Career Centers in serving people with disabilities depends on the invaluable contributions of their many partners working “silo-free” to ensure coordinated and personalized services for individuals who desire employment.

Partnership is an essential element of successful customized employment opportunities. Working together to achieve common interests and goals, partners in developing customized employment have been able to combine resources for the mutual benefit of each partner. Deliberate, strategic, and solid partnerships help to build associations that increase employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Such outcomes require collaboration of many partners including: employers, jobseekers, service providers, rehabilitation service personnel, One Stop Center services, and many other services and professionals.

Since the inception of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP) at MontgomeryWorks, the One Stop Career Center in Montgomery County, MD, over thirty different partnering agencies have been involved in some way in the coordination of services that have ultimately benefited job seekers with significant disabilities. These partnerships continue to flourish as the project moves toward sustaining systemic improvements for the MontgomeryWorks operation.

This issue of Workforce Development is dedicated to partnerships and will highlight several partnerships created as a result of MCEP. They will illustrate the positive outcomes that can be achieved when multiple parties benefit from working together toward a common goal.

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Partnership in Action

THE EMPLOYER SERVICE NETWORK Partnering with Local Service Providers Offering a Common Front to the Employer Community

Employer recruitment has been a longstanding challenge for workforce investment and disability employment service entities. In fact, employers often express frustration and confusion over the myriad of employment service entities competing for their attention.

One solution to this problem that employers have offered is the idea of creating a single point of contact to make it easier for them to hire candidates from the workforce system. Responding to this circumstance, the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP) recently initiated the Employer Service Network, patterned after a similar effort that has been very successful for the Rhode Island workforce investment system.

The Employer Service Network (ESN) is a formal affiliation of workforce and employment development agencies and providers who can offer an array of services to employers. There are currently more than 20 agency members of the ESN. The ESN has dual purposes: to develop collaborative outreach efforts in order to establish and create effective employer partnerships for job seekers and service provider agencies; and to provide employers with more convenient access to a broad pool of job candidates.

The intention of the ESN is to add value for the county's employers, reduce duplicative efforts that confuse and frustrate employers, and continuously improve Montgomery County's capacity to connect people, employers, jobs, education and services. While its target customer is the

employer, the ESN ultimately serves job seekers who have expanded exposure to potential employers, as well as ESN members themselves who receive continuous professional development essential for quality service delivery to both employers and job seekers.

The ESN has two primary elements. The first is electronic sharing of job leads through a member job posting listserve. This allows member agencies to share job leads and respond to job postings with qualified job candidates to meet employer needs in a timely manner. These job leads are processed in a way that establishes a single point of contact for the employer. The second element is collaboration and networking among member agencies at regular ESN partner meetings allowing for increased opportunity for information sharing, problem-solving, sharing of job leads and referrals, and joint staff training on employer outreach related topics.

Position Announcement and Candidate Referral

When an ESN member obtains a job lead the agency is unable to fill with candidates from its own agency, the member provides the ESN Administrator with detailed information about the job vacancy. The member maintains the relationship with the employer and functions as the Lead Point of Contact for the identified position. Once the information about the opening is received by the ESN Administrator, it is disseminated to all of the ESN members. If a member has a potential candidate for the position, the ESN Administrator connects the member with the Lead Point of Contact who facilitates the intro-

duction to the employer, as illustrated in the chart below. The outcome of the referral is reported to the ESN Administrator in order to gauge the overall success of the ESN.

