

# Dialogue



***The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, Fall/Winter 2013***

## **disABLED Interns Prepared and Ready to Work For You**

Lisa Harrison, MBA, EEO Compliance Officer and Systems Administrator

*The benefits of internships programs for state employers*

“I learned from working with Annie that there are no limitations as to what she can do. Her performance was most exceptional. She was both efficient and pleasant to work with.”<sup>1</sup> – MCD Transition to Work employer

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has proven that internships for people with disabilities offer the employer an invaluable service by increasing production, and benefit the intern by giving her/him professional experience often times before entering the workforce.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) has had an internship program in place for the last 10 years. MCB consumers had expressed concerns about entering into the workforce without having experience of being in a professional environment. In 2003, MCB answered this concern, by starting small, and placed 2 interns within its own agency. Since its inception, the MCB internship program now has 82 interns and 200 employers who participate with MCB. The most important aspect of the internship is to focus on the ABILITIES the intern has and not the disability.

A 2009 survey administered by the Center for Health Policy and Research given to some Executive Branch offices that worked with interns with disabilities, found that the “Executive Branch are generally very receptive to the idea of recruiting and including individuals with disabilities, but most have little practical experience with doing so.”<sup>2</sup> MCB has quelled any fears or concerns employers may have by extensively preparing their interns.



**The Commonwealth: Working to be a Model Employer**

**Footnote**<sup>1</sup> Northern Essex Community College News Staff, “Student Participates in Transition to Work Program” October 8, 2013. Web. Newsroom NECC

**Footnote**<sup>2</sup> Long-Bellil, Linda, Tonakarn-Nguyen, Anita, and Henry, Alexis. *Supporting Massachusetts Executive Branch To become a Model Employer of People with Disabilities: Report of a Survey of Internship Programs*. Boston, MA. Center for Health Policy and Research, UMASS Medical School. p. 19 August 2009. Unpublished Survey.

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If an agency expresses interest in participating in the internship program, MCB will begin working with that agency and intern often times 9 months before the internship begins. MCB will first screen and interview qualified internship candidates in order to determine each candidate's goals, skill set, and needs. A candidate will interview with sometimes several employers until an appropriate match is made, then the candidate will work with a mobility instructor on becoming familiar with the workspace and transportation. Before the internship begins, the intern will participate in soft skills training with MCB's vocational rehabilitation staff. An assistive technology technician is referred to the employer to assess what type of adaptive equipment is needed for the intern at their work station. After a determination is made regarding appropriate accessible equipment, then MCB will order and install the equipment at no cost to the employer. On day one of the internship the intern is undoubtedly well prepared.

Employers have been enthralled with the support MCB provides to them and the intern. The Secretary of State's office participated in the MCB internship program this past summer. This state office was so impressed with the intern that she was offered a full time job and is currently employed by this office.

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's (MRC) Vocational rehabilitation Division uses a variety of strategies in assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain employment. These strategies include but are not limited to internships, On-the-Job Training (OJT) and On-the-Job Evaluations (OJE) and hiring events.

Through the MRC OJT/OJE Program qualified individuals with disabilities are recommended to employers to meet their staffing needs. MRC offsets the training cost of bringing the candidate up to speed on the job, as well as covering the cost of any adaptive equipment. The candidate works for the employer for an agreed upon short-term basis. During that time the employer evaluates the candidate's work and if the candidate is a good fit for the company the employer can retain him/her as an employee. Over 60% of those who complete an OJT/OJE remain with the employer and others obtain employment elsewhere as a result of the OJT/OJE experience.

The third state agency that has created, in partnership with MRC, an exceptional internship program is the Massachusetts Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). The MCDHH internship program, Transition to Work, began 3 years ago. Transition to Work focuses primarily on high school and college aged youth, where the average age is 22. This past summer 35 youth participated in the program, which lasted for 6-8 weeks. The MCDHH program also covers the cost of the salary for the interns as well as sign language interpreters, CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) and any adaptive equipment; however, the majority of interns preferred to use their own technology. The interns communicated through American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, speech, pagers and [iPads](#).



