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Employers Like What They See at Job Fair for Individuals with Visual Impairments

Five Massachusetts Organizations Team Up to Address Joblessness among People Who Are Blind

Cambridge, Mass. – Thirty top-tier Boston employers met with more than 70 job candidates on Tuesday at a job fair. That in itself is not remarkable. The job seekers were well-educated, experienced and ready to take on new challenges. Nothing unusual for a quality job fair. What was exceptional is that at this event, all of the candidates for employment were blind or visually impaired.

On Tuesday morning, October 20, Carroll Center for the Blind, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), National Braille Press, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and Perkins School for the Blind presented the 5th Annual Job Fair for Individuals with Visual Impairments, “Changing Lives One Career at a Time,” hosted at Radcliffe, Helen Keller’s alma mater, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

All 30 employers hosted information tables. Fifty job interviews were held on site. Massachusetts General Hospital, Granite Communications, State Street Financial, Tufts Health Plan, Harvard University, the Museum of Science and Museum of Fine Arts/Boston were among the organizations looking for new hires.

In his opening remarks, MCB Commissioner Paul Saner called the job fair “a quintessential collaborative event.” Speaking for all sponsoring organizations and job seekers, he said, “I want to thank the Greater Boston business community for being such supportive partners.”

Hiring managers on the scene were duly impressed by the caliber of candidates they met. Job seekers’ areas of expertise ranged from a data analyst with a background in economics and philosophy, to a one-time restaurateur turned realtor, to a certified paralegal who is fluent in both English and Portuguese.

“Wilmer-Hale is here because we’ve made a commitment and an initiative to have a more diverse population of employees,” said Human Resources Coordinator Samantha DeTore, “Really, it’s a win-win. We get great, qualified candidates that we otherwise wouldn’t have found. And we get to help people out a little who might not have been given a chance elsewhere. There’s a lot of great, qualified people here. We made a lot of great connections.”

Job applicants were clients of MCB or the Carroll Center or graduates of Perkins, the first school for the blind in the US. Perkins President and CEO, Dave Power, pointed to the reasons employers sought out this talent pool. “Company leaders know the strategic benefit of a diverse workforce. Employers who attend this particular job fair understand the value of different perspectives in achieving their business goals.”

The unemployment rate among Americans with a visual impairment is more than double the national rate for those without a disability, according to the most recent [American Community Survey](#) data. The great majority of job seekers who have impaired vision never reach the interview stage – despite having the education and skills to successfully perform a wide range of jobs. Many more do not participate in the workforce at all. The goal of this event is to create a positive impact on the Commonwealth by bringing talented individuals together with effective public resources and the energies of forward-looking businesses and non-profit organizations.

Radcliffe Institute Director of Human Resources Chuck Curti spoke to the power of the job fair to effect genuine change. “Each day we read or hear news about things that distress us, and we wish we could do something about it,” Curti said. “Well today, whether you’re a recruiter or a volunteer, you have the opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life.”

J. William Budding, 24, was a job seeker at the 2014 event after moving to Massachusetts from Iowa to attend programs at the Carroll Center for the Blind. Budding related the impact the job fair had on his landing an internship at State Street and more recently being hired by the Harvard Divinity School. “When I attended the job fair... it really gave me the opportunity to network... demonstrating that I am someone with a visual impairment [and that] I’m also a qualified candidate.”

The job fair is held yearly during October, [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#) #NDEAM. The event has special significance this year, the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and because Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker plans to release his unemployment task force report in November.

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About the sponsors:

The Carroll Center empowers individuals who are blind and low vision by providing rehabilitation skills, technology training, and career development opportunities so they can achieve independence and self-fulfillment. www.carroll.org

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), an agency of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, provides the highest quality rehabilitation and social services to individuals who are legally blind, leading to independence and full community participation. MCB accomplishes this critical mission by working in partnership with consumers who are legally blind, families, community agencies, health care providers, and employers. www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcb/

National Braille Press (NBP). A non-profit braille publisher, National Braille Press promotes literacy for blind children through outreach programs and provides access to information by producing information in braille for blind children and adults. www.nbp.org

Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Founded in 1893 as Radcliffe College, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study is a division of Harvard University that is dedicated to creating and sharing transformative ideas across the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences. www.radcliffe.harvard.edu

Perkins School for the Blind, founded in 1829 as the first school of its kind in the US, is a multifaceted organization working around the world to prepare children and young adults who are blind with the education, confidence and skills they need to realize their full potential. www.perkins.org