



REHACARE 2024 – Specialist Article / August 2024

Winning over skilled labour – discovering inclusive talents

Can skilled labour shortage be remedied with the help of inclusive talents? Many initiatives are committed to this and will be presenting their projects at REHACARE 2024. Employers encounter enthusiastic employees who are received well by their customers.

Jasper serves waffles not only dusted with icing sugar. He bakes savoury, truffle-flavoured ones, too. And when the 21-year-old is not on duty in the team at the mobile “Downtown Waffles” stand on the banks of the Rhine in Düsseldorf, he enquires if there is some other work for him to do – “because I enjoy talking to customers so much.” As a child Jasper had a traffic accident the consequences of which hinder him to this very day. Tom Sion and Vincent Wirxel, Jasper’s employers, appreciate his talent for serving and enjoy watching how this young man has really “blossomed” at the waffle stand. They have just completed their university studies themselves and are already busy running a start-up under the motto “Inclusion as the Centrepiece”.

Relieving the tense labour market situation

Discovering and leveraging the potential of people with disabilities to fight skilled labour shortages – this is a strategy garnering more and more support. According to recent data from “ifo-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung” (March 2024) 36.6% of German companies are currently suffering from a lack of skilled workers. The Institute of the German Economy expresses hopes: “People with disabilities could relieve the tense situation somewhat. In 2021 there were to the tune of 3.1 million severely disabled of working age, i.e. between 15 and 65 years across Germany. But by no means all of them are integrated in the general labour market. In October 2023, for instance, some 165,700 people with disabilities were registered as unemployed. To place these potential applicants in vacancies is the aim of an initiative launched by the North Rhine-Westphalian government, employers’ associations, the Federal Labour Agency, the German Trade Union Confederation and other partners.



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The "3 x 10 percent" Project

The regional organisations "Landschaftsverbände Rheinland und Westfalen-Lippe" (LWL), which are also represented as exhibitors at REHACARE 2024, are also involved in the initiative. Dr. Georg Lunemann, the LWL's Director, describes the in-house project "3 mal 10 Prozent" as follows: "We want to bring 10% of the people with disabilities from the sheltered workshops in Westfalen-Lippe to the primary labour market, if possible. Secondly, we want to be a role model as LWL and bring up our own percentage of severely disabled to 10%, twice as many as is mandatory. And thirdly, we want to reduce the unemployment rate among people with disabilities by 10% by 2030." One of many strategies towards this goal are so-called external workplaces. "This means an employee can test themselves and their skills in a company for one year. During this time they remain under the 'roof' of the workshop and are accompanied. The goal is, of course, for these persons to be hired permanently," explains Petra Wallmann of the LWL Inklusionsamt Arbeit.

New career after occupational accident

Seeking creative solutions to make people with impairments after occupational accidents or illness successful in their jobs again – this is one of the most important tasks for Thomas Schramm, coordinator and rehabilitation consultant at DGUV job, the labour exchange service provided by the Germany Statutory Accident Insurance for 25 years. DGUV is one of the big exhibitors at REHACARE 2024 and will present amongst others the online tool "Wegweiser Berufsumstieg" (Career Change Guidance) to mark the anniversary of DGUV job. Thomas Schramm knows from experience: "When it becomes apparent that you will no longer be able to perform your original job due to illness you can test yourself with the help of this tool. This allows people to explore their own strengths and their possible future career path." The DGUV consultants can help here – and, by Schramm's account – take into account not only people's skills such as former vocational qualifications but also inclinations: "Many applicants have re-specialised in their hobbies and are selling model trains or fishing rods now."

Companies not missing out on a single talent

For waffle bakers "Downtown Waffles" recruiting people with disabilities always formed an integral part of their concept from the outset: "Developing the brand was Vincent's Bachelor's thesis. He saw for himself how his sister, a Down's syndrome sufferer, never had a chance of getting a permanent job. We wanted to make a



statement by putting this project into practice. So far we have funded this all by ourselves – like any other company,” reports Tom Sion. In the meantime TV and the regional press have featured the committed founders with graduates from special schools now applying for jobs here. Tom notes: “Many manage the stand here so well – I don’t understand why they’re not getting any other job offers but are expected to work at a workshop for people with disabilities.”

The KfW group of banks has now also understood employers should not miss out on any talents when screening applicants despite them being a bit older, coming from a migration background or with a disability. “Aktion Mensch“ features the Group as a role model for winning over skilled workers – making the KfW-Bank one of more and more companies cooperating with the social company myAbility. It helps to find vacancies for people with disabilities or chronic diseases. “We accompany firms on their way towards an inclusive corporate culture,” explain myAbility – using, by their own accounts, the largest job platform for people with disabilities and chronic diseases, to name but one tool.

Information:

Joint initiative for strengthening inclusion on North Rhine-Westphalia’s labour market:

<https://www.land.nrw/pressemitteilung/menschen-mit-behinderungen-und-offene-stellen-besser-zusammenbringen>

Read more on the LWL Projekt “3 mal 10 Prozent”:

https://www.lwl.org/pressemitteilungen/nr_mitteilung.php?urlID=58874

Film:

https://www.lwl-inklusionsamt-arbeit.de/de/wfbm_al/uebergang-aus-der-werkstatt-in-den-allgemeinen-arbeitsmarkt/

The social company myAbility with economic forum and job platform: www.myability.org

“Wegweiser Berufsumstieg” (Career Change Guidance) by DGUV job helps people who want or have to reorient themselves professionally: <https://www.dguv.de/job/wegweiser-berufsumstieg/index.jsp>

Author: Natascha Plankermann, journalist, specialised in health and medical subjects.





Info REHACARE 2024

REHACARE 2024 trade fair: from 25 to 28 September 2024 a unique community of people with disabilities, their families, carers and supporters as well as companies specialising in the needs of these people will come together in Düsseldorf. REHACARE provides an international platform to exchange ideas with experts as well as like-minded people. There are multiple opportunities here to make new contacts and find out about the current developments and trends. These include both digital and analogue mobility solutions, medical aids and care and therapy offers but also inclusive sports and leisure options.

For more information on Rehacare 2024 including the exhibitors' and event programme, please visit the official website of the trade fair: www.rehacare.com

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Photos:

The Downtown Waffles team: Vincent Wirxel, Domenico Pirillo, Tom Sion, Marina Haas (left to right). Credit: Downtown Waffles

Waffle bakers at work: Marina Haas, Jasper Breuer, Domenico Pirillo (left to right). Credit: Downtown Waffles

Andere/Other shots: Consulting at the stand of the NRW regional organisation during Rehacare (2023).