

Promising Practices: AMC Entertainment's FOCUS Program



Background

The Furthering Opportunities Cultivating Untapped Strengths (**FOCUS**) program began in 2010 through a partnership between AMC Entertainment and the Autism Society of America. Prior to 2010, AMC Entertainment and the Autism Society together developed AMC's Sensory Friendly Films program in which first run movies are shown in a sensory friendly environment that takes into consideration the different needs of individuals with autism. Given the success of the Sensory Friendly Films program, AMC and the Autism Society decided to establish a competitive work program for young adults with autism. AMC's main objectives were to go beyond compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act; remove barriers to employment for individuals with autism; replicate the program in all AMC theatres nationwide; and eventually include other disability groups.

FOCUS is a competitive work program where individuals with disabilities are required to meet the same criteria as all other job applicants. Individuals are hired based on their ability to do the work; they earn the same wages and are eligible for the same benefits as all other associates. The most common types of jobs held by **FOCUS** participants include ushers, concession workers, porters and box office cashiers.

FOCUS' pilot program was launched at one theatre location in Kansas City, MO. Eight months after the pilot concluded, the program had been replicated at 70 AMC theatres and by April 2011, all 300+ AMC theatres had implemented the program. Feedback on the program has been very favorable; 90% of managers ranked **FOCUS** associates as meeting job expectations or higher. Associates hired through **FOCUS** have been described by many AMC managers as great employees, punctual, hardworking, leaders and inspirational to others.

What is the FOCUS Program?

FOCUS' main objective is to provide employment opportunities to qualified individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Common challenges faced by people with autism can include difficulty in social situations and communicating with others, sensitivity to sensory stimuli, engaging in repetitive behaviors or interests, and/or learning challenges.

FOCUS uses a hiring process that takes into consideration the extra support that some individuals may need; key components include:

The Traveling Interview – A "traveling interview" or walking tour of the facility is used in place of a standard sit-down interview. The manager walks with the applicant to the various work

WorkWithoutLimits

Putting abilities to work in Massachusetts.

Work Without Limits is a statewide network of engaged employers and innovative, collaborative partners that aims to increase employment among individuals with disabilities. Our goal is to position Massachusetts as the first state in the nation where the employment rate of people with disabilities is equal to that of the general population.