

A Chattanooga Community Conversation

On Promoting Meaningful Work for Young People with Developmental Disabilities

BACKGROUND ...

A meaningful job truly can make a real difference in the lives of youth and young adults with disabilities. Yet, opportunities for these young people to share their strengths and talents in the workplace are far too limited. The TennesseeWorks Partnership is a systems-change project funded through the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The goal of the project is to increase the availability and quality of employment opportunities for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in every corner of our state.

We are partnering with communities across Tennessee to host a series of "Community Conversations" focused on how best to equip young people with disabilities with the aspirations, preparation, opportunities, and supports they need to access competitive, integrated work in their community. In September 2013, the fifth of a series of six events was held in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The local planning committee included local advocacy organizations, disability service providers, educators, and family members.

We shared invitations widely throughout the Chattanooga community to gather a diverse group people who care about making their community more inclusive of people with disabilities. Family members, local employers, disability service providers, educators, faith community members, community organizations, and civic leaders were all invited to the event.



Photo from Wikipedia



THE CHATTANOOGA COMMUNITY CONVERSATION



A community conversation is a creative, fun, and powerful way of identifying how diverse members of a community might work together in compelling ways to solve an important challenge. The focus of this event was on generating ideas, sharing resources,

and making connections with other community members to enhance employment and community involvement for young people with disabilities and, ultimately, to strengthen the Chattanooga community.

The Chattanooga community conversation was held at Lindsay Street Hall. This evening event took place on September 9th and involved more than 50 members of the community. Katherlyn Geter, a parent and advocate, served as the facilitator for the evening. She shared with the attendees about the impact employment has on the lives of young

people with disabilities. Using the World Café model, the group next began a series of “coffee-house” conversations—first at small tables and then as a whole group—in which they shared their best ideas related to three questions:

- What can we do as a community to increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability?
- How might we work together in compelling ways to make these ideas happen here in Chattanooga?
- What are the most promising ideas you have heard this evening? Where should we go next to launch meaningful change here?

At the end of the event, attendees completed a short feedback form and indicated whether they would like to be involved in future efforts to promote employment for young people with disabilities in their community.

After the event, all of the notes taken at each of the individual tables and during the whole group discussion were compiled and organized. A full report of ideas across all six conversations will be available later in the year. A sampling of ideas and next steps is included on the next two pages.



AGENDA

- 6:10-6:15 Greeting
- 6:15-6:25 Opening Remarks
- 6:25-6:30 World Café Process
- 6:30-6:50 Round 1 Discussion
- 6:50-7:10 Round 2 Discussion
- 7:10-7:30 Round 3 Discussion
- 7:30-7:50 Harvesting of Best Ideas
- 7:50-8:00 Closing Remarks

A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Families

- Communicate with decision makers in local and state government about the barriers to youth accessing employment and education opportunities
- Learn more about the IEP and transition planning process to ensure your child is getting strong preparation for a future career
- Get the facts on how benefits are actually impacted by working in the community



Ideas for Disability Service Providers

- Introduce individuals with disabilities to employers when discussing possible employment opportunities
- Share with employers information about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, such as low turn-over rates and strong work ethics
- Help individuals with disabilities create resumés that can be shared with potential employers
- Build relationships with the local chapter of the Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM)

Ideas for Community Leaders

- Develop a local advocacy group that connects with and informs leaders and decision makers about employment-related issues impacting young people with disabilities
- Create a pilot youth employment program within local city and county government
- Address barriers to service delivery that arise when individuals live near state and county borders



A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Employers and Business Networks

- Share about the contributions employees with disabilities provide in the workforce within local business networks
- Replicate best practices from other companies that have been successful in hiring and maintaining employees with disabilities such as Walgreens, Lowe's, and Hershey's

Ideas for Faith Communities

- Help provide disability awareness and sensitivity training within the community

Ideas for Educators

- Replicate best transition practices implemented in other areas that have proven successful in increasing youth employment rates
- Host an event designed to more actively engage businesses in supporting the employment of youth with disabilities
- Teach students to create resumés and pursue experiences that strengthen their resumés

Ideas for Young People with Disabilities

- Share with people you know about your desire to be employed and the difficulties you encounter
- Tell employers about your strengths and talents when discussing potential job opportunities

Ideas for Our Entire Community

- Provide opportunities for youth with disabilities to obtain job-specific skills at local vocational schools
- Recognize local businesses for their efforts in hiring and promoting employment of persons with disabilities
- Feature employment as a focus of the large community event "Go Fest"
- Engage "Leadership Chattanooga" in increasing employment for youth with disabilities
- Use social media to promote efforts towards expanding work opportunities



RESOURCES ON EMPLOYMENT

TennesseeWorks <i>Numerous state and national resources focused on improving employment outcomes</i>	www.tennesseeworks.org
Pathfinder <i>Comprehensive, multilingual disability clearinghouse of information, referral resources, and support services to and for people with disabilities and their families in Tennessee</i>	www.kc.vanderbilt.edu/pathfinder
Job Accommodation Network	www.askjan.org
National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability	www.ncwd-youth.info
National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center	www.nsttac.org
Disability.Gov's Employment Portal	www.disability.gov/employment
Campaign for Disability Employment	www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org
Resources for hiring people with disabilities	www.thinkbeyondthelabel.com
Employment & Training Administration's Disability Program	www.doleta.gov/disability
Office of Disability Employment Policy	www.dol.gov/odep
Disability & Employment	www.disability.workforce3one.org
Learn about Ticket to Work	www.socialsecurity.gov/work
Jobs for Tennessee Online	www.jobs4tn.gov
Upcoming Tennessee Job Fairs	www.tn.gov/labor-wfd/JobFairs
West Tennessee Workforce Investment Board	www.westtennesseecareers.org
Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation	www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html
Tennessee Career Centers	www.tennessee.gov/labor-wfd/cc

WHAT ATTENDEES SAID ABOUT THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Below is a summary of responses from evaluations completed by attendees regarding their views on their community and the event.

