

# Changing attitudes toward disabled

## Groups show how businesses benefit

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With a 4.7 percent national and state unemployment rate, chances are if you want a job, you've got one — unless you have a disability.

Depending on which study or group you rely upon, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities ranges from 40 to 70 percent.

Michael Schneider, a spokesman for [AccessibleEmployment.org](http://AccessibleEmployment.org), said the latest U.S. Census figures say its about 44 percent. That percentage represents people who are actively looking for work, not all people who have disabilities, he said.

It's because of this high percentage that the New Jersey Business Leadership Network and the Henry H. Kessler Foundation created [AccessibleEmployment](http://AccessibleEmployment.org), which is an Internet-based job board connecting people with disabilities to jobs. It works much like [Monster.com](http://Monster.com) and the group launched it on Tuesday.

Companies can post openings and job hunters can post resumes. It's a nationwide site.

Business groups across the state, including The Business Council of Fairfield County, have reported that members find it difficult to find qualified labor so any expansion of the labor pool would help boost the economy.

While not disputing this, two Connecticut-based experts in working with people with disabilities said reducing the high unemployment rate for this group of people isn't just about solving a major labor shortage, it's about recognizing human worth. F

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# Groups bringing disabled to work force

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When you think about the statistics, just about every family in the state of Connecticut probably has a member with a disability, according to Sydney Evans, founder of Envelopes Anyone, which is based in East Haven.

Since 2005, Evans has been training people with disabilities to make envelopes from recycled materials, including old wallpaper and calendars.

A World War II veteran, Evans said it wasn't that long ago that most people thought those with disabilities should be locked away from society. But Evans has seen firsthand the contributions people with disabilities can make.

"They learn and they love it," Evans said.

About Envelopes' goal is to change attitudes about the work force and the environment, he said. It provides training to indi-

viduals and then contracts through nonprofits to make envelopes.

Martin Horan, of Bridgeport-based Production Providers Inc., works with a variety of groups finding employment for the disabled. He has agreements with organizations, including the Kennedy Center, that are based in Westchester and Fairfield counties and much of New Haven County to go find jobs for either a group or for individuals.

He said the biggest problems to overcome are the myths that surround workers with disabilities.

Companies believe hiring a person with a disability will raise costs, create inefficiency and lower morale of other employees, he said.

But many people with disabilities actually don't raise costs, because they are eligible for Medicare benefits, he said, and sometimes companies can receive

tax breaks or even a government-provided supervisor.

In the case of Kennedy Center clients, a supervisor accompanies the employees for a set period of time and helps make sure they understand and complete their job duties.

While the employer must pay the going wage to the Kennedy Center clients, the supervisor's salary comes from a state Bureau of Rehabilitation Services grant, he said.

Some companies have said they are concerned a person with a disability won't be able to come to work as often, but Horan said the vast majority are so determined to prove themselves, their attendance and performance are usually above average.

As for hurting morale, Horan said that's not the case. Employees tend to accept the worker, especially when they learn the new employee will take some of the

more repetitive tasks off their hands.

"When a highly trained legal secretary learns she won't have to do any more shredding, she's for it," he said.

Ultimately, those involved in finding jobs for people with disabilities agreed with Horan that the chief obstacle is educating business owners and workers about the abilities of those who have mental and physical challenges.

*To contact Production Providers, visit*

*[www.productionproviders.com](http://www.productionproviders.com).*

*For information on Envelopes Anyone, visit*

*[www.envelopes-anyone.com](http://www.envelopes-anyone.com).*