MCDHH engaged employers and interns through the use of social networking in addition to phone calls, word of mouth, and online posting. MCDHH also utilized contact with MRC Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf to review applications and assist in student placements. In April MCDHH posted the summer Job coach position on Facebook. Additionally MCDHH posted on the Executive Office of Health and Human Services blog with experiences and feedback on Transition to Work. It is clear that this innovative way to conduct outreach worked with interns as 100 students applied for the Transition to Work summer internship and only 35 were accepted.

The online presence for MCDHH is resourceful and user friendly. Several articles highlight the success of the Transition to Work Program. All of the articles report unanimously positive experiences by both the employer and intern. Judy Janda, The Recreation Director for Sterling, reported, “It’s awesome the state is able to offer a program like this.”<sup>3</sup>



Intern Chi Wai Kwong-Sito, Commissioner Heidi Reed, Intern Mark Mohan, and MCDHH Business Director, Edgar Herrera

These targeted internships will boost the Massachusetts Model Employer initiative. As evidenced from employers participating in internship programs this allows them to complete overdue projects, create a more diverse workforce, and teaches others that often times disabilities are really ABILITIES. The interns overwhelmingly agree how critical the experience has been for them in preparation for entering or re-entering the workforce.

If you would like to enhance your Model Employer initiative by participating with an internship program please contact: MCB – Joey Buizon at [joey.buizon@state.ma.us](mailto:joey.buizon@state.ma.us), MRC – Joan Phillips Assistant Commissioner [joan.phillips@mrc.state.ma.us](mailto:joan.phillips@mrc.state.ma.us), and MCDHH Patricia Ford, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy at [patricia.ford2@state.ma.us](mailto:patricia.ford2@state.ma.us).

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**Footnote**<sup>3</sup> Cleveland, Ken. “Deafness no obstacle for Sterling Intern.” *The Item* 20 September 2013. Web.

### *The Massachusetts Information Technology Division announces...*

IT Accessibility Services statewide contract, ITS 52 Designated ITD (or "ITS52".) ITS52 can help government entities get expert assistance to ensure that information technology services do not discriminate against people with disabilities.

As a statewide contract, ITS52 can be used by state and local government entities across the Commonwealth – from state agencies to municipal offices and public libraries, schools, colleges, and universities – as well as other states and territories.

ITS52 is made up of six categories of services frequently asked for by state agencies. Vendors have been selected for each category based on their expertise.

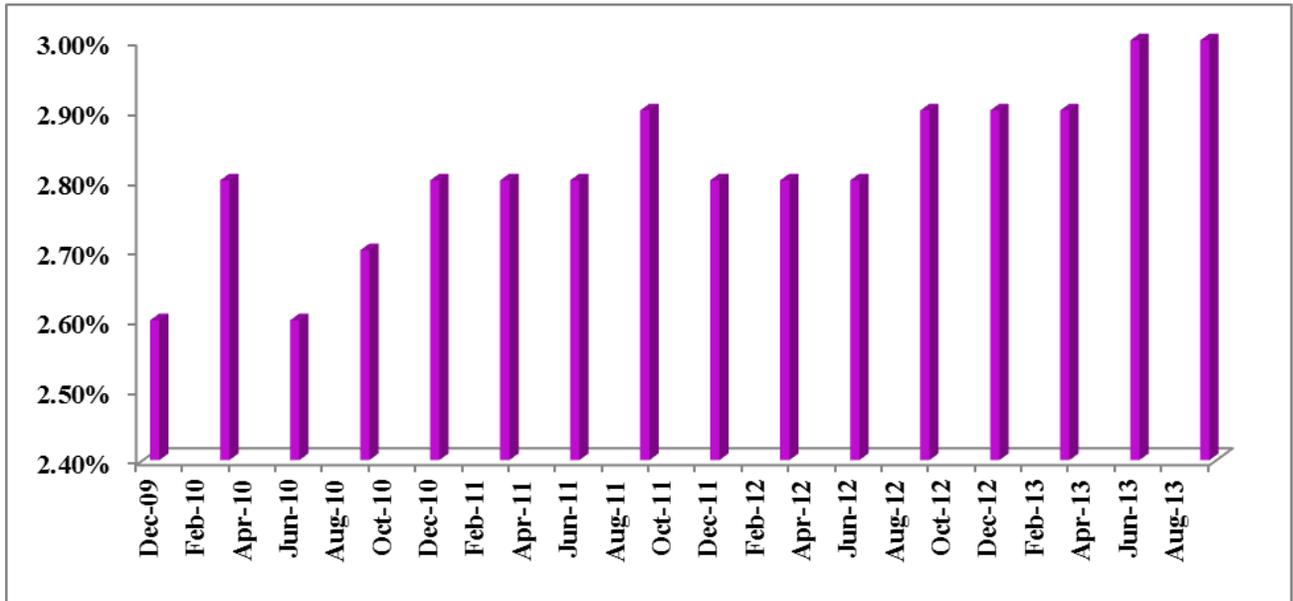
- **Category A:** Accessibility Audit Services is for contractually required third-party testing, or for any need for authoritative, impartial accessibility assessments of IT services or programs.
- **Category B:** Accessibility Consulting Services has vendors who offer a variety of professional services specific to IT accessibility, including planning and strategy, QA testing, and web or application design, development, and remediation.
- **Category C:** Document Remediation Services is for assessing and fixing accessibility problems with common office document formats, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Portable Document Format (PDF).
- **Category D:** Accessibility Training Services has a mix of predefined courses and custom training development services geared to train managers, developers, content creators, and others on the hows and whys of accessibility.
- **Category E:** Multimedia Transcription, Captioning, and Description Services vendors create text equivalents for audio and video materials to meet accessibility requirements for deaf and hard-of-hearing users. Some also offer live captioning services for real-time broadcasts and/or video description services, which provide audio and/or text alternatives for videos.
- **Category F:** Assistive Technology Scripting Services vendors provide custom scripts for screen readers and other assistive technologies to accommodate the needs of individual internal users, typically on legacy systems.

