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 the aspirations, preparation, opportunities, and supports they need to access competitive, integrated work in their community. In July 2013, the second in a series of six events was held in Lawrenceburg of Lawrence County, Tennessee. The local planning committee included local community leaders, employers, family members, disability service providers, and educators.

We shared invitations widely throughout the Lawrence County 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.
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 community.

The Lawrence County community conversation was held at Providence Hall. This evening event took place on July 16 and involved more than 90 members of the community. Tommy Lee Kidd, parent and advocate, served as the facilitator for the evening. 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 Lawrence County?
- 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

• Encourage your child’s involvement in a range of community and recreational activities to build strengths and connections with others.
• Work with schools and agencies to put on a resource fair to inform families about employment supports and opportunities for their children with disabilities.
• Find out what formal services and informal supports are available in your community to help you connect your child to vocational experiences.
• Believe that your child can work and work toward making that vision a reality.

Ideas for Disability Service Providers

• Provide awareness and educational opportunities for families, educators, and employers aimed at overcoming barriers to the employment for youth with disabilities.
• Educate employers about tax incentives and other benefits associated with hiring people with disabilities.
• Showcase the successes and contributions of people with disabilities who are already working in the community.

Ideas for Community Leaders

• Develop and implement a local employment initiative and advocacy group to spearhead a strategic plan regarding increasing employment of people with disabilities in the county.
• Identify someone who could serve as a point person for community resources that could be drawn upon to improve employment opportunities.
• Develop a local mentoring project that links professionals in the community to young people with disabilities to expose them to a variety of possible career paths.

Ideas for Employers and Business Networks

• Create a public way for local businesses to identify themselves as committed to the employment of persons with disabilities, such as a storefront sticker or other public acknowledgment.
• Share employment openings with local disability service providers so they are aware of local needs and can assist with recruiting people with disabilities who have the needed skills.
A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

- Explore avenues for employing accessible vans and buses used for church events to meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities to get to and from work.
- Foster awareness of the employment-related needs of people with disabilities through churches and other places of worship, a natural network of community members.

Ideas for Educators

- Provide graduating youth with disabilities a written summary or portfolio of their strengths, interests, skills, needs, preferences that could be shared with potential employers and help youth decide on a career path.
- Host a job fair with local employers to introduce them to job seeking youth with disabilities.
- Set up job shadowing and internships for students with disabilities to foster career awareness and early work experiences.
- Commit to holding high expectations that students with disabilities can and should work.

Ideas for Young People with Disabilities

- Seek out opportunities to gain hands-on work experiences that could help you learn about your strengths and interests.
- Attend any events in the community that may provide you opportunities to engage with potential employers.
- Get involved in summer youth programs.

Ideas for Our Entire Community

- Encourage the newspaper to highlight local success stories of people with disabilities and their employers who are making a difference.
- Set a community-wide goal focused on encouraging employers to commit to hiring a larger number of young people with disabilities.
## RESOURCES ON EMPLOYMENT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tr>
<td>TennesseeWorks</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tennesseeworks.org">www.tennesseeworks.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Numerous state and national resources focused on improving employment outcomes</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathfinder</td>
<td><a href="http://www.kc.vanderbilt.edu/pathfinder">www.kc.vanderbilt.edu/pathfinder</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Comprehensive, multilingual disability clearinghouse of information, referral resources, and support services to and for people with disabilities and their families in Tennessee</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Accommodation Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.askjan.org">www.askjan.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ncwd-youth.info">www.ncwd-youth.info</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nsttac.org">www.nsttac.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaign for Disability Employment</td>
<td><a href="http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org">www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources for hiring people with disabilities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thinkbeyondthelabel.com">www.thinkbeyondthelabel.com</a></td>
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<td>Employment &amp; Training Administration’s Disability Program</td>
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<td>Office of Disability Employment Policy</td>
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<td>Disability &amp; Employment</td>
<td><a href="http://www.disability.workforce3one.org">www.disability.workforce3one.org</a></td>
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<td>Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation</td>
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<td>Tennessee Career Centers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tennessee.gov/labor-wfd/cc">www.tennessee.gov/labor-wfd/cc</a></td>
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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.
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

Funding for this project is provided by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Photos by Erik Carter & Sarah Harvey