

Grant helps area disabled secure employment

United Way involvement in the community goes beyond funding of programs at its member agencies and distributing venture grants to selected nonprofit organizations each year. It is also a partner in many coalitions working to improve the services available to area residents.

A recent example is United Way's participation in a federally funded program to assist people with disabilities in locating and using programs designed to help them secure employment.

Use of services low by disabled area residents

While the federal government has provided funding to the state and local communities to implement employment services for the disabled for many years, only a small percentage of eligible people nationwide choose to use the services. To help determine why usage is so low, a two-year federal grant was awarded to the **Broome-Tioga Workforce Development** in partnership with the workforce system of Chenango, Delaware, and Otsego counties, and other area organizations that serve persons with disabilities. In New York the workforce system is coordinated by the state, but is usually run by each county through **One Stop Career Centers**, such as the **Broome Employment Center on Front Street in Binghamton**. United Way was a member of the five-county partnership from its inception.

The two-year project had many goals, including making sure that sufficient services for the disabled were available at each of the area One Stop Centers,



training One Stop employees so that they would be more skilled in working with people who have disabilities, and eliminating physical and other barriers that restrict the use of the One Stop Centers by those with disabilities.

While United Way was involved in all aspects of this project, it was primarily concerned with marketing—both providing employers with information about the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and informing those with disabilities about the services available to them at the One Stop Centers.

Area employers that hire disabled workers find benefits to business

United Way reviewed information from several area advertising agencies and selected **Fred Riger Advertising** of Binghamton to develop and implement a marketing plan. The resulting marketing

effort kicked off in May of this year with a seminar for area businesses featuring testimonials by area organizations that had hired people with disabilities and were happy with the results.

This was followed with radio, television, and newspaper ads beginning in June aimed at both employers and those with disabilities. Among the points mentioned were that people with disabilities often outperformed other employees and stayed with their jobs longer. Also mentioned were the tax credits and other benefits to those businesses hiring the disabled.

All area One Stop Centers adapt to use by disabled

The full impact of the two-year program has not been measured yet, but it appears that more than 500 disabled persons have received services through the programs associated with this grant. All One Stop Centers in the five-county area have the proper adaptive technologies to assist job-seekers and over 30 of their employees have received certification for demonstrating the skills necessary in assisting disabled persons with securing employment.

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