I am leaving this conversation with specific steps I plan to do to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The conversation tonight improved my views of the capacity of our community to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.

Members of our community need help learning how to support people with disabilities in meaningful jobs.

Strong partnerships between employers, community agencies, and families currently exist in my community.

Our community currently has the capacity to support people with disabilities in meaningful jobs.

People in our community are generally receptive to employing people with disabilities.

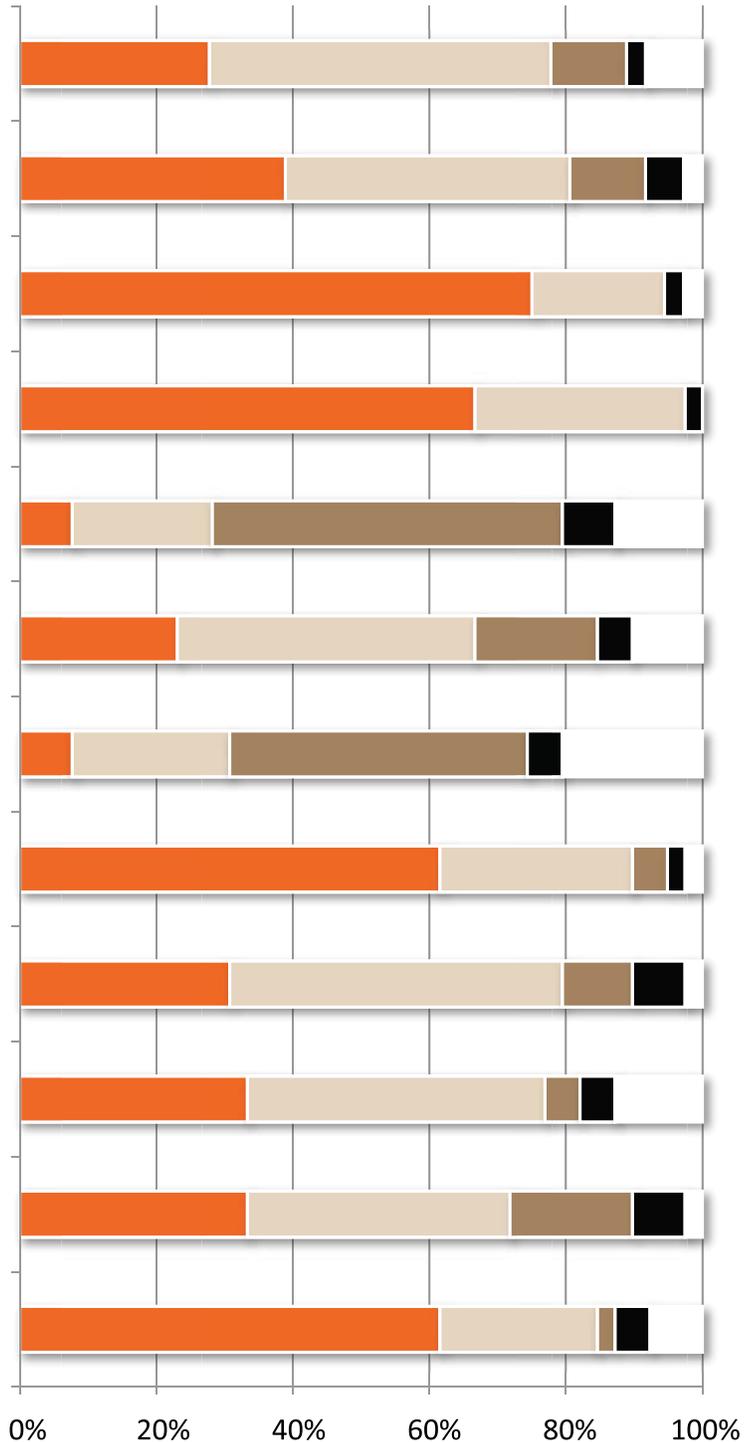
I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this one in the future.

I was able to identify things I could do to enhance employment outcomes for people with disabilities from this conversation.

This conversation will contribute to increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities in our community.

I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I previously did not know about.

This conversation was a good investment of my time.





If you are interested in hosting your own community conversation on employment, download this free guidebook "Launching Inclusive Efforts Through Community Conversations: A Practical Guide for Families, Service Providers, and Communities" from www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/Community_Conversation_Guide.pdf

ABOUT TENNESSEWORKS

The TennesseeWorks Partnership was first funded in October 2012 with the purpose of equipping (a) youth with significant disabilities to *aspire* toward competitive work from an early age, (b) families to *demand* competitive work for their children with disabilities, (c) educators to *prepare* their students for competitive work across the grade-span, and (d) state systems to *support* competitive work in every part of the state. More than 25 agencies and organizations have collaborated with the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to form this collaborative. State partners include Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

For more information, see www.tennesseeworks.org or contact Sarah Harvey at (615) 322-4999, tennesseeworks@gmail.com

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