



US Department of Labor New Freedom Initiative Award Recipient

Strategies for Including People with Disabilities in the Green Jobs Talent Pipeline

Chicagoland Metropolitan Area

**December 16, 2009, Round Table Discussion Co-sponsored by the US
Dept. of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy and NTAR
Leadership Center**

The purpose of this presentation is to address a green collar job initiative that is currently ongoing in the Chicago Metropolitan area; to address a specific pilot project directed to mature workers and green job certification ; and, to highlight the need for continued education to dispel the myths and stereotypes directed to people with disabilities that present barriers to their access to green collar job training and employment.

It is important to note while preparing for this presentation and interviewing various leaders that are moving the green collar jobs initiatives forward in the Chicagoland area, very few leaders had thought about the inclusion of people with disabilities into green collar jobs.

Metropolitan Chicagoland Area

The City of Chicago has been involved in green collar initiatives for several years and it is evident that a tremendous amount of activity is directed to the county, city, and state of Illinois in regard to green collar jobs. This includes a City of Chicago Weatherization Program directed to residential homes which is to be completed by individuals that are ex-felons. There are so many initiatives ongoing in the Chicagoland area that reporting on all of the initiatives goes beyond the scope of this presentation. However, in view of the fact that 2/3 of the population in Illinois is centered in the Chicagoland area; there should be more green collar job opportunities for training and employment for people with disabilities.

One of the most significant organizations that has emerged in Chicago is the Chicagoland Green Collar Jobs Initiative (CGCJI). This organization connects interested organizations and companies focused on a green economy and brings them together as collaborative partners in order to enhance green collar job dialogue and initiate action as appropriate.

The *Building a Green Collar Workforce in Chicagoland: A 2009 Report* indicates that the *Chicagoland Green Collar Jobs Initiative* believes green collar jobs are those jobs that enable low-skilled workers to find economic opportunities which dually develop the Chicagoland green economy. In addition, CGCJI states that green jobs are accessible to individuals with significant barriers to employment, but not limited to them. CGCJI conducts quarterly Partner meetings and monthly Steering Committee meetings. The Steering Committee relies on Partner Organizations to assist in driving the work of the initiative. Targeted Partners are *low carbon, high opportunity green collar organizations and companies across the Midwest*. There have been two Green Jobs Summits with the first summit held in December 2007 at Wilbur Wright Jr. College in Chicago with 150 participants and the second summit held at Kennedy-King College in Chicago in 2009 with 300 participants. There will be a 2010 summit which is anticipated to include several hundred more participants. Green collar jobs identified by this initiative include *local jobs in renewable energy, alternative transportation, energy efficiency, water conservation, green building, material reuse, sustainable local food systems, recycling and others*.

Mature Workers

During the summer of 2009, disabilityworks conducted a presentation in Chicago for the National AARP Aging & Diversity Conference. The topic for this presentation was ***Disability Does Not Mean Retirement! Employment Viability Through Workplace Modifications and Accommodations***. Disabilityworks had become interested in mature worker retention as more employers shared that they needed to accommodate their mature workers that had developed disabilities and chronic health conditions. Many mature workers were requesting reasonable accommodations in order to remain on the job. With the economic downturn, research indicates that many mature workers intend to stay on the job at least 2 years longer than anticipated due to the decline in their home value, lower interest rates on savings and reduced value of stocks. Some mature workers intend to work into their 70s. For some mature individuals that have already retired or have not worked at all, they are now confronted with the economics of their life situation and many mature individuals want to enter or re-enter the workforce.

According to Easter Seals, Inc., mature job seekers are rarely successful in obtaining specific skills training in the “green” arena, nor are they often considered viable candidates for entering training programs targeting potential employees for these industries. Typically mature workers are screened out from established WIA funded training programs due to the fact the majority of mature job seekers may only want part-time (20-30 hours per week) employment after receiving training. This reflects a lower entered employment rate for WIA vendors which sets up disincentives for enrolling mature workers. WIA does however provide for a positive outcome if any adult is enrolled into a certificate program and attains a State-recognized credential related to educational skill attainment

(diploma, degree or certificate) or attains occupational skills (license or certification) recognized by a state or a national industry trade body. Easter Seals believes that they have established the perfect partnership to define a successful pathway for mature job seekers and individuals with disabilities to enter community and technical college short-term training/certificate programs. This would enhance their opportunity to become employed in these industry sectors. This pathway will also open the doors for WIA vendors and other community-based agencies to enroll mature job seekers and individuals with disabilities into their programs to offset the cost of training.

Easter Seals, Inc. will augment the workforce development capacity of its Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) to engage with green industries through the development of a “Green Pathway” model that takes mature job seekers from experiential training to formal job training, and connects them with job placement services. This Green Pathway will route SCSEP participants to one of three certificate or continuing education programs in green occupations at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago, and following training will connect them directly to job placement opportunities with Chicago-area employers. The program will be piloted beginning January 2010 in the Chicago metropolitan area, in conjunction with community partners: Wilbur Wright College and Disabilityworks and one of its divisions, the Chicagoland Business Leadership Network (CBLN).

Funded through an ARRA DOL grant **it is important to note that Easter Seals, Inc. submitted the grant proposal to the Dept. of Labor and will be the administrator of this grant.**

Certification Programs Offered by Wilbur Wight Jr. College—Chicago, Illinois

Building Energy Technology Certificate Program

The Building Energy Technologies Program offers an occupational certificate to individuals seeking expertise in the practice application of energy efficiency and renewable energy systems in the building construction industries.

Environmental Technology Certificate Program

The Environmental Technology Program prepares individuals for work in a wide variety of environmental fields. The courses are designed to prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in environmental careers including environmental compliance in public and private sector organizations, pollution prevention, environmental remediation, workplace health and safety, and emergency response preparedness.

Urban Agriculture and Natural Resources Certificate Program

These courses prepare individuals to obtain skills needed to initiate, manage and market the production of agricultural products in the urban setting. The students will also learn how to address various aspects of urban land contamination due to post industrial re-use of contaminated land. In addition the skills training planned include the care and

maintenance of horticultural and park land with the emphasis towards the restoration of natural habitats.

As part of the grant, mature workers will be assessed at the Wilbur Wright Jr. College and a TABE Test will be administered in order to identify skill gaps that may hinder a participant's efforts to successfully complete the program. If skill gaps do exist, those gaps will be addressed through targeted tutoring as mature job seekers and some individuals with disabilities may have limited educational levels that would hinder their progress in these college level training programs. Wilbur Wright Jr. College will enroll participants into their adult education programs and offer appropriate support services to help individuals reach their educational goals. Disabilityworks will provide assistance (accommodations and resources) for any student that has a disability and will provide services where needed to assist in successful completion of the green classes for these individuals. In addition, disabilityworks will be marketing the program to constituents registered online at www.disabilityworks who are mature workers with disabilities as well as reaching out to green companies associated with the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce for potential job placement of mature workers that have completed the certification programs.

Karen Jane McCulloh
Executive Director, disabilityworks
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce