A Memphis 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 August 2013, the third in a series of six events was held in Memphis, Tennessee. The local planning committee included local community leaders, employers, family members, disability service providers, and educators.

We shared invitations widely throughout the Memphis 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 Memphis community conversation was held at the SRVS facility on Knight Arnold. This evening event took place on August 1 and involved more than 80 members of the community. Jeness Roth and Mary Ellen Chase, both parents and advocates, served as facilitators 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 Memphis?
- 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

• Develop a parent coalition to provide support and resources for families
• Share success stories with the community
• Utilize your family’s circle of friends for networking opportunities to discover potential opportunities to build resumes and skills
• Participate with educators to explore opportunities and services that lead to employment
• Connect your children in volunteer experiences to teach new skills and build their resumes

Ideas for Disability Service Providers

• Increase communication and partnerships among providers to discuss opportunities for individuals with disabilities
• Host local career fairs that link employers to people with disabilities in the community
• Develop a “Big Brother, Big Sister” type program to provide support and mentorship to individuals throughout the process of finding and maintaining employment
• Develop resource materials to share with employers about the process and benefits of employing persons with disabilities

Ideas for Community Leaders

• Encourage local government to implement a policy encouraging a certain percentage of their workforce be individuals with disabilities
• Develop a task force to address increasing employment for persons with disabilities in this community
• Promote awareness of the potential contributions of individuals with disabilities as part of the workforce within the community
• Engage local leaders and legislators in promoting employment of persons with disabilities

Ideas for Employers and Business Networks

• Share job opportunities with Vocational Rehabilitation offices
• Provide tours of your workplace to school groups that open the line of communication among employers, individuals, families and educators
A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Faith Communities
- Share information with faith leaders and congregations about the needs in their community and the ways they can assist
- Make sure someone on staff is familiar with local services and agency information that can be shared with interested families
- Provide opportunities for families to get together to share information about employment related services and supports

Ideas for Educators
- Include social and soft skills in transition planning to better prepare youth for employment
- Involve students in career exploration activities and connect them to needed employment services
- Match people with disabilities who are successfully employed to current job seekers to share advice and encouragement

Ideas for Young People with Disabilities
- Start getting a foot in the door by participating in volunteer and internship opportunities
- Support other young people with disabilities by sharing your employment successes and lessons learned

Ideas for Our Entire Community
- Perform a media campaign that encourages employers to share how they welcome people with disabilities as employees
- Develop a local coalition charged with increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- Promote awareness of hiring persons with disabilities by utilizing the local film school to assist with this
## RESOURCES ON EMPLOYMENT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TennesseeWorks</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tennesseeworks.org">www.tennesseeworks.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Numerous state and national resources focused on improving employment outcomes</td>
<td></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>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive, multilingual disability clearinghouse of information, referral resources, and support services to and for people with disabilities and their families in Tennessee</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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<tr>
<td>Employment &amp; Training Administration’s Disability Program</td>
<td><a href="http://www.doleta.gov/disability">www.doleta.gov/disability</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of Disability Employment Policy</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dol.gov/odep">www.dol.gov/odep</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Disability &amp; Employment</td>
<td><a href="http://www.disability.workforce3one.org">www.disability.workforce3one.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about Ticket to Work</td>
<td><a href="http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work">www.socialsecurity.gov/work</a></td>
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<td>Jobs for Tennessee Online</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jobs4tn.gov">www.jobs4tn.gov</a></td>
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<td>Upcoming Tennessee Job Fairs</td>
<td>www tn.gov/labor-wfd/JobFairs</td>
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<td>West Tennessee Workforce Investment Board</td>
<td><a href="http://www.westtennesseecareers.org">www.westtennesseecareers.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html">www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html</a></td>
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<tr>
<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.

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![Bar chart showing responses from attendees]

- **Strongly Agree**
- **Agree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly Disagree**
- **Don’t Know**
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.

ABOUT TENNESSEWORKS