

People with disabilities make up largest job-seeking minority group

By Audrey Reed
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Job seekers with disabilities make up the single largest minority group looking for employment, according to the nonprofit group Accessible Employment.org

With about 30 million Americans between the ages of 16 and 64 having a disability and with only 18 million being employed, the unemployment rate within that demographic stands at 44 percent — significantly higher than the national unemployment rate of 4.7 percent.

"A lot of people don't see past the disability," said Dan Honig chief operating officer of AccessibleEmployment.org. "So the unemployment rate is much higher than it should be. As a result, you've got some tremendously talented for people looking for work."

The Web site, based in New Jersey, posts job listings by employers and targets job seekers with disabilities.

Honig and Barbara Latasa, president and CEO of Glendora Employment Agency Inc., said it's important not to overlook an applicant because of a disability — particularly in today's job climate where it can sometimes be difficult to find skilled workers.

"I think with the job market the way it is, the person with the most skills and the most talent is going to be in the forefront and be the most sought after," Latasa said.

Latasa, who has placed a number of people with disabilities at jobs over the years, can

recount many times when a person with a disability has done well at a job.

"I have placed a completely deaf person, who did a remarkable job," Latasa said, adding that the worker initially was hired on a temporary basis and later went full-time.

However, not all cases work out, she said.

"We have interviewed people with various disabilities, some of whom have been very talented," she said. "It's unfortunate that smaller companies can't make accommodations for these people."

Accessible Employment reports that the average cost of workplace accommodations for the disabled in 2006 was \$600 or less. The group said that because many people with disabilities are covered by Medicare and Medicaid, a company can actually save on health care costs when they hire someone with a disability.

Latasa said that the most important factor when placing people with disabilities is that they have the skills for the job.

"The areas we find the most difficult are people with disabilities who are not prepared for the work force," Latasa said, adding that all job applicants have to complete the same process and are treated equally.

AccessibleEmployment.org is free to job seekers. The annual subscription service is available to employers and individual postings cost \$200.

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