

Employers Drawn to Business Leadership Network in Greater Kansas City

By Daniel Lassley, Working Healthy Employment Specialist

A number of prominent businesses in the greater Kansas City area are taking an interest in employing people with disabilities. In April, several employers came together to discuss the formation of a Business Leadership Network (BLN) for the greater Kansas City area. A BLN is a business-to-business organization whose members share best practices for the recruitment, hiring and management of people with disabilities. Supported by the USBLN, chapters exist in more than 32 states, representing more than 5,000 businesses.

Because this is a bi-state effort, representatives from disability organizations in both Kansas and Missouri are involved to help start the Greater KC BLN. Kerrie Bacon with the Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns and Daniel Lassley of Working Healthy are working closely with Linda Baker, Executive Director of the Missouri Governor's Council on Disability. Some of the noteworthy businesses participating are AMC Entertainment, UMB Bank, KCP&L, and Target. These businesses are eager to tap into new sources of talent and reap the benefits of becoming diverse and inclusive employers.

Keith Wiedenkiller, Senior Vice President for AMC Entertainment, notes that businesses that recognize opportunities like the BLN are likely to gain a competitive advantage. "Companies that embrace diversity in all its forms are better able to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing marketplace," Wiedenkiller said. "We're excited to make AMC a leader in making people with disabilities a priority."

The BLN efforts don't stop in Kansas City. South Central Kansas has started organizing a service-provider counterpart to the BLN called the Provider Leadership Network (PLN). Christine Pechstein, Employment Specialist with

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Statewide Data Inventory Soon to be Released

On October 19th, 2007, stakeholders involved or interested in the use of Medicaid and disability data from Kansas gathered on the University of Kansas campus in Lawrence to initiate efforts to improve data sharing and information exchange. The day's activities, which drew more than thirty participants, generated a number of questions, such as:

- "How do I use disability data?"
- "What value has it been?"
- "What would be needed to track outcomes more effectively?"
- "What data could be used to increase awareness of health, employment and quality of life issues for persons with disabilities in Kansas?"

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Benefits Specialists' Corner

This issue features *Working Healthy* Benefits Specialist Karen Baessler from the Pratt area SRS office. Karen covers southwest Kansas, including Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane, Ness, Hamilton, Kearny, Finney, Hodgeman, Stanton, Grant, Haskell, Gray, Ford, Edwards, Kiowa, Stafford, Pratt, Morton, Stevens, Seward, Meade, Clark, Comanche, and Barber counties. Karen can be contacted at (620) 672-5955 ext. 211, or by emailing GKSB@srs.ks.gov.

How to Navigate the Social Security Work Incentive System

Employment can be a rewarding experience, providing higher income, increased self-esteem, social opportunities, etc. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to weigh increased income with potential loss of Social Security benefits. How do you obtain the information necessary to make an informed choice? Working Healthy Benefits Specialists are available to assist with this complicated Social Security information. This information is available for FREE!! YES, truly something for FREE! No strings attached.

Working Healthy Benefits Specialists can meet with persons individually or in small groups. Currently, we are offering workshops for consumers and providers that include information about many of the Social Security Work Incentive programs, including:

- Earned Income Exclusions
- Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE)
- Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS)
- Student Earned Income Exclusion
- Blind Work Expense (BWE)
- 1619(a) and 1619(b)
- Working Healthy, the Kansas Medicaid Buy-In program

During these presentations, we can also provide information about other programs, such as:

- SSI and SSDI
- Medicaid with a spenddown
- Medicare and Medicare Subsidy
- HCBS Waivers
- Food Stamps
- Subsidized housing
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Workforce Centers

Did you know you can even apply for Working Healthy even though you are not eligible for a Social Security cash benefit? We can assist you through this process.

Working Healthy Benefits Specialists are located in SRS offices across the state of Kansas. Contact the Benefits Specialist in your area to set up individual or small group meetings. **WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION!**

To get in touch with the Working Healthy Benefits Specialist closest to you, call 1-800-449-1439 or visit our website at www.workinghealthy.org

-Karen Baessler, Working Healthy Benefits Specialist

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Prairie Independent Living Resource Center in Hutchinson, is leading the charge to bring service providers together in order to present a more unified, professional front to the area's employers. "When service providers stop competing and begin cooperating it's the job seeker who wins," Pechstein said. The South Central Kansas PLN will offer members greater access to more employers, as well as access to professional development and networking opportunities.

For more information, please contact Daniel Lassley at (785) 368-6454 or Daniel.Lassley@khp.ks.gov.

