Crain's Detroit Business October 14, 2026

Southeast Michigan's most overlooked workforce is ready to work

When the Michigan Chamber of Commerce surveyed 550 business leaders in March 2026, finding skilled, prepared workers ranked among their top challenges. And yet a group of motivated people, ready to work, are right here in Michigan. Who are they? They are adults with disabilities. While 65% of people without a disability are employed, only 23% of people with disabilities are.

A Gesher Human Services client works at Red Goose Spice Company.

Only a failure of imagination keeps these qualified candidates from being hired. Many need coaching to get in the door, and many don't do well in typical interviews. A traditional interview rewards small talk, eye contact, and quick answers to hypotheticals, skills that have little to do with packing an order accurately or keeping a clean production log. Candidates who would excel on the job get screened out before they can show what they can do, held back by outdated ideas about what a person can achieve.

Consider a neurodivergent young man we placed at Red Goose Spice Company, where he builds, labels, and fills boxes with spices, and keeps detailed logs of the high volume he packs for customers like Better Made, Chicken Shack and Nino Salvaggio. His supervisors say he has helped the whole company communicate better. Working with him, they recognized that people learn differently, especially with multi-step processes, and they changed how they explain the work to everyone.

Hiring a multidimensional workforce is good business. A widely reported 2023 Accenture study found that companies leading on disability inclusion outperform their peers on revenue and net income. And accommodations are rarely costly: a 2026 Job Accommodation Network study found that 61% cost nothing, with a median one-time cost of $300 for the rest.

Paul Blatt is CEO of Gesher Human Services.

At Gesher, our team coaches job seekers to be prepared and realistic about work that best suits their strengths and talent. We also help employers meet their needs through small changes, whether through a hands-on working interview, sharing questions in advance, or breaking training into clear steps. Most of these changes are small. The results are not: last year, the people with disabilities Gesher supports earned $3.4 million.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Let this month be the impetus for change. I invite Southeast Michigan employers to reach out to Gesher. Let us show you how a few changes to your hiring process can solve your most intractable talent problem, while building a bridge to opportunity for Michiganders who are just waiting for the chance to be your best employees.