

# Classified

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## Enterprising use of latent talent

JANET Carpenter, manager of an innovative initiative – SMESS, the Slough Mencap Employment Support Scheme – believes there are real and clear contributions to be made by people with learning disabilities.

She explained: "Because it is so difficult for them to get a job they are usually very conscientious. They really want to prove that they can do that job and that they'll do it to the best of their ability. They'll do it very well because they want to keep it."

She added: "Statistically, it's been proven that people with disabilities have less time off work through sickness, ill-health and other reasons."

Research has shown that the business case for employing disabled people is powerful. Some companies have demonstrated these benefits about others have yet to realise the rewards.

Together with Slough Social Services and East Berkshire NHS Trust, SMESS aims to support people through the application, recruitment and employment process.

*Employers may be losing out on a helpful and hidden work force – people with learning disabilities. The Employers' Forum on Disability (EFD) believes that 'the case for including disabled people in a diverse workforce is compelling'.*

**RICHARD HILL** finds out more.

"My role starts by identifying what jobs are available," said Janet. "If a vacancy seems suitable for one of the people we support I'll contact the employer, explain about our scheme and that we're prepared to support an applicant."

Interviews can be particularly arduous for people with learning disabilities.

"Some people can't project themselves at interview," Janet explained. "They may not have had the work experience to prove that they can do the job."

There are alternatives which may be more valuable than the traditional interview. An example is work experience, a week of which can offer both appli-

cant and employer an excellent opportunity to get to know each other and suitability of the applicant/job match.

SMESS needs more employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Janet said she would like to see 'more employers who can give people a chance, to see them for what they can do – not what they can't'.

*Finding out more:*

**Slough Mencap Employment Support Scheme**, tel 01753 512770; email [smess@lineone.net](mailto:smess@lineone.net)

**The Employers' Forum on Disability**, tel 0207 403 0404 website: [www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)



■ SMESS manager: Janet Carpenter with administrator Jerry Severwright.