

March 13 Bulletin Article - MATCH: Meeting A Tremendous Challenge

With Nanaimo's unemployment rate at 5.9%, the lowest it has been in over 20 years, it is becoming increasingly necessary to engage into the workforce all pools of potential labour. At the end of March, EDG, in partnership with the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, will be undertaking a one-day forum. The MATCH Forum will facilitate dialogue between employers and those representing persons who are work ready and living with a disability. The day's outcome will have matched employers with employees, and given all participants the resources and tools to continue filling workforce gaps.

According to the 2001 census, there were approximately 300,000 BC residents with a disability, of which only 44% were employed. 3,000 are Nanaimo residents and are ready, willing and able to join the workforce. Why is 56% of this workforce underutilized? Some employers are reluctant to hire persons with disabilities due to lack of knowledge on disability issues. One such perception is around mobility issues, when in fact only 10.5% of persons with a disability have a mobility-related disability.

One goal of this forum is to dispel common myths and attitudes by educating employers. Thomas Goodwin of WorkAble Solutions, an initiative of the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, wants to spread these and other positive messages around this issue. That is, British Columbians with disabilities have virtually the same educational achievements as those without disabilities; 90% of persons with disabilities rated average or better on job performance than their non-disabled colleagues; and the vast majority of persons with disabilities who are currently employed require no special workplace accommodations.

At the MATCH Forum, employers will hear from colleagues who have had success hiring persons with disabilities. They will also learn about the diverse network of agencies and service providers able to assist them in hiring and retaining employees. They will then be provided with leads for employees matching the skill sets they require. Wade Simmons of Amber Education Services Ltd., who is coordinating the MATCH Forum, is confident that this event will be more effective than a traditional career fair. Simmons says, "MATCH is unique in that it is not a passive career fair but a working session to find candidates which fit the skill needs that employers are looking for. In a fast paced, energetic atmosphere, employment agencies will be representing the hundreds of workers they have on file and literally MATCHing workers with employers."

The MATCH Forum will be held on Thursday, March 27, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. To find out more about this EDG initiative and how it can benefit your business, contact Katie Ferland, Economic Development Coordinator, at katie.ferland@nanaimo.ca or (250) 755-4465.