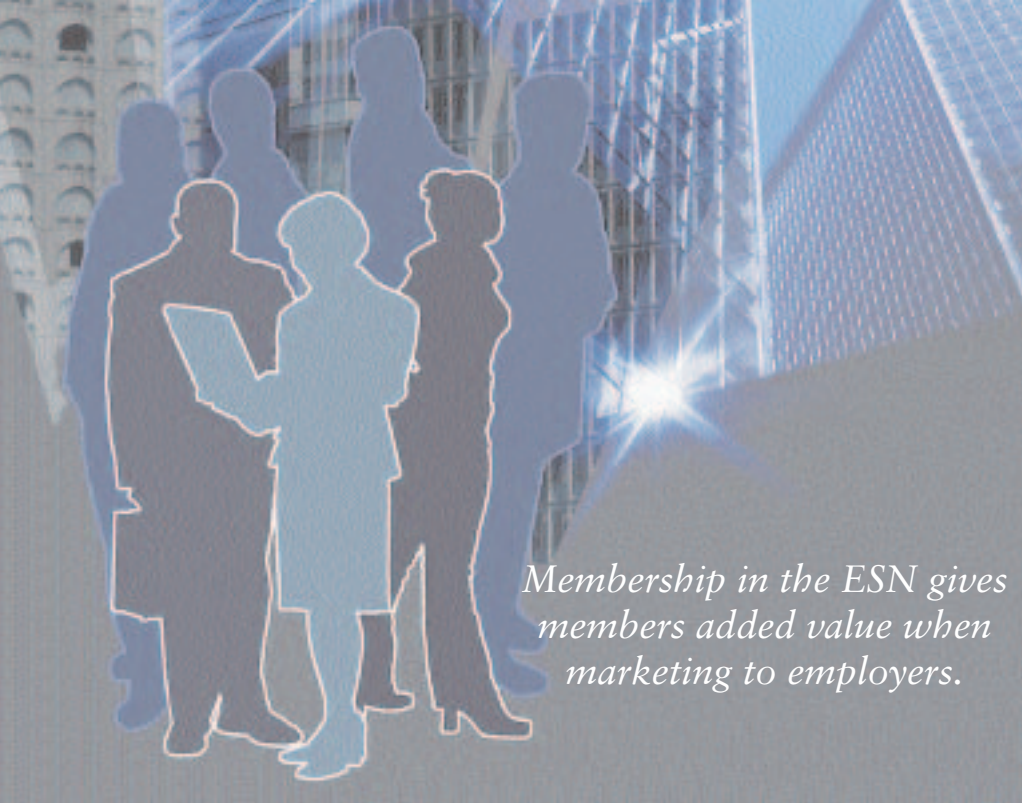
ESN Process

The Lead Point of Contact (LPC), the ESN member agency professional, identifies a job lead the agency is unable to fill with candidates from its own agency, completes a Position Announcement, and sends it to the ESN Administrator who disseminates the Position Announcement to the ESN members.

ESN members review the Position Announcement and screen job candidates to identify a good match and meet the Core Job Referral Standard; if a good match is found, the ESN member completes the Candidate Referral Form and sends it by e-mail to the ESN Administrator.

The ESN Administrator sends the Candidate Referral Form to the LPC. The LPC refers the job candidates to the employer.

The LPC follows up with the employer to verify application status and employer satisfaction.



Membership in the ESN gives members added value when marketing to employers.

ESN Process in Detail

1. Lead Point of Contact Role

The Lead Point of Contact (LPC), that is, the professional who first developed the relationship with a specific employer, identifies a job lead the agency is unable to fill. The LPC completes a Position Announcement, and sends it to the ESN Administrator who disseminates the Position Announcement to the ESN members. ESN members refer screened job candidates for the position. The LPC then refers job candidates to the employer for review.

The LPC is responsible to maintain a relationship with the employer and to collaborate with fellow ESN members to satisfy the employer's identified needs. This provides the employer with a measure of screening and "gate keeping" as well as the maintenance of a trusted relationship with a particular employment development professional rather than trying to work with multiple organizations.

2. Core Job Referral Standard

ESN members agree to screen job candidates to identify a good match between the posted position announcement and job candidates to meet the core standard for job referral. The core standard for job referral is achieved when a candidate is able to perform the functions of the job listed; the intent of the "core standard" is to establish a level of uniformity among ESN members relative to job placement services so that employers are not inundated with improperly matched candidates.

3. Job Referral Screening Process

ESN members screen job candidates to meet the core job referral standard as a service to both the employer and the job seeker. The screening performed by ESN members entails at a minimum: a reasonably detailed inquiry about the candidate's work skills, work behaviors, work history, and work preferences, as well as a review of resume and references.

As part of the screening process, inquiry is made about transporta-

tion, job coaching needs and availability. If a potential match is found, the ESN member informs the ESN Administrator who connects the member with the designated Lead Point of Contact.

