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 fourth in a series of six events was held in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The local planning committee included local advocacy organizations, disability service providers, educators, university staff members, and family members.

We shared invitations widely throughout the Murfreesboro community to gather a diverse group of 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 Murfreesboro community conversation was held at the Carriage Lane Inn. This evening event took place on August 26th and involved more than 70 members of the community. Tammy Day, Director of the Next Steps Program at Vanderbilt University, served as the facilitator for the evening. She shared with the attendees about the impact families, communities, and educators can have on the lives of young people. 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 Murfreesboro?

- 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.
A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Families

• Plant goals related to further education and employment at a young age
• Teach youth skills and independence by giving them responsibilities in the home
• Engage youth in volunteer opportunities that teach skills that would be valuable in the workplace
• Begin working with Vocational Rehabilitation prior to your child’s senior year

Ideas for Disability Service Providers

• Provide potential employers with resources that address concerns they may have related to accommodations, liability, and other issues
• Share success stories broadly with the public
• Provide local businesses with resources on how to employ people with disabilities
• Help link interested businesses with other employers who can share about their first-hand experiences employing people with disabilities and the benefits they experienced

Ideas for Community Leaders

• Recognize local businesses who employ persons with disabilities
• Work with local transportation services to provide reduced rate programs that enable persons with disabilities to get to and from their work
• Provide resources to Chamber of Commerce members regarding employment incentives and contacts for employing persons with disabilities
• Add to the local community website a section where people with disabilities and employers can go to connect with one another
A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Employers and Business Networks

- Participate in programs offered by Nashville Career Advancement Center to assist with employing youth with disabilities
- Develop a mentor program pairing a seasoned employee with a new employee with disabilities to assist in the transition to the new job
- Use job carving to create jobs for people with disabilities, leading to increased productivity and lower costs
- Provide sensitivity and disability awareness training for employees

Ideas for Faith Communities

- Utilize volunteers and church vans to assist with transportation to and from work

Ideas for Educators

- Encourage relationships among special education departments and business programs within local colleges and universities
- Partner business students with youth with disabilities to help them achieve personal goals related to employment
- Communicate regularly with members of a student’s IEP planning team to discuss progress, needs, and goals in the area of employment

Ideas for Young People with Disabilities

- Participate in training opportunities offered by Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies to gain skills employers are seeking
- Practice interviewing to prepare for future job opportunities
- Make a list of your likes and dislikes to help identify employment options that will be a good personal match
- Network with people you know and make them aware of your desire to find a job

Ideas for Our Entire Community

- Host a summer camp for youth with a focus on employment
- Form a group that brings youth, families, employers, and others to the table to work toward promoting employment success throughout the community
# RESOURCES ON EMPLOYMENT

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<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>
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<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>
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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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<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.
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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