

# PERCEPTION IS NOT REALITY

ARC BROWARD AIMS TO BRIDGE THE UNEMPLOYMENT GAP AMONGST THOSE WITH DISABILITIES BY EQUIPPING THE WORKFORCE AND DEBUNKING MISCONCEPTIONS

WRITER PETE STEVENSON

Arc Broward is an organization that has been assisting people with disabilities for over 40 years. A primary emphasis has been to give job-seeking individuals a better opportunity to find a long-term career rather than a part-time job. This is no easy objective. The Florida Chamber Foundation reported that 63 percent of people with disabilities are not active in the workforce. The obstacles may be high, but many of these barriers are in the minds of potential employers and not in the hard work of the disabled.

Arc Works, a division of Arc Broward, helps to break down the myths and misconceptions potential employers may have about hiring people with disabilities. As Arc Broward COO Julie Price says, “Our business development people are tasked with going out and speaking to business owners and hiring managers asking, ‘What could it look like in your workplace to employ an individual with a disability?’ It happens organically, with these one-on-one conversations. And this notion of them being a financial burden does not exist.” In fact, studies show that 80 percent of the time, work accommodations for people with disabilities cost an organization less than \$100. Also, these accommodations, made for employees with disabilities, have been found to benefit a company’s older population as well.

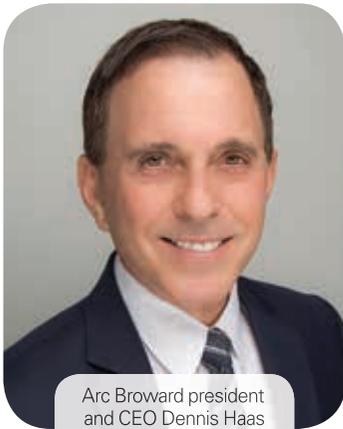
Arc Works provides the necessary training, skills, and ongoing support to ready people with disabilities to seek and maintain long-term employment. They also offer certification and professional job coaching to ensure the long-term success of an employee in his or her employment. “We give job seekers the ability to earn accredited certificates in several industries and to get experience to build their resume in the companies that Arc Broward owns outright,” explains Dennis Hass, president/CEO of Arc Broward.

Arc Works recently opened a 2,600 square-foot space that holds classes, seminars, and speaker programs to keep members connected professionally and socially. This space

Students receive training and assistance at Workbar, a new Arc Works resource hub located near Downtown Fort Lauderdale



Arc Broward client Erik, executive chef Steven Ostashev, and Brio general manager Rachel Kelley Perz



Arc Broward president and CEO Dennis Haas



Arc Broward COO Julie Price

is known as Work Bar. “The reason we located Work Bar near Downtown Fort Lauderdale is that it is smack dab in the epicenter of the Broward business community. The single best thing we can do is have a business owner meet our students and job seekers,” said Haas.

Work Bar brings in people from a wide variety of industries as speakers to interact with individuals with disabilities who are passionate about not only finding a job but also a career. “There may be industries that have lent themselves to more of what we think had worked best for people with disabilities, but that has changed in recent decades. People with disabilities have as varied career interests as everyone else,” said Haas. Price echoed those thoughts. “By exposing job seekers to a variety of industries and jobs, they then have a choice to express their likes for a career, thus having a better chance to succeed. Moreover, the employer will have less turnover.” In fact, hiring a worker with a disability is both a retention and employment strategy for some companies. One national

company reported that their turnover rate for individuals with disabilities was 20 percent compared to a 150 percent turnover rate among non-disabled employees. The same national survey found that 92 percent of customers felt more favorable toward businesses that hire individuals with disabilities.

Rachel Perz, general manager of the Brio Tuscan Grille in Plantation has been delighted and impressed with the two employees she hired from Arc Broward. Perz has a family member with disabilities and did not need to be convinced by the hard work and dedication of people with disabilities. In fact, Perz says, “We have recently promoted one of the individuals from Arc Broward and are looking to hire another individual to fill that position.”

Increasing the percentage of people with disabilities that get hired is not easy. The change happens on the ground level moving opinions one mind at a time. Arc Works is doing just that – transforming people’s lives by providing them with an opportunity to have a career while becoming a valued member of the workforce. 



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