4. Follow-up Standards

Members agree to assume responsibility for good customer service to employers through timely and quality initial service and then follow-up to assure that the employers' needs are met. Follow-up is routinely conducted by the Lead Point of Contact to verify status of job application and employer satisfaction. The Lead Point of Contact reports the outcome of candidate referral to the ESN Administrator to facilitate quick turn around of position announcements.

Adding Value

Membership in the ESN gives members added value when marketing to employers. The ESN allows members to offer employers not only their particular pool of jobseekers, but also the combined ESN membership pool of jobseekers for any given position. In addition ESN members have available resources to offer such as: assistance with solutions to business needs, on-site job support, on-site technical assistance to maximize skills of line staff and management in accommodating a diverse workforce, ongoing follow-up service as needed, and access to disability awareness training.

The ESN members have identified the potential for ESN collaboration as a vehicle for countywide employer outreach, joint efforts to identify targeted job seeker interests, and focused industry-specific outreach. The ESN is just underway as of this writing. Future issues of Workforce Development will share updates on

MCEP Update

PARTNERING WITH HIGHER EDUCATION

A New Course for Montgomery College: Advanced Job Development Using Customized Employment Methodology

As previously reported in Issue 3 of *Workforce Development*, a partnership between Montgomery College's Division of Workforce Development and Continuing Education, the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development, and TransCen, was developed to create a new course called Advanced Job Development. The course was created after a focus group of local disability employment service providers concluded that an ongoing need included advanced training for job developers to learn customized employment strategies.

The Advanced Job Development course was designed for supported employment agency personnel who have a desire to learn creative ways to support jobseekers with disabilities in their search for employment opportunities. The course has the potential to contribute to widespread service improvement since the course is adding a new avenue for training that did not previously exist for personnel of disability employment service agencies.

Three offerings of the course have attracted over 50 participants. The course consists of four sessions, meeting every other week for a total of 8 weeks. The sessions are broken down into the following categories:

Session I - Using a Positive Profile to Direct Job Development Activities

- traditional assessment vs. discovery
- using the discovery process to create a positive profile
- planning for job development

Session II - Getting in the Door: Using Informational Interviews as a Tool for Finding Customized Employment Opportunities

- making the request easy to fulfill
- sample informational interview questions
- making careful observations

Session III - Creating and Utilizing Task Lists for Customizing Job Duties

- ineffective and effective task lists
- task lists in action
- an employment proposal to make the "ask"

Session IV - Post-Hire Satisfaction and Customer Service

- outcome and process
- promises and deliveries
- measuring and improving customer satisfaction

The course features a requirement of the participants, after each class, to apply strategies in assisting a job seeker they are currently supporting. This results in immediate application of the learning and this application is reinforced in subsequent participant discussion about the assignments. At the conclusion of the course, each student reports on the progress made in helping job seekers using customized employment methodology.

Montgomery College has committed to offer the course up to four times per year as part of its regular non-credit course offerings in the Division of Workforce Development and Continuing Education. The College offers these courses in collaboration with the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board and the Developmental Disabilities Administration's certified service providers in Montgomery County.

COMMENTS FROM COURSE PARTICIPANTS

"A few times into the Advanced Job Development course, with its strong underpinnings in customized employment methodology and positive profiling, it became apparent that John could do more than we thought he could if the correct emphasis was put on his positive abilities."

"This class has helped me to understand job development in a different way. It has given me the knowledge to change my thinking in what to say and how to say it."

"As a result of this training, I have been successful in negotiating an increased number of hours and tasks for my client to perform on his job."

MCEP Update

Improving Service Delivery for Customers with Psychiatric Disabilities

One of the goals of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP) is to train and educate One Stop staff on serving people with significant disabilities. Recently MCEP partnered with St. Luke's House to develop a series of training events so that front line staff at MontgomeryWorks receive information on how to better assist customers with disclosed or perceived psychiatric disabilities.

St. Luke's House Back to Work Program is a local provider of evidence-based supported employment services for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness (See Spotlight on MCEP Partner: St. Luke's House Back to Work Program on page 7). Since many of St. Luke's House customers are also customers of the One Stop Career Center, St. Luke's House has recently become a partner of MontgomeryWorks. Thus St. Luke's House was very interested in working with MCEP to identify specific strategies that would help front line staff accommodate customers with psychiatric disabilities.

