

DSS Launches Groundbreaking Initiative To Link People with Disabilities, Employers



See the ability

See how we can work together

Overview

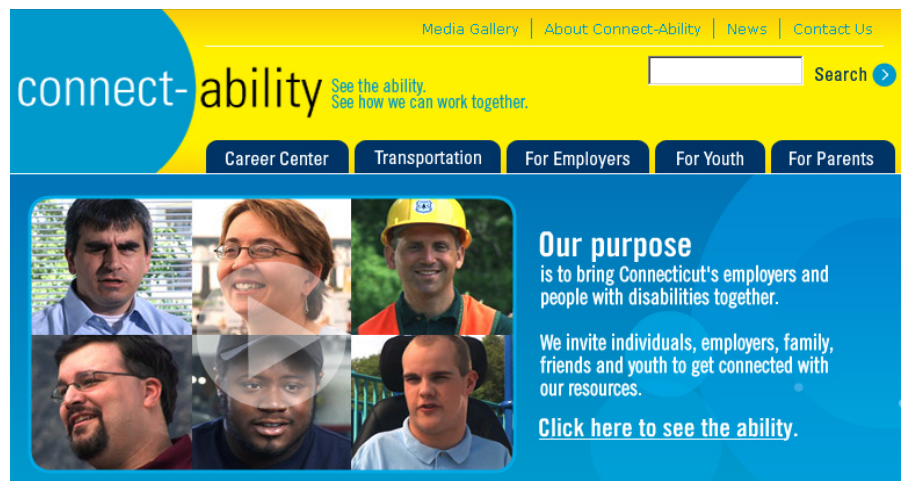
The Department of Social Services recently launched Connect-Ability, an initiative geared to connecting Connecticut businesses and able job seekers with disabilities. Funded through a \$5.1 million grant from the Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Connect-Ability aims to increase employment for Connecticut residents with disabilities, and to raise awareness among employers.

The initiative has two primary customers: employers of all sizes and in all industries who are seeking qualified workers, and individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment or for individuals wanting to retain employment.

According to a needs assessment recently conducted by the University of Connecticut, the employment rates of people with disabilities, as a group, remain low, despite the passage of the ADA and the general movement toward inclusion of people with disabilities. As noted in the literature review, people with disabilities are less likely to be employed than people without disabilities, and when employed, are likely to have less job experience than people without disabilities. There is some evidence that during times of economic downturn, people with disabilities are among the first fired and last hired, and when the economy rebounds, many never return to

the labor force. For these and other reasons, the incomes of people with disabilities tend to be lower, and the prevalence of poverty and reliance on public income and in-kind support programs tend to be greater, relative to people without disabilities. (University of Connecticut Health Center, 2006).

Connect-Ability is organized around a comprehensive strategic plan, spearheaded by DSS' Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). The plan was developed with input from a wide variety of stakeholders in Connecticut: employers, persons with disabilities, associations such as chambers of commerce and business organizations, education professionals, community providers, parents of youth with disabilities, and representatives of state and local government agencies. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted in order to identify barriers keeping people with disabilities from



Did you get connected?

Did you get a job or hire an employee with the help of Connect-Ability?
[Tell us your success story](#)

Connect a Friend

Do you know a friend or colleague who might be interested in Connect-Ability?
[Get them connected](#)

Friends & Family

Do you have a friend with a disability? Find resources to help them on their path to employment.
[Explore the Career Center](#)

Issue Brief

Issue #2
October 2007

Connect-Ability (cont...)



employment and employers from recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities.

This plan is designed to address some of the key barriers for job seekers with disabilities and for businesses, as defined through the statewide needs assessment. The plan has four priority areas:

1. Recruitment/hiring and promoting
2. Transition from school to work
3. Transportation
4. Stakeholder education

Connect-Ability does not directly provide services to match individuals with specific jobs. Instead, our efforts are targeted at removing the barriers that keep the primary customers from finding one another. These barriers include low expectations, inadequately planned transition from school to work, inadequate transportation, and the actual process of recruitment, hiring, and promoting.

Communications and Marketing Campaign

The statewide awareness and education program, launched June 27, 2007, will bring employers and job seekers together to create a richer and more diverse workforce.

The initiative involves a communications campaign including television, radio, online and print advertising and public relations across the State of Connecticut. All communications will point to the program's new website: www.connect-ability.com.

The marketing campaign and website feature several vignettes of Connecticut persons with disabilities who have entered the workforce and who have a variety of disabilities. One video features a Connecticut man who uses a wheelchair and who has his own trucking



James DeVoe, Owner/Operator, J. DeVoe Trucking, Guilford

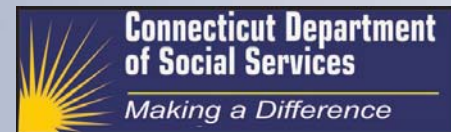
business. BRS provided funding to modify a dump truck (which he purchased) so that he could pursue his career goal of becoming a licensed truck driver. Another vignette profiles a woman who is deaf and is an information technology professional who works for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London. A third video tells the story of a young man with learning disabilities who became a car mechanic and customer service ace.

More individuals will be featured in the months ahead as the Connect-Ability marketing campaign rolls out. But in each case, the emphasis is on a person's abilities, not his or her disability. Real-life employers are featured in the campaign to help demonstrate that in many cases, the adjustments or accommodations needed to employ a person with a disability are not difficult, nor expensive, to make.

Governor M. Jodi Rell is in full support of the new initiative. In a letter to the state commissioners on July 12, 2007, she wrote, "I urge all agencies of state government to become aware of the Connect-Ability initiative, and to recognize the value of highly

Issue Brief

Issue #2
October 2007



Connect-Ability (cont...)

motivated and skilled people with disabilities as a key to a thriving workforce.” The Governor stated that the goal of job expansion and a strong economy, uppermost on Connecticut’s agenda, would be greatly enhanced by the Connect-Ability awareness campaign.

The Connect-Ability website provides the resources employers and people with disabilities need to make employment accessible to all. With information for employers, job seekers, youth and other stakeholders, the site showcases the benefits of a diverse workplace where abilities, not disabilities, are the focus.

Connecting to the Initiative

In your everyday work with Connecticut residents, you connect with many individuals with disabilities. If they are asking about employment options, this initiative provides a central point of contact. You can refer them to the website at www.connect-ability.com or have them call the toll-free number at 1-866-844-1903.



Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski, who addressed the employment summit and presented awards to 6 leading Connecticut corporations for excellence in employment practices, praised the outstanding work of BRS staff in the Connect-Ability initiative.

See the ability. See how we can work together.

Find out how Connect-Ability has the resources that bring Connecticut’s employers and people with disabilities together. Call 1.866.844.1903 or visit connect-ability.com.



Print ad created for Connect-Ability media campaign by Mintz and Hoke Communications Group

To see this and other “Issue Brief” topics on the web, go to www.ct.gov/dss and follow the link for Publications

For more information on the Connect-Ability Initiative, contact us toll-free at 1-866-844-1903, or E-mail at info@connect-ability.com

For more information on any Issue Brief Publication, email Public & Government Relations at pgr.dss@ct.gov