... 'Statewide Data Inventory' continued from page 1...

As part of a road map for improved data sharing and information exchange, the concept of a "data connector" was discussed. In order for a data connector that links Medicaid and disability data to be effective, participants mentioned the immediate need for a comprehensive inventory of data relevant to persons either running programs related to people with disabilities in Kansas or doing disability-related research. Consequently, Working Healthy staff at the University of Kansas worked with staff across state agencies to produce the Data Inventory on the Employment and Health of Kansans with Disabilities. The Inventory is a first effort to compile a comprehensive data inventory on employment and health of Kansans with disabilities and will be published in August 2008. It will be a living document, kept current and available online at www.workinghealthy.org.

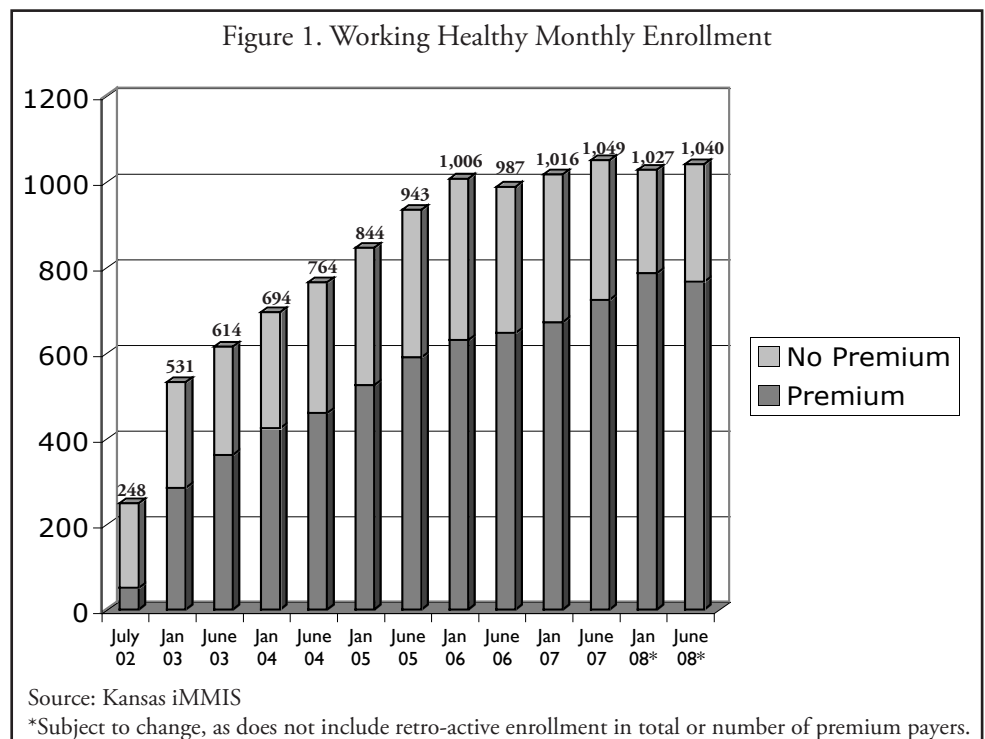
Please address any questions about this effort to Dr. Michael H. Fox, Professor in the Department of Health Policy & Management, University of Kansas Medical Center (mfox2@kumc.edu); (913) 588-2687).

Working Healthy Enrollment & Premium Statistics

By Noelle K. Kurth, M.S., KU Evaluation Team

Working Healthy began enrolling participants in July 2002. Figure 1 shows enrollment trends over time. The initial three years of the program were marked by rapid growth, with more gradual growth in recent years. Nevertheless, enrollment has consistently increased as Kansans with disabilities realize that Working Healthy meaningfully supports their employment efforts.

Further, the number of enrollees paying premiums has continued to rise dramatically. As of June 2008, approximately 75% of Working Healthy enrollees were earning enough to be required to pay a monthly premium. Premium amounts paid by individuals are based on a sliding scale based on income, but are never more than 7.5% of total monthly income. Increases in the number of premium payers indicate enrollees in Working Healthy are steadily increasing their earnings, paying taxes and helping to offset their Medicaid costs.



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Additional copies and copies in alternate formats are available upon request by writing the University of Kansas, CRL - Division of Adult Studies, Attn: Noelle, JR Pearson Hall, Room 521, 1122 West Campus Rd., Lawrence, KS 66045-3101, by calling (800) 449-1439, or by emailing, pixie@ku.edu

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