"St. Luke's House provided seven trainings on working with customers with mental health concerns. MontgomeryWorks staff have used information from the trainings to support the career goals of their customers. It has become very clear that leveraging the skills and resources of MontgomeryWorks Partners is the most efficient and effective way to serve customers with significant barriers to entering the workforce."

*Larry Abramson
Vocational Director, St. Luke's House*

St. Luke's House agreed to create and conduct a series of workshops specifically designed for One Stop front line staff at MontgomeryWorks. The One Stop management team, including Maryland's Disability Program Navigator, met to identify the topics that would be most beneficial to the customer base. The following topics were determined to be most appropriate and were each incorporated into a specific workshop on the following topics:

- Counseling and communications skills
- Overview of symptoms, diagnosis, medication & treatment
- Crisis counseling, assessment & referral for people with mental health concerns who want to work
- Mental health services – resources & effective referral strategies
- Career counseling & mental health counseling
- Establishing reasonable accommodations for people with mental health issues

- How to link customers to the resources and services in Maryland's Public Mental Health System; Evidenced Based Practice and Supported Employment

Over 20 MontgomeryWorks staff and partners attended the seven workshops. Reports from staff indicated that the workshops were very beneficial in helping staff to better serve and include persons with mental health issues in the day-to-day customer-service operations of the Core Service resource room. MontgomeryWorks is continuing to work with St. Luke's House to explore additional avenues for creating a long-term partnership that will benefit all One Stop customers, and customers with mental health issues in particular.

"The mental health training series absolutely increased MontgomeryWorks' staff comfort level and ability to provide career and customer services to people with psychiatric disabilities. The excellent attendance at these workshops demonstrated the need for this type of training."

*Maggie Leedy
Maryland Lead Disability Navigator*

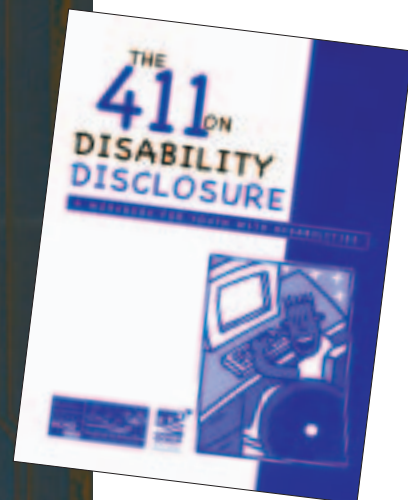
Highlighted Resource

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities

[text] http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/411.html

This publication is designed for youth and adults working with them to learn about disability disclosure. This workbook helps young people make informed decisions about whether or not to disclose their disability and understand how that decision may impact their education, employment, and social lives. Based on the premise that disclosure is a very personal decision, the Workbook helps young people think about and practice disclosing their disability.

This publication, created by TransCen for the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, does not propose to tell a young person what to do. Rather, it helps them make informed decisions about disclosing their disability, decisions that will affect their educational, employment, and social lives.



MCEP Update: Partnering with the Public Schools

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) transition support teachers are assigned to assist youth in special education to prepare for the transition for life after high school, which typically includes planning for employment. One of the more difficult challenges high school special education teachers face is preparing youth and their families for the difference between the entitlements of public education and the eligibility-based guidelines of post school employment services.

Partnering with the Montgomery Works One Stop Career Center is one way the MCPS Transition Services Unit chose to help young people to better understand the choices available to them once they exit the public school system. Once per month, teachers sign up small groups of students for a two hour orientation to One Stop services.

This orientation takes place in the MontgomeryWorks One Stop Career Center in Wheaton. For all students, this is usually their first introduction to a One Stop. As part of the learning experience, students work with the transition teacher to find the best

route, using public transportation, from their base school to the Career Center. They are expected to arrive on time with the understanding that if they are late without a phone call explanation, their orientation will be rescheduled. This requirement is designed to help the students learn that in the business world, time is money, and arriving late to a scheduled appointment is unacceptable.

