



Massachusetts – Career Pathway Pilot for Individuals with Disabilities

The Challenge: Job Seekers with disabilities are often at a disadvantage when seeking employment due to lack of experience as well as attitudinal barriers of managers and employers.

The Strategy: The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grantee in Massachusetts at the Workforce Central Career Center location partnered with the University of Massachusetts Memorial Medical Center (UMMMC) to support individuals with disabilities gain skills that later resulted in a strong track record of them finding employment. The DEI project and UMMC collaborated to develop an internship program to train individuals with disabilities in Patient Access Services at the UMMC medical facility. A Patient Access Service Representative is an entry-level position that serves as a great starting point for those looking to build a career in the healthcare field. To support the interns get the skills they need for this internship, the DEI project partnered with a local community college to provide basic training on how to provide quality patient care services. The combination of classroom training and real-world experience allowed the interns to maximize their potential and helped them achieve their professional goals.

The Plan: The career pathway design incorporated the following steps:

- The Community College prepared students to handle:
 - patient encounters;
 - patient customer service and areas related to intake; and
 - coordination of a patient's healthcare experience.
- Candidates worked in an internship capacity at the UMMC for 8 weeks, 15 hours per week learning various aspects of the patient access services role.
- Interns were paid through funding from the Disability Employment Initiative but could also be funded through Titles I, II, or IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- Internships were competitive. UMMC interviewed graduates of the Patient Access class and selected the students they thought best fit.
- Outreach was performed by the Disability Resource Coordinator to Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Based Organizations and the American Job Center, who subsequently referred qualified candidates to the training.
- Costs were shared and collaboration was done with the local Vocational Rehabilitation office.

Two Internship Case Examples: Emma was placed in a temporary position with UMMMC and stated that her internship "...was what [she] needed to change careers. [She is] so grateful to have had the opportunity to learn new skills and start working again!" Sandra is another intern who is now working full time after years out of the workforce because of her disability. She stated that her time at UMMMC was "invaluable" and she "was able to do something [she] never before thought [she] would be able to do."

Management Perspective: The internship program was "a great experience for both interns and our department. A solid learning opportunity for them and a big help to us."

System/Workforce/WIOA Outcomes: With little to no medical or administrative background, nearly all the interns were successfully employed as a result of this experience. Twelve individuals were placed in internships at UMMMC with one hired into a permanent position, two into temporary positions, and others were quickly able to find full-time employment elsewhere.

Key Career Pathway Elements: Identify Industry Sector and Engage Employers; Build Cross Agency Partnerships (WIOA Workforce and Education); and Identify Funding Needs and Sources.

Additional Resources on this Topic:

- [WorkforceGPS Disability and Employment Community](#) – An online resource destination for the American Job Center network, people with disabilities, and employers. In addition, this is a resource for all key stakeholders who partner with the workforce system to provide services and programs to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.
- [WorkforceGPS Career Pathways Collection](#) – An online resource that helps workforce development leaders, practitioners, and policymakers expand state and local career pathways efforts currently underway or being planned. The collection of resources will enhance knowledge, skills, and expertise in building effective career pathways systems.
- [Career Pathways: Systems and Program Level Strategies](#) – This two-part webinar series examines Career Pathways at the System and Program Level.
- [Apprenticeship](#) – The U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy profiles efforts that promote inclusive models for apprenticeships through detailed guides and video tutorials.
- [The Employer \(Job Driven Resources\)](#) – This section of the WorkforceGPS Disability and Employment Community includes resources for employers to help effectively recruit, retain, and advance people with disabilities to enter or return to the labor force.