

# Due to a tight labor market, companies are struggling to find employees...

**WPS Health Insurance** has actively recruited and hired people with disabilities for many years. This philosophy and practice has given them the opportunity to consider a group of potential employees who are often overlooked by many employers.

Peter Windschiel, Director of Employee Relations for WPS, said, "People with disabilities are a great resource with many skills to offer employers."

With more than 3,100 employees, WPS is a major administrator for federal health insurance programs including Medicare and TRICARE. WPS also provides coverage for many employers and individuals throughout Wisconsin, including health, dental, vision, life, and disability coverage.

Recent growth at WPS is making it necessary for the company to tap into every human resource available. Because of changes in benefits to U.S. military personnel and retirees (TRICARE), administrative services that WPS has provided to the Department of Defense for the past 43 years will be expanding. The company is currently adding over 550 new positions in 2001.

In addition to hiring people with disabilities through their standard recruitment process, WPS works closely with several organizations in the Madison area that specialize in finding supported and transitional employment for people with disabilities. These organizations include Responsive Employment Services (RES), Creative Community Living Services, Salvation Army, and Yahara House. According to Kim Schutte-meier, WPS Manager of Employee Relations, "We worked with the LaFollette High School Vocational Program to hire students with disabilities." These relationships not only benefit the student by providing employment, but also help WPS to fill positions.

According to Windschiel, 46 WPS employees have self-identified themselves as having a disability. Out of those 46 employees, nine either work limited hours or participate in the WPS Homeworker Program. This program provides an innovative means for the homebound to work for WPS without leaving their homes. It gives people the opportunity to be productively employed who might otherwise not be able to work. Through the Homeworker program, WPS messengers deliver and pick up completed work from the employee's home.

*"People with disabilities  
are a great resource  
with many skills to  
offer employers."*

WPS has actively recruited people with disabilities for a variety of administrative and technical positions including programming, claims processing, customer service, and clerical. The company also provides comprehensive training programs including customer service lasting six weeks and four weeks for claims processing.

Over the past six years, Barb Aguilera, Medicare Supervisor, has supervised four WPS employees with disabilities who were referred by RES. All of the employees had a combination of physical and cognitive disabilities, some of them severe. She said, "Supervising employees with disabilities isn't different than supervising any other employee".

Aguilera has also worked with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in making accommodations for employees. For example, DVR staff helped make adjustments for a workstation to an employee who uses a wheelchair.

To accommodate employees with disabilities, WPS has provided various adaptations, including the installation of power-assisted doors, sign language interpreters, ergonomic chairs, restructured work stations, and special written and verbal instructions.

Windschiegel said providing accommodations has been a fairly straight-forward process for WPS. "We ask the person what they need in order to do their job. Most of the time, they're able to tell us, and we're able to fit their needs."

In cases where the individual may not know exactly what accommodation is needed, WPS has sought the help of people and agencies that specialize in employing people with disabilities. In one situation, WPS worked with DVR when an employee's repetitive motion injury made typing impossible. DVR assisted WPS in restructuring the job. According to Schutte-meier, "It was a win-win situation for everyone." WPS kept a dedicated employee; the employee continued working in a job she enjoyed.

Evan Adams, Manager of Employee Relations, added that, "WPS recently hired two hearing-impaired individuals for claims processing and accommodated them by providing interpreters for training."

Because of its experience and interest in employing individuals with disabilities, it was natural for WPS to take a leadership role by participating in the Business Leadership Network (BLN).



Born and raised in Wisconsin, WPS Health Insurance has maintained a position of financial strength throughout its 55-year history. Today, WPS is one of the largest health insurance companies in Wisconsin. Although not exempt from federal, state, or local taxes, WPS is one of the only insurers in the state maintaining a not-for-profit status. WPS is committed to safeguarding avenues to quality, cost-effective health care.

WPS Health Insurance serves the individual and group health insurance needs of nearly 200,000 Wisconsin residents, in addition to processing the Medicare Part B claims of more than 4 million seniors in Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota. WPS also processes U.S. Department of Defense TRICARE claims for more than one million military personnel and their families in several states and foreign countries. It has diversified lines of business, including The EPIC Life Insurance Company, External Technology Solutions, and adtec (Administrative and Technical Services.)



The EPIC Life Insurance Company  
InsurTec Administrative Services

1717 W. Broadway—P.O. Box 8190—Madison, WI 53708-8190  
www.wpsic.com • (608) 221-4711