Once at MontgomeryWorks, staff gives students a tour of the resource room and a short presentation on the services available through the One Stop Career Center. Students also have the opportunity to use the One Stop's computer lab to explore and navigate CareerOneStop.org, specifically the career videos which show the types of work people do in nearly 450 different careers. Students are encour-

aged to bring resumes, and are offered a critique. Responses to basic interview questions are practiced with the group as well.

Throughout the orientation, self-determination is highlighted, that is, the importance for the students to make informed personal decisions about their career direction. Students leave the One Stop with practice giving a firm handshake and answering questions using good eye contact and other basic social behaviors that will impress future employers.

The students' One Stop orientation is an important part of opening their eyes to their responsibilities and the career opportunities that they can pursue with proactive planning, determination, and support.

"I've enjoyed watching the students come into the orientation quiet and keeping to themselves. As the orientation progresses they begin to open up and gain some confidence and knowledge pertaining to new resources and avenues they can pursue for their future. By the end of the orientation the students are smiling, interacting with each other, and leave walking a little taller."

*Alison B. MacKenzie
Cluster Transition Support Teacher*

customized employment in action

Partnerships Result in a Career Path

Abigail Liu is a 20 year old graduate of Montgomery County Public Schools. Since she left school Abby struggled to find the right job that matched her interests, skills, and support needs. She wanted a job that was low pressure, interesting, supportive, not customer-focused, in a small environment with a slow consistent pace, and preferably full-time with benefits.

She was referred to Montgomery Works by St. Luke's House so that she could utilize One Stop services to support her career search (See Spotlight on MCEP Partner below). Through the One Stop Abby linked up with a MCEP Career Specialist who helped her achieve her career goals through a customized job.

The job she obtained was based on negotiations with the General Counsel's Office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). Representatives from this office

worked with Abigail and an MCEP Career Specialist to identify a customized file clerk position in the docket room. After a working interview to assess her ability to perform the job duties and her comfort level with the work environment, Abby was hired for a part-time position with benefits.

The MCEP Career Specialist helped to initially support and orient Abby on the job and facilitated ongoing support from St. Luke's House. After identifying more tasks that Abby was able to perform, she recently had her job responsibilities expanded and this customized position transitioned into a full-time position with a complete benefits package.

This example of customized employment in action is a clear illustration of partnership at work. Not only were the employer's needs met, but expectations were exceeded which paved



the way for the creation of new opportunities. Because of the positive experience with Abby, MCEP and St. Luke's House, the DVA is now considering creating yet another file clerk position.

Through this collaboration, Abby is successfully employed in a job that she finds challenging and satisfying with an employer who is pleased to have the operational needs of the office met with an employee who does quality work. In addition, the partnership is helping St. Luke's House meet its employment placement goals and helping the One Stop address its performance standards. A win-win-win situation!

Spotlight on MCEP Partner

St. Luke's House

St. Luke's House, Inc. is a community-based psychiatric rehabilitation program that helps people live, learn and work successfully in their communities by offering integrated mental health services and community resources. Through its innovative services, St. Luke's House provides long-term responses for individuals with severe mental illness who strive to live in the community. Two of St. Luke's House programs focus on customers with mental health issues.

Back to Work Program

The St. Luke's House Back to Work Program is a rehabilitation program that helps people with psychiatric dis-

abilities find and maintain employment and provides support to the employer and employees on the job as needed. St. Luke's House has partnered with MontgomeryWorks to provide outreach to customers with psychiatric disabilities as described in the article on page 5.

Career Transition Program

The Career Transition Program (CTP) provides high school students with serious emotional disabilities and their families a unique combination of mental health and career/vocational services. Career Transition Specialists help students identify goals related to education, vocational training,

employment, and community participation. These specialists help students utilize the natural supports and community resources they need in order to meet those goals. This program features the close collaboration of St. Luke's House with the Transition Unit of Montgomery County Public Schools. Students participating in the CTP frequently take advantage of MontgomeryWorks services to help pursue their career goals.

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MCEP is committed to and is making every possible effort to ensure that all materials developed, procured, maintained, or used by MCEP are accessible to people with disabilities. Please contact us if you would like to receive this newsletter in an alternative format.

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