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Business focuses on jobs for seniors

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Brian Dalton leads a training session for members of the National Able Network in the group's new office at [5 Washington St.](#) in [Biddeford](#). The organization provides job-preparedness and computer training services free to seniors 55 or older. (Ben Meiklejohn photo)

BIDDEFORD/SACO – An office of the National Able Network has opened in downtown [Biddeford](#) to help senior citizens develop better computer skills and provide them with job training for a changing employment marketplace.

The office moved to [5 Washington St.](#) from its previous location in the Sweetser building at [43 Industrial Park Road in Saco](#).

Patricia Wilkins, who is vice president of Workforce Development, said she hopes the move to [Biddeford](#)'s downtown will attract more seniors to the office who will take advantage of the computer resource center.

Where's the story?



10 Points Mentioned

The National Able Network is an organization that offers employment training programs for seniors, veterans and individuals of all ages. The group has offices in four other states – [Illinois](#), [Indiana](#), [Massachusetts](#) and [New Hampshire](#). The [Maine](#) headquarters

are in [Bangor](#); the [Biddeford](#) location is the only satellite branch in the state. Wilkins said the Maine offices focus specifically on training programs for people age 55 or older.

Wilkins said services are free because the network is funded by the federal government and private sources. Job programs for seniors, she said, are funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. The services are income-contingent, she added, and are primarily for unemployed seniors.

“We have individuals that may be a displaced homemaker who has never worked before, or has been downsized from a job after working for 20 years and needs to be re-skilled,” Wilkins said.

The organization helps seniors get job experience by placing them in subsidized training positions working for nonprofits or public groups, such as libraries, churches, hospitals, city halls and governmental organizations.

“We always need more nonprofits. We’re always looking for more to have different job opportunities available,” Wilkins said. “We have individuals who do advocacy for community-based organizations, do peer to peer help with computer skills, and other services. It varies with each group (they train with).”

The training assignments are paying positions and seniors can work up to 20 hours a week. Wilkins said individuals can participate in the training program for up to four years, but the average duration is 27 months.

“Our goal is trying to get them ready for unsubsidized work,” Wilkins said.

Wilkins said the Senior Ambassador Loaner Laptop Program is a program that loans laptops to seniors to help them increase their computer literacy and access employment training and tutorials from online resources.

Brian Dalton, a trainer who led a session at the [Biddeford](#) office the first week it opened, said the National Able Network can serve people from many states with the help of technology.

“We do a lot of remote stuff, virtual things,” Dalton said.

At a session where Dalton taught program coordinators along with training assistants – employees of the National Able Network who help administer programs – Dalton discussed some of the nuances of technology, such as how to use phone conference calls effectively. Dalton said there were people from three different states at the three-day intensive training. The National Able Network paid for transportation and hotel for those traveling from a distance, he said.

Darlene Smith of Saco, who is now a program coordinator for the National Able Network, started out as a senior looking for employment. Smith participated in the organization’s training referral program and was assigned to help a nonprofit, where she stayed for nine months. After that, Smith worked on another assignment for nearly a year.

Smith has since landed employment with the very program that helped refine her employment skills.

“(The National Able Network) gave me a lot of confidence in myself,” Smith said. “It returned in me a whole list of skills and uses to be functional in the workplace.”

For more information, visit www.nationalable.org or call 855-994-8300.

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