Information on the IT Accessibility Services Contract, including the User Guide, is available at [policies-legal-and-technical-guidance/tech-guidance/accessibility-guidance/it-accessibility-services-statewide-contract.html](https://policies-legal-and-technical-guidance/tech-guidance/accessibility-guidance/it-accessibility-services-statewide-contract.html)

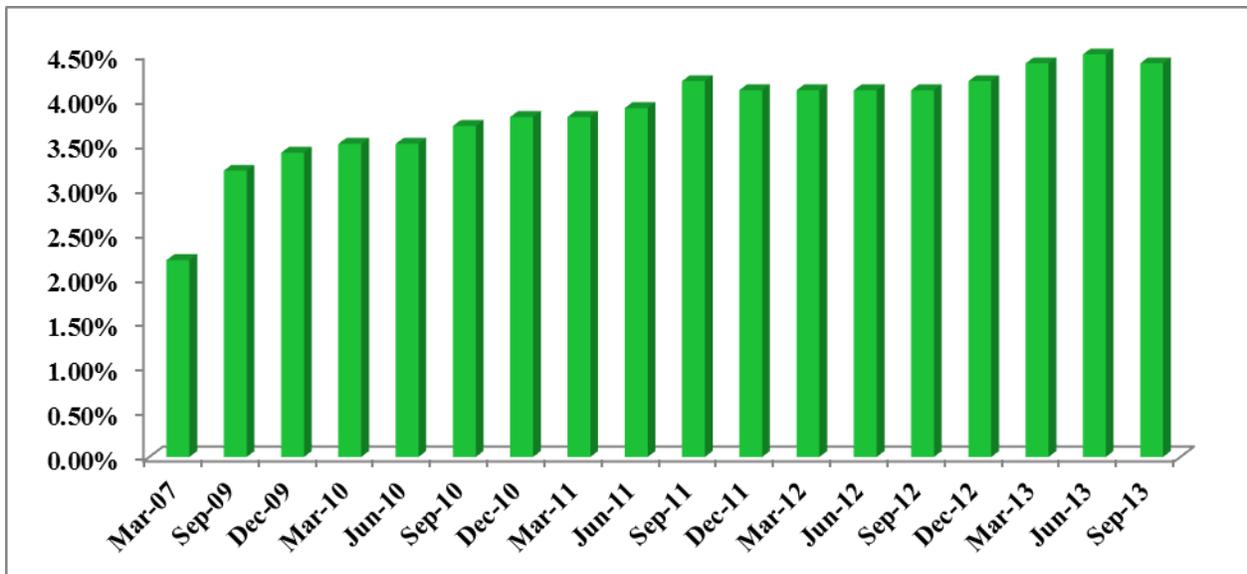


**ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?**

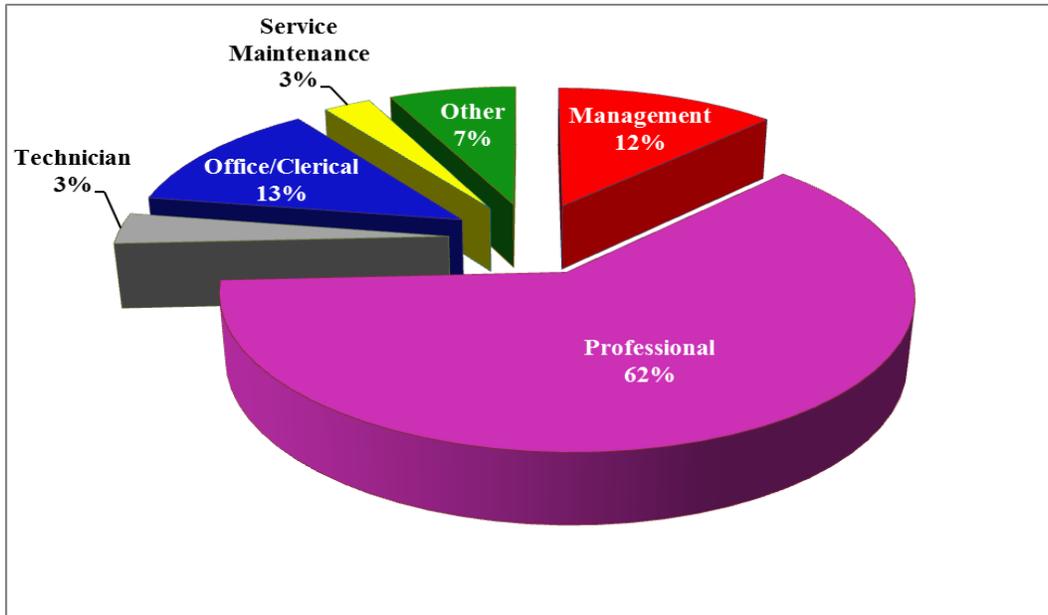
**Figure 1.** The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Employees** from March 2007 to September 2013. The percentage of self-identified Executive Branch employees hit 3% in June 2013 and again in September 2013.



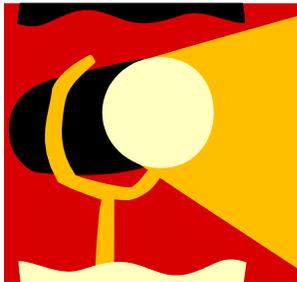
**Figure 2.** The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Management Employees** from March 2007 to September 2013. The percentage of self-identified Executive Branch Management employees was 4.4% in September 2013, in comparison to the 3.2% reported in September 2009. The percentages have increased steadily; 3.5% in March 2010, 3.9% in June 2011, and 4.2% in December 2012.



**Figure 3.** The Percentage of Self-identified Executive Branch Managers and Employees by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 1, FY14: Management 12.5%, Professional 61.7%, Technician 3.4%, Office/Clerical 12.5%, Service Maintenance 2.7%



**Note:** Other Positions include Protected Service Positions (sworn and non-sworn) and Skilled Craft Position



## “SPOTLIGHT”

We know that many of our Executive Branch agencies are doing good work to remove barriers to employment and to assist in our journey to become a model employer for persons with disabilities.

We want to highlight some of the great efforts that are going on, so we are introducing **“SPOTLIGHT”**. This section of the Dialogue newsletter will be devoted to sharing milestones along the journey.

Will you consider sharing your agency milestones with us? We look forward hearing from you.

Please send your stories to [Sandra.e.borders@hrd.state.ma.us](mailto:Sandra.e.borders@hrd.state.ma.us)

