



Pathways to Meaningful Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Significant Disabilities



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Letter from our President and Executive Director

Kudos to Erik Carter, Elise McMillan, and their colleagues in the TennesseeWorks Partnership for this important and timely issue of *Connections!* Constructing a pathway to employment early in EVERY child's life is important – and for students with severe disabilities – crucial. There is no question—the most daunting task facing the disability field today is addressing the unacceptably high and pervasive rate of poverty experienced by people with disabilities, solved only by dramatically improving employment rates and access to careers.

TASH has worked hard for Customized Employment and Discovery to be more available by increasing public funding and understanding of these essential strategies – and achieved success by its inclusion in the 2014 reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, now known as the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act. For people with significant barriers to employment, including those with complex support needs, Discovery and Customized Employment offer openings and opportunities. This TASH position statement was prepared by TASH Employment Committee member Michael Callahan and explains why TASH is working hard to raise awareness and expand the availability of these practices.

The 2014 TASH conference includes more than 15 hours of training on employment – we hope to see you there!



Barb Trader and Dave Westling



David L. Westling, Ed.D.
President, TASH Board
of Directors



Barbara Trader,
Executive Director of
TASH

The Critical Importance of Customized Employment and Discovery

Michael Callahan 2013

The individuals that TASH represents are among the most under-represented group of citizens in the workforce in our country. Our organization has advocated for innovative strategies and progressive policies such as supported employment, access to rehabilitation technology, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to improve access to competitive employment for our constituency. During the past decade, two innovations have emerged that are of critical importance to all individuals who experience significant barriers to employment: Customized Employment and Discovery.

It would be fair to say that for many job seekers with disabilities the largest barrier they face to becoming employed is the negative attitude of potential employers. People with disabilities have traditionally been perceived as less able than their non-disabled peers. However, as negative perceptions fade and job seekers receive quality employment supports, effective training, good job matching and the accommodations guaranteed by the ADA, most employees with disabilities are fully able to compete effectively in the work place. Additionally, the strategy of competitive supported employment (SE), starting in the mid-1980s, allowed many individuals with significant impact of disability to become

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competitively employed through the use of job developers to assist in navigating the personnel office and job coaches to assist both employees and employers to offer better training and support.

However, there remains a chronically unemployed group of individuals for whom the impact of their disabilities directly affects their ability to meet the existing demand of job openings in the competitive workforce. It is estimated that over 450,000 individuals with significant disabilities are in sheltered employment and perhaps millions more are in day programs or at home living unproductive, lethargic, often-boring lives in an unseen existence below the poverty line. Many of these individuals have intellectual and development disabilities and, as such, are the focus of TASH's mission. If these individuals are to become successfully employed for regular pay in the community, Customized Employment and Discovery must be available to them.

Customized Employment (CE) was defined by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in the US Department of Labor in 2001. It was to be the first initiative of this newly formed office as was based on field-based efforts to turn the concept of job carving into a viable employment model that benefited both employers and job seekers with significant disabilities who were not benefitting from competitive supported employment. CE is currently defined by ODEP as, ... a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time . . . one employer at a time. The value of CE is that it works for individuals who are unable, due to the severity of their disability or other life complexities, to meet the competitive demands of an open job. In this way, CE goes beyond the protections of the ADA and of the competitive standard that is so often an aspect

of SE through negotiations with employers who voluntarily agree to customize job descriptions. CE seeks to match and negotiate the job seeker's conditions for success, work interests and specific contributions with areas of specific benefit to potential employers. In this way both parties benefit and the doors open, at least conceptually, for all job seekers with a disability to become successfully employed.

The strategy of Discovery is of critical importance as a tool to substitute for the negative consequences of vocational evaluations. In a manner similar to that of competitive, demand employment, assessments set a threshold of expected performance related to the normative performance of others. Since the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, employment services for job seekers with disabilities have relied on comparative, norm-referenced assessments and evaluations to both assure the potential of benefit by individuals regarding the expenditure of public funds and to guide individuals into jobs that best fit them. In the 1992 Amendments to the Rehab Act, Congress directed VR counselors to basically presume benefit in terms of an employment outcome, but the practice has persisted at the grass-roots level in the years since. While many individuals with disabilities will benefit from a well-administered comparative assessment, job seekers with the most significant impact of disability, especially many with intellectual and developmental disabilities, will be found unlikely to benefit in terms of an employment outcomes. Many of these individuals end up in sheltered workshops, day programs or at home or in institutions, unemployed and poor.

Discovery is a process based on qualitative research rather than quantitative, comparative research. The fundamental question of Discovery is, "who is this person?" The fundamental value of Discovery is that all people have specific areas of competence and potential contribution. By getting to know job seekers deeply it is possible to translate their life competencies into their conditions for success, interests to certain aspects of the job market and specific contributions to be offered to potential employers. In this way, Discovery provides the foundation for the negotiation of a Customized job for individuals with significant disabilities.

Introduction to the Issue: Pathways to Meaningful Employment for Youth and Young Adults with Significant Disabilities

Erik W. Carter & Elise McMillan

Work matters. Most Americans can speak first hand to the numerous benefits that can come from having a good job. Beyond the paycheck and the opportunities having a steady income can make possible, work can bring a sense of accomplishment and build our confidence. It gives us a way to share—and deepen—our talents and contribute to our communities in valued ways. And it offers us opportunities to develop new friendships and deeper connections to our communities. When connected to the right job, so many of the other goals we have for our lives become all that much easier to accomplish.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), work matters for the very same reasons. Talk with almost any middle or high school student about the vision they have for their own futures and you are likely to hear about the great job they hope to get and the money they plan on making. The difference is that the aspirations young people with significant disabilities share in this area so rarely come to fruition. Almost every measure of employment outcomes nationally paints a similar portrait—far too many businesses and communities are missing out on the chance to benefit from the gifts and contributions people with disabilities have ready to share. Consider just a few of these numbers:

Almost three quarters of young adults with severe disabilities have not been employed at any point during their first two years after leaving high school. Among those few who are working, jobs often take place in segregated work settings, bring low wages, and offer a very limited number of hours (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012).

During the first six years after leaving high school, barely half of young adults with autism have held a paid job in their community at any point since exiting high school (Shattuck et al., 2012).

According to June 2014 employment statistics from the Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is still more than twice what it is for people without disabilities (12.9% versus 6.1%). Moreover, only 19.3% of people with disabilities actually participate in the labor force (compared to 65.0% of people without disabilities).

Unfortunately, the landscape is not much different in our own state of Tennessee. Like other states across the country, we struggle to make sure the career-related aspirations of every young person with a disability are met with the support and opportunities

needed to find fulfillment. At the same time, we are committed to doing better.

What will take to change the employment landscape for young people with significant disabilities? The answer certainly is not a simple one. We need compelling research that helps us know which practices and policies will work best for which young people. We need strong and coordinated policies that all see integrated employment as the intended outcome of our services and supports. We need well-crafted legislation that directs multiple systems to focus their work on getting people to work. We need generous funding to ensure people with disabilities receive strong instruction and individualized support to move into the workplace. We need funding and systems aligned with long-term services and supports based on outcomes. We need effective professional development and widespread dissemination efforts to ensure the best of what we know works penetrates daily practice, particularly for those on the front lines of this work. We need innovative ideas and programs that uncover new pathways to employment. And we need all of these efforts to be driven by the vision, needs, and choices of people with IDD and their families.

The Projects of National Significance employment systems change grants recently funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities offer one especially exciting pathway through which needed answers might be found. Awarded to eight states—Alaska, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Tennessee, and Wisconsin—these grants are focused centrally on changing systems and policies in ways that make integrated, competitive employment the very first and preferred choice for youth and young adults with IDD. [More information about the efforts of each state can be found at www.partnershipsinemployment.com.] Our own project—called the TennesseeWorks Partnership—is actively pursuing this same commitment through a collaborative made up of more than 40 state agencies, organizations, and advocacy groups. Together we are focused on equipping:

- ◆ students with disabilities to aspire toward competitive work from an early age;
- ◆ families to demand competitive work for their children with disabilities;

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- ◆ educators to prepare their students for competitive work across the grade span; and
- ◆ state systems to support competitive work in every corner of our state.

We are all working together to empower people across our state to see getting a great job as the expectation for all Tennesseans with disabilities, to equip people with the resources and training they need to pursue and support competitive employment, and to ultimately connect individuals with disabilities to meaningful work.

Although still early into this project, one thing is already clear: It will take a constellation of individuals and groups working together in coordinated ways to elevate employment outcomes in our state. Promoting seamless transitions from school to the workplace is not the responsibility of any single entity. It will require all of our collective efforts to create multiple pathways to the workplace. And we will only find success if we consider carefully the multiple perspectives of people across our state who are invested in this issue. Youth people with disabilities, their families, educators, employers, agencies, advocacy groups, civic leaders, and many may others have an important role and voice in systems change efforts. Finally, we need much tighter alignment of our long-term service and support systems.

This issue of TASH Connections highlights just a few of these pathways and perspectives, all offered with a Tennessee accent. The articles we have assembled showcase “community

conversations” as way of generating creative solutions for improving employment outcomes, highlight the important role of families in communicating high expectations for employment, describe how students can self-direct their own transition planning, illustrate how postsecondary education programs can promote career development, and answer common concerns employers might have about making their workplaces more inclusive of people with disabilities. Woven throughout the issue of this newsletter are personal reflections from young people with disabilities, educators, and agencies about the value of work. We hope this issue will encourage your ongoing efforts to change the employment landscape in your state, as well as spur new ideas for where you might go next.

Note. Partial support for this article comes through a grant from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities through a Projects of National Significance grant (Grant# 90DN0294). The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of AIDD or its collaborative agencies.

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About the Guest Editors

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Together, Erik and Elise lead the TennesseeWorks Partnership.boys under the age of six.



*Erik W. Carter, Ph.D.,
Guest Editor*



*Elise McMillan, J.D.,
Guest Editor*

Articles from Our Contributors

Changing the Conversation: Engaging Local Communities in New Discussions About Competitive Employment

Erik W. Carter, Carly L. Blustein, Jennifer L. Rowan, and Sarah Harvey

Conversations about improving employment outcomes for young people with severe disabilities have been pervasive within the field of special education since the concept of “transition” was first conceived more than 25 years ago (Will, 1984). Despite many hard-fought developments in the areas of legislation, policy, research, and practice, changes in the employment landscape for youth and young adults with disabilities have been strikingly slow and often uneven (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Far too many young people with severe disabilities living in communities across the country still do not receive the encouragement, instruction, supports, and linkages they need to share their talents and relationships within the workplace.

Amidst these recurring conversations focused on how our field might move forward in their efforts to improve employment outcomes, we have noticed a few concerning themes. First, there

is a tendency to look for solutions to this longstanding challenge entirely within the formal service and support systems designed specifically for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While our educational and service systems can (and ought to) play a key role in expanding access to competitive employment, it is unlikely sweeping changes can be accomplished by relying entirely on any service system. In addition to strengthening the relevance and capacity of these systems, we must also pursue partnerships that meaningfully engage ordinary citizens (e.g., employers, civic leaders, association members, family members, neighbors) in solving these challenges. Second, gatherings focused on improving employment outcomes too often begin *and* end with a discussion of the barriers that stand in the way of real progress. We tend to perseverate on what is going wrong and struggle to articulate what it might look like for things to go right; we often go to great lengths to document the myriad challenges while overlooking the many assets and possibilities that exist within our reach. We would do well to adopt new conversational patterns that move us toward solutions and encourage thinking outside of our narrow professional paradigms. Third, we are sometimes inclined to adopt a “one-size-fits-all” set of strategies borrowed from the professional literature, model programs, or other states. While much can (and should) be learned from the efforts of others elsewhere, communities often vary considerably from one to the next both in terms of the challenges and opportunities they hold. As with the individualized planning we undertake with students, we

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ought to consider ways of identifying potential solutions that align well with the unique needs, culture, and assets of a diverse communities.

Community Conversations on Employment

In our own state's efforts to change the employment landscape for young people with disabilities, we launched a series of "community conversation" events to engage a broader cross-section of our communities in generating creative solutions for improving employment outcomes that reflect local priorities and possibilities. Community conversations are an asset-based approach for informing, spurring, and/or documenting efforts to expand inclusive opportunities for young people with disabilities (Carter, Swedeen, Cooney, Walter, & Moss, 2012; Trainor, Carter, Swedeen, & Pickett, 2012). In this article, we share how we have used community conversations as one launching point for systems change in Tennessee. We describe the process used for planning and implementing these events, as well as some early lessons learned from hosting these employment-focused conversations. [More information about hosting a community conversation can be found in Carter et al. (2009) and Swedeen, Cooney, Moss, and Carter (2011).]

Planning the Events

We began planning these community conversations by identifying six cities reflecting the geographic diversity of our state—Chattanooga, Greeneville, Jackson, Lawrence County, Memphis, and Murfreesboro. We selected small (about 15,000 people) to large (more than 650,000 people) communities spanning

"The way the questions are formatted keeps people focused on what can be done instead of dwelling on barriers. Sometimes [when we talk], the word can't comes up too much. But in this case, it's more focused on what can happen."

Leader of a Statewide Disability Organization

our three grand geographic regions, with an additional goal of involving some communities not often part of disability events. All of the community conversations took place throughout the summer and fall, and planning began approximately two months prior to each event.

Within each community, we formed a planning committee of 8-10 individuals to provide local perspectives, encourage attendance by drawing upon personal connections, and assist with logistical arrangements. Committee members had different backgrounds (e.g., parents, educators, service providers, disability organizations), creating a diverse network from which to recruit attendees. We held an initial conference call with the committee to explain the goals of the events and to make logistical decisions. Shortly thereafter, we finalized event venues, times, and caterers that met the needs of each area.

We developed print and electronic invitations for each event, highlighting its focus on employment for young people with disabilities; emphasizing the need for attendees from varying



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“Some people walked through that door [that evening] wondering why they were supposed to be there. Most of them had no other reason except that they knew my daughter. But by the end of the night, we left as a community with a shared goal. [Our goal] is to have someone with a disability working at every local business at some point in time.”

Parent and Conversation Facilitator

backgrounds; and detailing the time, location, and planning committee members. We used a free, online system (www.splashthat.com) to register participants, determine their roles in the community, and determine any needed accommodations. Planning committee members collectively shared these invitations throughout their personal and professional networks. We sought to ensure each community conversation involved a broad cross-section of residents: family members, young people with disabilities, service providers, community and civic leaders, educators, and employers.

Members of our TennesseeWorks Partnership worked alongside each planning committee to support the success of the events. For each location, we developed a generic list of approximately 100 community members (e.g., school board members, city leaders, civic club members, volunteer groups, educators) who would have an important perspective to share. This list was used to extend



invitations and we regularly evaluated registrations against our lists to identify where more targeted invitations needed to be extended. In most communities, we submitted press releases to local radio stations, newspapers, and civic organizations. Our initial goal was to have 40-60 attendees at each event.

Carrying Out the Conversations

Each two-hour event was held on a weekday evening in a community location selected by the planning team. We sought to create a “coffeehouse feel” by offering refreshments and seating at decorated tables. As community members arrived, they signed in and found a place at round tables with several other people, often whom they did not know. We identified a “host” for each table—usually a member of the planning committee or someone they knew would be effective in this role—who was responsible for launching introductions, keeping the discussion focused on solutions and possibilities, and recording on paper all of the key ideas shared at their table during each round of the event.

After a brief welcome, a local facilitator highlighted the importance of improving employment outcomes in their community and encouraged attendees to share their best ideas for making this happen locally. Using an adaptation of the World Café conversation process (www.theworldcafe.com), attendees were then asked to participate in a series of small-group conversations at their tables during which they shared their ideas related to two questions:

- ◆ What can we do as a community to increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability? [Round 1 and 2]



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- ◆ How might we work together in compelling ways to make these ideas happen here in this community? [Round 3]

Each round of the three rounds of conversation—two addressing the first question, and one addressing the second question—lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The “hosts” recorded the diverse ideas shared by attendees at their tables. For example, one person might share a compelling idea for raising parent expectations, another might suggest ways to dispel myths held by employers about hiring people with disabilities, and a third might recommend ways in which schools could make stronger connections to early work experiences for students. As each idea is shared, others sitting at the same table react to, build upon, and refine the ideas. By rotating tables between each round of conversation, participants directly connect with and hear from as many as 12-20 of their fellow citizens.

After almost an hour of small-group discussions, the entire group participated in a short round (i.e., 20-30 minutes) of whole-group sharing of the most promising ideas for making meaningful changes in their community heard throughout the evening. The facilitator invited attendees and table “hosts” to highlight for the entire group one or more of the most compelling suggestions for improving employment outcomes raised at each of their tables. Each idea shared was typed and projected on a large screen for the entire group to see. The conversation was closed by thanking everyone for attending, asking them to complete a brief survey about the event, and inviting them to fill out contact card if interested in contributing to follow-up efforts. Attendees often lingered afterwards in conversation with newly met neighbors.

Learning From Communities

Almost 400 community members participated in these six events (range, 39 to 92 per event). We collected notes from each table host, paper placemats on which attendees took notes, end-of-evening surveys, and notes from the whole-group discussion. We used this information to code and categorize the hundreds of ideas and perspectives generated across the events. We compiled these strategies into “community briefs” and a statewide “practice guide,” all of which were shared back with communities (downloadable at www.tennesseeworks.org). A sampling of these strategies is shown in Table 1. We also analyzed survey findings to understand how attendees viewed their community and this event. For example, nearly everyone considered the evening to be a valuable investment of their time, many learned about local supports and resources of which they were previously unaware,

“It’s one thing to create the ‘mountaintop experience,’ where we talk about this and everyone gets pumped up. But then all of a sudden, we return to our real world and the problems are still there. We need to not only help the communities come up with their own ideas, but then also implement these ideas in their own realistic ways.”

Advocate and Individual with a Disability

“[The conversation] showed us that employment is feasible for everyone because everyone has something positive to offer.”

State Agency Representative

most identified steps they could take to help expand access to employment, and nearly everyone felt the event improved their views of the capacity of their community to improve employment opportunities locally.

After the Conversation

The six events were successful at generating practical next steps for each community, raising awareness of a critical issue, and bringing new voices into conversations about making systemic change. But they also generated interest in further actions. If community conversations can be a catalyst for local communities, what next steps might be taken to begin changing employment opportunities for their neighbors and family members with disabilities? As individuals, residents might work within their own sphere of influence (e.g., their family, school, workplace, or agency) to equip young people with the skills, supports, linkages, or encouragement needed to pursue a good job. Indeed, we learned in our follow-up survey that many attendees reported implementing an idea or strategy they heard at the conversation up to six weeks after the event.

- ◆ As a community, a number of ideas were suggested for moving forward collectively to expand quality employment

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opportunities locally. For example, communities recommended:

- ◆ Establishing a local coalition focused specifically on building the capacity of employers to support inclusive employment opportunities;
- ◆ Launching community-wide awareness efforts aimed at raising expectation about the contributions people with severe disabilities can make in the workplace and recognizing employers who strive to make their workplace inclusive;
- ◆ Developing a community portal through which people with disabilities, schools, and employers can connect with one another and find relevant resources; or
- ◆ Hosting follow-up community conversation events each year to revisit progress and identify next steps to make a deeper impact.

A coordinating team comprised of community conversation attendees and others could be established to launch and maintain one or more efforts in their community. This group should craft a shared vision, draw in key partners, and identify those next steps that make most sense for their community. Such a group may be better positioned than any individual agency or organizations to adopt a broader, community-wide approach to change.

Some Lessons Learned about Hosting Community Conversation

We are struck by the particular promise of community conversations as a feasible, enjoyable, and effective approach for identifying local solutions to issues that matter most in the lives of community members. We conclude this article by highlighting just a few of the lessons we learned from implementing this approach across six communities:

Communities are replete with individuals who have much to contribute to change efforts, but who are too often overlooked. When extended an invitation to be part of these conversations, more than 400 Tennesseans chose to invest an evening and most volunteered to be part of follow-up efforts. Many people were surprised by how many fellow citizens were also invested in this issue.

While a number of barriers to competitive employment were evident across most or all of the communities (e.g., low expectations, limited supports, lack of awareness), the specific solutions generated by communities often varied and reflected the unique assets each possessed.

These events may themselves constitute a powerful community intervention, raising awareness among attendees about resources, strategies, and opportunities of which attendees were previously unaware and building new connections among key stakeholders.

The composition and connections of the local planning team impacts the nature of the conversation and the likelihood of follow-up activities. Identifying a leadership team that reflects a breadth of community roles increases the likelihood of a drawing in new voices to the conversation events.

The presence and participation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities fundamentally changes the nature of the conversations. The conversation is no longer about an “issue” but about their neighbors and family members who are directly impacted by the lack of employment opportunities in their community.

About the Authors

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Table 1: Sample Ideas Raised at Local Community Conversations

Ideas for Families

- Involve your child in early work experiences when they are in middle and high school
- Require household chores to promote responsibility, independence, and skill development
- Talk often with your child about work at home and communicate high expectations for future work
- Learn about formal services and natural supports in your community that can help your child connect to and succeed in the workplace

Ideas for Communities

- Organize a community-wide job fair to link employers and young people with disabilities
- Create a website to serve as a centralized resource and information hub on employment for your community
- Encourage media outlets to spotlight success stories of employees with disabilities
- Launch a broad awareness campaign focusing on the strengths and contributions of people with disabilities in workplace.

Ideas for Employers

- Share employment openings with service providers so they are aware of local needs and can assist with recruiting people with disabilities who have the needed skills
- Create prominent way for local businesses to publically identify themselves as committed to the employment of persons with disabilities (e.g., storefront sticker)
- Emphasize that hiring people with disabilities is more about finding excellent employees than about “doing good”
- Learn about available financial incentives and agency supports that can be drawn upon when hiring people with disabilities

Ideas for Civic Leaders

- Engage area civic and service groups (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists) in mobilizing their networks and resources toward expanding local employment opportunities
- Partner with local schools to expand the availability of community-based training sites for youth in transition
- Identify someone to serve as a “point person” for navigating 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 Educators

- Teach job search skills to students, such as application completion, interview strategies, and job search strategies
- Ensure students are involved in multiple work-based experiences each year
- Invite local employers and representatives from civic organizations to schools to connect with students through classroom and community-based activities
- Facilitate a family support group to develop community networks, share information about services and supports, and increase parent participation in the transition process.

Ideas for Service Providers

- Make job matches on the strengths, abilities, and preferences of young people with disabilities, not simply available job openings
- Deepen personal relationships with employers and address work incentive programs, myths related to employment, and the benefits of hiring young people with disabilities
- Form a local collaborative of provider agencies that work together to plan community-based vocational training outside of school for youth with disabilities.
- Host job fairs and networking events to connect potential employers to youth with disabilities.

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Changing the Conversation: Engaging Local Communities in New Discussions About Competitive Employment

Table 1 continued from page 13

Ideas for Faith Communities

Support youth with and without disabilities to work together on service and community projects

Create a mentoring program that matches congregation members without disabilities to those with disabilities to promote inclusion in services and community events

Develop a network of persons within the congregation willing to provide transportation or mobilize inactive church vans throughout the week

Regularly host events focused on connecting small business owners and entrepreneurs in your congregation to youth with disabilities

Reach out directly to congregation members who are employers or whose place of employment might be receptive to hiring people with disabilities to share information in the weekly bulletin and/or at other events about potential opportunities

Ideas for Young People with Disabilities

Find a mentor in your community who could provide advice on finding a job and introduce you to employers

Ask to attend your IEP meeting each year and share your input about your goals, strengths, and areas of support.

Come up with a list of your interests and goals and find occupations that match. Talk to family and friends who may know people who already have those jobs to learn more.

Talk to your employer about parts of your job that are unclear or challenging to complete

Look for jobs that you enjoy that build upon your strengths and abilities

Practice a "mock interview" with a friend, teacher, or mentor so you feel more prepared on the real interview day.

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Holding High Expectations from an Early Age

Rachael Jenkins and Courtney Taylor, Vanderbilt University

As emphasized throughout this issue of *TASH Connections*, work is frequently considered an important aspect of living well in community. After all, the benefits of working extend beyond the financial stability it brings. Having a good job can lead to the development of satisfying relationships, promote greater independence, and offer new opportunities to give back to one's community. Employment is a path that should be available to everyone, whether or not they have a significant disability. Indeed, every person has skills, strengths, and other assets to contribute. When young people with significant disabilities receive the right encouragement, supports, instruction, and opportunities—they too can thrive in the workplace.

The expectations of families, educators, and others directly influence the career development and employment outcomes of young people with significant disabilities (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). Far too many parents do not realize that integrated, community employment is a viable option when their sons or daughters have extensive support needs. Yet when parents hold high expectations for work from an early age, their children are substantially more likely to pursue this path and find success. Similarly, too many educators invest limited time preparing students with significant disabilities for the world of work. Yet when the development of work-related strengths, interests, experiences, and awareness are encouraged consistently throughout childhood—and from multiple directions—the pathway to a good career in adulthood becomes much more secure.

In this article, we begin by addressing how parents can clearly communicate high expectations for work to their sons and daughters with disabilities. We then discuss promising avenues for encouraging educators to adopt these same high expectations

and to equip their students with disabilities for the world of work. Finally, we suggest policies and practices states could pursue that support encourage high expectations among parents and educators.

The Expectations of Parents

Encouraging Career Development at Home

Parents can do many things at home to communicate high expectations and prepare their children for future participation in the workforce. One way to start thinking about setting up a child for success is to consider the characteristics and qualities that make someone a great employee. For example, a good employee has a strong work ethic, is motivated, and is a team player. She knows her own strengths and challenges, and is willing to try new things. He has a positive attitude, pursues his interests, and is confident about the contributions he has to make. Encouraging these skills and traits from an early age will go a long way towards preparing a young person with disabilities to enter the workforce.

Teaching Responsibility

A good work ethic requires having a sense of responsibility and taking pride in what one does. An effective way to begin teaching responsibility to a child is to assign chores based on their abilities. All children with disabilities are capable of contributing to family life in some capacity, even from a very young age. Young children naturally want to help, and giving them an opportunity

Five Tips for Parents

- ◆ Assign everyday household chores (e.g., making bed, laundry, dishes)
- ◆ Regularly prepare meals and do other activities together
- ◆ Regularly ask the child to reflect on what he or she enjoys doing and learning.
- ◆ Consider volunteering in the community
- ◆ Praise efforts rather than outcomes

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to contribute will add to a sense of pride and accomplishment. Consider these simple ways children with disabilities can contribute to the household:

- ◆ Making their beds
- ◆ Putting away their toys
- ◆ Clearing their dishes from the table
- ◆ Feeding the family pet

Parents should presume competence when assigning and teaching new responsibilities to their children. As children get older and their abilities grow, so should their responsibilities. For example, a child might move from clearing his or her dishes from the table to unloading the dishwasher. Parents might also consider shifting responsibilities periodically so children can learn more about what they do (and do not) like and develop flexibility in adapting to new tasks.

Providing children opportunities to learn about working as part of a team is also a valuable and translatable skill. Parents can encourage an ethic of teamwork by doing things like regularly preparing meals together, maintaining a garden, or putting forth a group effort to clean up a messy room. Children should have opportunities to do chores alone *and* as a family, and should be taught at an early age that it is expected they contribute to the well-being of the household. Encouraging active participation in family life reinforces the message that children with disabilities are an integral and important part of the community, starting with their family.

Getting Experience Outside of the Home

Volunteering and service projects are especially effective avenues for children and youth with disabilities to learn accountability and gain work-related experiences in elementary or middle school (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2012). Parents may consider the following questions when thinking about places in the community where their son or daughter might volunteer:

- ◆ What interests and passions does the child have that would fit well with the needs of a community or organization?
- ◆ Is the child already involved in organizations that offer volunteer opportunities, such as a faith community, a scouting group, or other youth program?
- ◆ What service-learning or other volunteer experiences are available through the school?

Research on Parent Expectations

- ◆ More than half (53%) of youth with disabilities have parents who expect them “definitely” to graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma.
- ◆ Most parents expect their sons and daughters with disabilities (86%) to “definitely” to be able to get a paid job in the future.
- ◆ Parents who believe their son or daughter will “definitely” get a paid job in the future increased 9% between 1987 and 2001.

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (www.nlts2.org)

- ◆ What types of experiences might expose the child to new experiences or aspects of the community of which he or she is unaware?
- ◆ What supports would he or she need to contribute in meaningful and enjoyable ways?

For example, assisted living programs are often looking for volunteers to visit with residents. The fellowship committee at a faith community may need help making refreshments or the welcome team may be looking for greeter. Actively engage the child in reflecting on his or her interests, exploring available volunteer opportunities, and making connections to those experiences. Having the child drive the process as much as possible will encourage self-reliance and independence, both of which are great skills for the workplace.

Once a child is old enough to pursue a paid job, it will be beneficial to encourage him or her to consider what he or she has learned about interests, strengths, and passions. The child might generate a list of what she enjoys doing and what she is good at. Getting her thinking about how those strengths might transfer into a work setting will be very effective, especially as she learns to communicate those strengths and contributions to others. Employers who have had few opportunities to get to know people with disabilities may have a hard time seeing how a person with a label like “Down syndrome” or “autism” might fit into their organization. When youth know their strengths and can communicate them effectively to potential employers, their prospects for securing a job increase substantially.

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Volunteer positions, internships, and part-time jobs during the school years are wonderful ways to not only explore interests, but also to learn critical soft skills like timeliness, appropriate dress, communication, and social graces. Having early work experiences will give youth with disabilities a jump-start to securing employment after his or her school years.

Encouraging a “Can Do” Attitude

Everyone needs praise and to know when they are doing well. Instead of praising the outcome (“good job”), focus on praising a child’s efforts and willingness to try new things (“You kept trying until you got that sheet on the bed!”). Praising efforts instead of outcomes may encourage perseverance and help children and youth develop positive attitudes about taking on new challenges. Praising effort, even when the outcome is not perfect, may ease frustrations and encourage the child to try again. Young people with disabilities might become frustrated as they challenge themselves to expand their abilities. Helping them to explore what went wrong and how they might approach the task in a different way will encourage a “can do” attitude.

Finally, parents are perhaps the most prominent role models for their children. Their own optimistic attitudes about their jobs can be very influential in terms of how children with disabilities view the concept of working. When parents come home exhausted and stressed, or complain about co-workers and the workplace, children are likely to notice and may store away these types of attitudes. The argument stands that explicitly teaching children the meaning and importance of work and how it contributes to the greater good of a community will raise expectations.

The Expectations of Educators

Raising Expectations at School

As children with disabilities enter and progress through school, the expectations of educators and other professionals can play a powerful role in shaping the career aspirations and opportunities for work experience they have (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011). When parents expect their child to eventually work and share that vision widely, they can encourage educators to work in partnership with them to equip their children with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes their sons and daughters will need to succeed. High educator expectations can enhance the effectiveness of programs and services designed to successfully transition young people to competitive employment or postsecondary education.

Teachers should pursue integrated, paid employment in the community as the first-choice postschool goal for all students with significant disabilities and infuse this commitment throughout the curriculum and school activities. Although transition is usually emphasized toward in late middle and high school, parents should be an active presence throughout their child’s schooling. For example, during elementary school, parents can ask teachers to provide information regarding any services and supports available that could impact post-school experiences. Parents can also encourage teachers to identify, build upon, and expand their children’s interests, strengths, and experiences related to the world of work. Finally, parents can ensure the individualized goals transition teams craft for their children outline a clear pathway to a future job. General goals rarely lead to concrete outcomes.

Promoting Career Development at School

Teachers can promote career development in a wide variety of ways. For example, they can select readings that show characters working a variety of jobs, they can use class time to hold discussion about different career options, and they can regularly ask their students about what they want to do when they grow up. Children and youth with disabilities can begin thinking about their dreams for the future as they are exposed to different career options. To be prepared for employment or postsecondary education, children need to develop self-awareness, an understanding of their own interests and abilities. Teachers can develop activities for the classroom that help students with disabilities identify their interests.



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Five Tips for Educators

- ◆ Include readings and discussions about careers in class activities
- ◆ Pursue integrated employment as the first and preferred option
- ◆ Clearly explain all transition concepts and services to parents
- ◆ Provide opportunities for early work experience
- ◆ Empower young people to participate in developing their transition plan

Understanding Transition Process

During high school, it is easy for parents to become overwhelmed with all the services and supports needed to promote a successful transition to adulthood. Ask teachers to explain concepts and programs with which you are not familiar. For example, a number of local and state programs may exist that can support graduates with significant disabilities in community jobs. Vocational rehabilitation can provide job placement and career counseling support. And various non-profits and state agencies can coordinate services that facilitate postsecondary outcomes. However, many parents do not know about these services or how to access them. If parents actively ask about available supports, they can work with educators and other service professionals to help create a more seamless transition. Once again, it is important for parents to discuss with teachers the importance of their active participation in the process.

It is also essential for parents to understand the importance of the transition plan (<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iep-transition/>). This plan includes information on each student's present levels of performance, assessment findings, services and supports, and goals for life after high school. Parents can familiarize themselves with what a good transition plan contains (www.nsttac.org). Each student's plan should be individualized. If parents and educators are working together on developing the student's abilities with employment as the culminating goal, all the objectives, goals, services, and supports outlined on that plan should converge toward that goal. The transition plan will also outline the coordination of services after school. Parents should ensure everything is explained clearly to them and the roles of all team members and partners are clarified.

Another important component of a transition plan is the inclusion of age-appropriate assessments. Vocational assessments are an essential tool for many students as they prepare for integrated, paid employment. Accurate assessments convey useful information about potential careers as well as supports the youth might need in a postsecondary or work environment. Again, assessments should be tailored to each individual. Parents should be actively included in this process; they can be involved in the development of assessments as well as determining which assessments would be appropriate.

Encouraging Early Work Experience

Access to early work experience can be a powerful way to equip students with the skills, attitudes, and connections needed for competitive employment. Discussion about opportunities for paid and volunteer work experiences should begin early in high school. Young people who hold paid jobs in high school are more likely to pursue integrated, competitive employment as an adult (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Educators and families should work together to connect young people to early work experience. Begin looking early and take advantage of any work-based learning offered by the school. Early work experiences can take many forms. For example, a teacher could set up a day of job shadowing to allow young people to explore various occupations in their community, involve students in a school-based enterprise, or support a hands-on job training placement in a local business.

These work experiences should be accompanied by any needed support. Close supervision at worksites is crucial in developing work skills. Young people need to receive clear, consistent, and supportive feedback. Constructive feedback allows young people



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to understand how to improve as well as receive the supports that can be necessary to work success.

Raising Expectations Statewide

When parents and teachers collectively communicate high expectations for the children and youth in their lives, the likelihood that successful employment will be realized increases dramatically. But those high expectations need to be backed up by strong support. The future will look much brighter for young people with significant disabilities when legislators, agencies, and other policymakers pursue policies and practices that support the outcomes parents and teachers are pursuing so vigorously. What steps might states take to collectively raise and support the expectations of families and educators for integrated, competitive employment?

In all of the professional development and training opportunities provided to parents and educator, make sure attendees hear success stories of young people with significant disabilities in the workplace and leave with resources needed to make it happen in their community.

Address fear of losing benefits by ensuring that families are provided accurate information and resources demonstrating the financial advantage of working over sole reliance on a check.

Develop a plan to coordinate transition services among different agencies involved in the transition process, including developing cross-training opportunities for professionals. States can make a huge impact in raising employment expectations by supporting

and implementing policies and practices that reinforce the value every young person with a disability brings to the workforce.

“Where Do You Want to Work?”

Although most careers are not formally launched not until after high school, children and youth with disabilities begin developing their career aspirations and skills from an early age. Ask children what they want to be when they grow up and chances are they will have a ready answer. While their answers were probably change over time, thinking about jobs and life as an adult is an important part of developing their identity. The expectations parents, educators, and others hold will permeate and shape the aspirations and plans of young people with disabilities. How do you know expectations are high? When the question “*Do you want to work?*” is replaced by the question “*Where do you want to work?*”

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Equipping Youth to Direct Their Own Transition Planning

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“Nothing about me without me” is a phrase commonly used by adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to remind us all that their voice should be primary when any planning occurs related to their lives. For over three decades, a variety of person-centered approaches (e.g., PATH, Personal Futures Planning, MAPS; see box), have been drawn upon to ensure a person’s own preferences, wants, and needs take center stage when creating a plan of support.

While person-centered approaches are increasingly advocated within adult services for people with I/DD, the concept of “nothing about me without me” has been slow to take root in the education system. Students with I/DD receiving special education services rarely attend their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings during and throughout the transition period. Even when present at these critical planning meetings, students with disabilities often have a passive role and rarely lead their own meetings (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) found that students were the least likely of all IEP meeting participants to understand the purpose of the meeting, the least likely to understand what to do at an IEP meeting, and the least likely to speak at their meeting. Instead, teachers and other adults dominate the conversations at these meetings.

Because these meetings are supposed to benefit students and create individualized plans that will help them transition to adulthood successfully, their active involvement in the process is critical. But students with I/DD are unlikely to learn the skills needed to participate in, contribute to, and lead an IEP meeting by passively watching. They need instruction, opportunities, and support to equip them to direct their own planning meetings.

Fortunately, expectations for student involvement are rising. Over the last decade, a number of tools have been developed and evaluated for teaching students with I/DD to become more involved in their IEP and transition planning meetings. In some cases, students are learning to be the primary facilitator of these meetings. Choice and control in one’s life is critical for any person whether or not they have a disability. It is now recommended that students assume a primary role in developing their own transition goals and taking steps toward meeting them (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

The Importance of Student Involvement in Transition Planning

Student-directed IEP training teaches and promotes self-advocacy and self-determination skills in among the most important planning context—their IEP meetings. The transition goals of students should reflect their dreams, wants, needs, interests, strengths, preferences, skills, and challenges. If the voice of the student is in the background, how likely is it that the IEP will be truly representative of a student’s personal aspirations and goals? Putting students in charge of leading their own IEP meeting (with support) provides a forum for students to learn about and practice skills that can enhance their self-determination by working through the various steps of these meetings. Students who direct their own IEP meetings show more interest in activities beyond high school (e.g., employment, higher education/training, community participation, and independent living), and take more ownership of meeting their IEP goals. For example, students gain opportunities to learn to facilitate their own meetings, speak up for themselves (self-advocacy), make choices, (self-determination), and resolve conflicts. Those skills are not learned overnight, and so it is important to begin practicing early.

As suggested previously, the skills taught in student-directed IEP training also have value for students far beyond running their own meetings. Students gain the skills related to interacting effectively in a meeting context; the ability to identify one’s wants, needs,

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preferences, skills, and limitations; and the capacity to ask for clarification when something is not clear. These skills are useful in many other contexts—at home, in the workplace, or elsewhere in the community. If students speak up for themselves (self-advocacy) and make their own choices (self-determination) in a setting as intimidating as an IEP meeting (just think of all those adults sitting around a table trying to plan a student's future), there is a greater chance they will continue using these skills in other aspects of their lives.

While providing students with disabilities the tools to better participate and/or facilitate their own IEP and transition planning meetings is an evidence-based and recommended practice (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013), there are benefits to consider. Sweeney (1997) found that students participating in self-directed IEP training demonstrated enhanced career awareness by more often expressing preferences toward certain types of work and discussing the types of jobs that they would pursue once out of school. This also showed that students self-directing their IEP/Transition Planning meetings experienced the following short-term outcomes:

- ◆ increased attendance at their IEP meetings;
- ◆ increased parent attendance at their IEP meetings;
- ◆ increased talk of their own interests;
- ◆ increased sharing of their dreams for the future;
- ◆ increased talk about jobs they want after leaving school;
- ◆ feelings of being “the boss” of their IEP meetings; and
- ◆ feelings of confidence about reaching their IEP goals.

Overview of our Self-Directed IEP/Transition Planning Project

Although a growing body of research exists to support the short-term benefits for students who lead their own IEP/Transition Planning meetings (Griffin, 2011; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013), studies are needed to measure the impact of self-directed IEPs/transition planning on longer-term outcomes such as increased opportunities for competitive, integrated employment or post-secondary education, increased self-determination and self-advocacy in other aspects of their lives, increased social skills, and increased opportunities for independent living. The Arc Tennessee staff have been providing education and outreach around secondary transition planning for students, families and educators for years, including some basic introductions to self-directed IEPs and transition planning. However, we had not had



opportunities to provide in-depth training and to examine the impact on participating students and staff.

Three years ago, The Arc Tennessee had the opportunity to implement and evaluate the impact of student-directed IEP/Transition Planning meetings through a three-year grant from the Walmart Foundation and The Arc US. Although not a formal research project, the grant project provided a rich context to explore the process and outcomes associated with student-directed IEPs and transition planning in real schools. Although our primary goal was to simply increase student involvement planning meetings, we also anticipated students who facilitated (or co-facilitated) their own meetings would have better outcomes in areas like employment, post-secondary education, community participation, and independent living.

The project focused on high schools in three rural counties in Tennessee. We sent invitations to all transition-age students (14 and older in Tennessee) in the school systems. Only a small number of students responded, even after individual meetings with students and their family. We averaged 8-15 participants each year, representing a wide range of disabilities (e.g., intellectual disability, autism, learning disabilities). We drew upon Jim Martin and colleagues (1996) self-directed IEPs process, as well as incorporated additional self-advocacy and self-determination materials from other sources.

At the beginning of each school year, students completed a variety of Brigance assessments in the areas of employment, post-secondary education and independent living, along with The Arc Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer & Kelcher, 1995) to establish a baseline of knowledge and skills in these areas. Students then participated in five “stakeholder workshops” that also included family members, educators, and (in some cases) peer mentors who co-facilitated meetings.

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Everyone received training in the following areas:

- ◆ Sensitivity, Empowerment, and People-First Language
- ◆ Basic Information About IDEA
- ◆ Secondary Transition Process
- ◆ Using Assistive Technology in Transition Planning
- ◆ Student-Directed IEP Team Meetings/Transition Planning Meetings

We considered joint training of all stakeholders in these initial workshops to be a critical component of this project. We designed these introductory workshops so each stakeholder learned about and valued each other's role in the transition planning process. It also created an environment in which all stakeholders were treated equally, thereby increasing the validity of the student's role in IEP and transition planning. It was especially valuable for parents and educators to "walk in the shoes of the student" to understand what the IEP process might be like for students when they are not leading the meetings, contrasted with what it might be like when students take the lead. Lastly, training everyone together reinforced philosophies that are often assumed to be in place, but frequently are lacking in the transition planning process (e.g., people-first language, self-determination, self-advocacy).

After the initial workshops were completed, we held a series of more intensive "Train the Trainer" workshops that involved teachers. The purpose of these sessions was to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to teach future students to self-direct their IEPs, thereby increasing the reach of the project. We individualized the sessions to meet each student's learning level, as no two students had the same needs. Both students and educators

(and some peers) participated in the workshops described in Figure 1.

Within the first section of training focused on Meeting Facilitation. The students learned to welcome planning team members, introduce themselves (and sometimes others), and to state the reason for the meeting. The second Meeting Facilitation session reviewed the first session and then focused on closing the meeting by summarizing decisions made and thanking people for attending "their meeting." Most students felt comfortable welcoming people into "their meeting" and their faces reflected their pride in doing so. Parents and educators who initially doubted a student's ability to actively participate in their own meeting slowly changed their opinions.

The second section of the training focused on Self-Advocacy & Self-Determination. We divided it into four separate workshops to provide students multiple opportunities to practice self-advocacy and self-determination skills. During each workshop, students practiced reviewing past goals and performance (from their own IEPs), expressing their interests, expressing their skills and limits, and expressing their own secondary transition options and goals. This section of the training was quite revealing. Students shared they would have never chosen some of the transition goals listed on their IEPs and they had not been part of these conversations in the past.

The third section of training focused on Communication and Conflict Resolution. Students learned to ask questions to better understand, ask for feedback, and deal with differences of opinion. Each of the three topics were covered separately for student and teacher benefit. Everyone needs effective

Figure 1. Overview of Topics Addressed in Trainings

Meeting Facilitation	Self-Advocacy & Self-Determination	Communication & Conflict Resolution
Welcome, Introduce Team Members & State Purpose of Meeting	Review Past Goals and Performance	Ask Questions for Better Understanding
Close Meeting by Summarizing Decisions & Thank People for Attending	Express Interests	Ask for Feedback
	Express Skills and Limits	Deal with Differences of Opinion
	Express Secondary Transition Options and Goals	

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communication and conflict resolution skills, and we saw improvement as students gained knowledge and practice.

We designed this series of workshops to give educators the skills needed to implement the student-directed IEPs with their students, thereby allowing the benefits of this project to continue after grant funding ended. These workshops allowed us to equip multiple educators to provide this training to their own students, including students self-directing their IEP/transition planning meetings as well as the peers who may co-facilitate with them. Once students and educators worked through the curriculum with The Arc Tennessee staff (and many practice session took place), students were invited to facilitate their next IEP meetings. Students with limited verbal skills or requiring extra support in meeting other aspects of these nine objectives had the option for a peer to co-facilitate the meetings with them, thereby retaining the “student-led” aspect of the IEP meeting. Some of the students also learned to use assistive technology as a part of the project.

Example Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Over the course of the three-year project, 20 students facilitated their own IEP/transition planning meetings. Students who facilitated their own IEP/transition meetings followed the different steps outlined in the training and received support from a peer or family member as needed. Students had binders with “hints” to help them move through the IEP/transition meetings. Three students chose to simply be active participants. While these students did not formally lead their meetings, they provided input on their IEP goals and planning for their coming academic year. At the completion of each project year, students completed the same assessments to determine any improvements in self-determination skills, and to measure any increased interest in employment, post-secondary education, or employment. The project produced a wealth of information related to the impact of students facilitating their own IEP/Transition meetings.

Students also demonstrated some improvements related to self-determination. For example, on the Arc Self-Determination Scale, ratings of autonomy increased by 8%, self-regulation increased by 13%, psychological empowerment increased by 9%, and self-determination increased by 6%. Two students who participated in the project found paid jobs, one is seeking employment, and one is volunteering. Seven students are participating in work-based learning experiences through their school. Eleven students are unemployed, but have expressed a strong interest in gaining work experience. In addition to the changes in goals and activities,

Case Example

Prior to the project, Nicky used no words to communicate and lacked access to a reliable communication device, he expressed his frustration through aggressive behaviors on a regular basis, and he had never attended his own IEP meeting. As the project progressed, so did Nicky. He began using an augmentative communication device to express one word at a time. He learned to welcome team members and introduce himself at his IEP meeting. He shared his likes and dislikes, thanked everyone for coming to his meeting, and left the room to go to an inclusive class he'd never attended prior to enrolling in our student-directed IEP training.

Resources on Person-Centered Planning

- ◆ *PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope)*
- ◆ *Personal Futures Planning*
- ◆ *MAPS (Making Action Plans)*
- ◆ *My Voice, My Choice*
- ◆ *Next S.T.E.P.*
- ◆ *Self-Directed IEP*
- ◆ *TAKE CHARGE for the Future*
- ◆ *Thriving in My Community*
- ◆ *Whose Future is it Anyway?*

there were notable changes in the students themselves. Staff and educators involved in the project shared examples of students who rarely spoke beginning to voice their opinions more often. A few students developed enough confidence to present on the topic at local conferences for self-advocates, professionals, family members, and educators.

One of the biggest hurdles we faced in the project related to getting strong “buy-in” from parents. To participate in the project, students needed both permission from their parents and their commitment to take part in those initial workshops. It was challenging to convince parents that their sons and daughters

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were capable of learning the skills to lead their own meetings and would benefit from participating, as well as difficult to get parents to commit their own time to this effort.

Summary

The project demonstrated that student-directed IEP training provided by organizations like ours can be a promising approach for equipping students to be involved in their own transition planning. “Nothing about me without me” clearly applies to people with disabilities across *all* ages, including youth. Students not only learned to be active participants in the most important meetings of their young adult lives, they also learned valuable skills that will serve them well as they move into adulthood – into post-secondary education, employment and community life.

About the Authors

Carrie Guiden has 22 years of experience working with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Indiana, Arizona, and Tennessee through chapters of The

Arc in these states. Her areas of concentration have included employment, secondary transition, positive behavior supports, person-centered planning, habilitation, grassroots advocacy, public policy and systems change. She is currently Executive Director for The Arc Tennessee.

Treva Maitland has over 20 years of both personal and professional experience with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a parent of young adults with developmental disabilities, Treva became a strong advocate for her children first and then shared her expertise with other families and their children. Her areas of expertise include secondary transition, IDEA, self-determination, and self-directed IEPs.

Loria Richardson has over 25 years of both personal and professional experience with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Loria’s personal experience having children with disabilities led her to work where she helped other families in similar situations. Her areas of expertise include secondary transition, IDEA, and navigation of the vocational rehabilitation system.

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Personal Perspectives: Changing the Question

Tyler Lisowski, M.Ed., a community-based transition program teacher in Nashville, TN.

“Do you want to get a job someday?” This would have been a rather peculiar question to ask me as I was completing my bachelor’s degree in special education at a small, public northeastern university several years ago. Had someone actually asked me this question, I likely would have responded affirmatively, perhaps accompanied by a tone of sarcasm. I had completed challenging entrance examinations, spent thousands of dollars on tuition (thanks, Mom and Dad!), and dedicated four years to studying. Of course I wanted to get a job!

Ironically, I found myself asking this exact question to a group of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities during my first year of teaching in a community-based transition program classroom. Our program includes instruction in, among many other things, employment readiness skills. More often than not students would respond “Yes, Mr. L.”. This would then open the door to a conversation involving career preferences, the job application process, and dream jobs. It was a natural response. My students were experiencing a similar process as the one I went through. But one important variable was different: the presence of a disability.

One of my best friends whom I met in college has a younger brother who happens to have Down syndrome. “Noah” is a bright young man, full of ambition and with an affinity toward physical fitness. Transition assessments correctly indicated he would thrive

in a gym or recreational setting working around people. Despite these assessment findings, Noah’s first work assignment through his school’s transition program was to clean tables in a hospital cafeteria. Unfortunately, this included little to no interaction with others. A few weeks into the placement, his job coach visited the site to assess his progress. To her chagrin, the tables in the dining space were not only dirty, but Noah had refused to complete the task and was sitting on the floor with his arms crossed in disgust. It was clear Noah was not exactly set up for success.

All individuals possess value, despite any differences. I appreciate the concept of people-first language in that it encourages us to look at the individual from a holistic view, where disability is just one part of a whole. Historically, people with disabilities have been devalued and grouped by diagnosis instead of by strengths and contributions. Unfortunately, look where that got us (e.g., institutions, Noah’s experience). As teachers, family members, friends, and neighbors, we cannot be satisfied with prevailing assumptions that individuals with significant disabilities cannot find and maintain meaningful employment. Instead of going through the motions and placing students in vocational experiences based on their label, IQ scores, or what is “convenient,” we should take the time to learn about their strengths as well as their quirks. More than anything, we should take the time to listen.

Noah’s teachers eventually listened and his next internship was at a fitness center. Noah impressed his employers so much that upon graduating from the program he went on to gain paid employment at a gym in his neighborhood. Five years later, Noah continues to work at the same gym and was recently promoted to assistant personal trainer. Instead of asking our friends with disabilities, “Do you want to get a job someday?”, perhaps we should ask, “How can we help you get the job *you want* someday?”.

Promoting Employment Outcomes Through Postsecondary Education Programs

Alicia Cone, Tammy L. Day, Mallory Whitmore, and Courtney Taylor

As national interest in postsecondary education programs (PSE) for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) has grown over the last decade, compelling new avenues for developing employment skills, experiences, and connections have emerged. These postsecondary pathways benefit both students with disabilities and the broader community (e.g., Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2013; Thomas et al., 2011). For example, young adults with IDD who have some type of postsecondary education are much more likely to obtain competitive employment, require fewer on-the-job supports, earn higher wages, have higher self-esteem, and develop stronger social networks. For students with significant disabilities, exiting high school has historically represented the end of their formal education, the introduction of long waiting lists for needed support services and, too often, time spent unengaged at home. These new college-based programs introduce exciting alternatives for students with IDD that increase career opportunities, independence, and involvement in community life.

The Explosion of Postsecondary Educational Options

The *Think College* organization has been instrumental in developing, expanding, and improving higher education options for students with IDD and represents perhaps the

most comprehensive nexus of research and practice in this area. According to their website (www.thinkcollege.net), 215 programs now operate in more than 40 states across the country.

Three main program models exist: mixed or hybrid, substantially separate, and totally inclusive (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Within each model—described below—a wide range of supports and services may be provided.

- ◆ **Mixed/hybrid model:** Students participate in social activities and/or academic classes with students without disabilities (for audit or credit) and also participate in targeted classes with other students with disabilities. This model typically provides students with employment experiences on-campus or off-campus.
- ◆ **Substantially separate model:** Students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities (sometimes referred to as a “life skills” or “transition” program). Students may have opportunities to participate in a narrow range of social activities on campus. Employment experiences are usually offered through a rotation of pre-established employment slots either on-campus or off-campus.
- ◆ **Inclusive individual support model:** Students receive individualized services (e.g., educational coach, tutor, technology, natural supports) in college courses, certificate programs, and/or degree programs, for audit or credit. The individual student’s vision and career goals drive services and supports. There is no program base on campus. The focus is on establishing a student-identified career goal that directs the course of study and employment experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning). Built on a collaborative approach via an interagency team (adult service agencies, generic community services, and the college’s disability support office), agencies identify a flexible range of services and share costs.

Until 2009, however, no college-based postsecondary programs for students with IDD were available in Tennessee after high school. Responding to advocacy by Tennessee families and students with disabilities, the *Tennessee Alliance for Postsecondary Education*

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Opportunities for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities was formed to research and develop best-practice criteria for postsecondary programs in Tennessee. Partners in the *Alliance* include members of the *Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network*, advocacy groups, key colleges and universities, school districts, family members, and state agencies that promote higher education in Tennessee. The *Alliance* advocates for the development of new opportunities for students participating in Tennessee's college-based postsecondary programs to develop strong social, independence, and work-related skills. As of the start of 2014, four programs have been launched in the state.

Financial Resources for PSE

Tuition costs for postsecondary education programs (PSE) for students without disabilities are on the rise, and the financial pinch for students with IDD is no different. PSE programs in Tennessee on average cost students \$10,000 per year. Fortunately, a growing number of sources of financial assistance now exist (see below). Although not all are currently accessed in Tennessee, they may represent possibilities in other states. Because state-specific resources may be available for students, local avenues for financial assistance should also be explored.

- ◆ **IDEA funds:** Dual enrollment programs are often funded by the school system using IDEA or local school district funds. Additionally, higher education institutions can opt to waive tuition.
- ◆ **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** If a student's coursework is directly related to future employment, state VR funds might be available. Additionally, some VR agencies offer a tuition waiver for eligible students.
- ◆ **Federal Pell Grant:** Students with an intellectual disability can now receive funds from the Federal Pell Grant program. They must be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program for students with an intellectual disability and must maintain satisfactory academic progress as determined by the school for this program. Students who are 23 years of age or older do not need to have family's income included in funding determination. These students do not have to be enrolled for the purpose of obtaining a degree or certificate and are not required to have a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.
- ◆ **Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA):** Students who are Tennessee residents may be eligible to receive the TSAA grant provided they meet the deadline of submitting a



FAFSA no later than March 1 and receive a processed Student Aid Report with a valid Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of \$2100 or less. Students must be enrolled as an undergraduate student that has not yet received a baccalaureate degree, be enrolled at least half time at an eligible Tennessee postsecondary institution, and maintain institutional satisfactory academic progress. [More information is available at www.tn.gov/collegepays/mon_college/tsa_award.htm]

- ◆ **Tennessee STEP UP Scholarship:** These funds are available through the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program and are available to Tennessee residents who enroll in non-degree programs for students with an intellectual disability within 16 months of high school completion. This bill was passed in the 2013 legislative session after a considerable amount of advocacy efforts by the disability community, especially students currently enrolled in Tennessee PSE programs, their family members, and educators. They worked tirelessly to educate their legislators about the importance of these programs to Tennessee students with intellectual disability and their families. Those activities included visiting legislators in person and providing testimony during the legislative session. The STEP UP legislation increases financial access to these postsecondary education programs for students with ID, and promotes greater awareness of the benefits that these programs can have for students with disabilities, as well as for their peers and the larger college campus community. [More information is available at www.tn.gov/collegepays/mon_college/stepup.shtml]
- ◆ **Fundraising:** PSE programs frequently conduct an array of small- and large-scale fundraising events to generate additional funds to offset costs for students. In Tennessee, events have included a young professional's meet and greet, bake sale, and *The Vanderbilt Star* songwriter competition.

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◆ **University scholarships:** Tennessee universities with PSE programs for students with IDD are also working hard to establish endowments significant enough to serve as an ongoing source of scholarships to students.

Comprehensive Transition Program Status

Becoming a Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) is an important step for colleges or universities offering programs for students with IDD. Comprehensive Transition programs were initially described and defined by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. They are degree, certificate, or non-degree programs for students with intellectual disability that (a) are offered by a college or career school and approved by the U.S. Department of Education; (b) are designed to support students with intellectual disabilities who want to continue academic, career, and independent living instruction to prepare for gainful employment; (c) offer academic advising and a structured curriculum; and (d) require students with intellectual disabilities to participate, for at least half of the program in one of four types of integrated settings with students without disabilities. Those setting are: 1) regular enrollment in credit-bearing courses; (2) auditing or participating in courses for which the student does not receive regular academic credit; (3) enrollment in noncredit, non-degree courses; or (4) internships or work-based training. If students with an intellectual disability are attending a CTP, they may qualify to use federal financial aid to help pay the cost of attendance.

Addressing Career Development in PSE Programs

These PSE programs offer a unique context to promote career development for young adults in transition. When designed well, these programs can substantially increase the likelihood that participating students will find success in the area of employment (Flannery, Benz, Yovanoff, Kato, & Lindstrom, 2011). In the remainder of this article, we examine how two PSE programs in Tennessee are addressing career development with their students with IDD. The *Next Steps* at Vanderbilt program was launched with its first cohort of students in 2010 and the *IDEAL* program at Lipscomb University began this year.

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Assisting students in the search for competitive, integrated, paid employment that is meaningful to them is the highest of priorities for the Next Steps at Vanderbilt program. The employment conversation with students begins during the application process and continues for throughout



the entire two-year program. Through a variety of internships based on interests, person-centered planning sessions, and classes focused on career planning, 80% of students who have graduated from the Next Steps program have secured paid employment.

IDEAL at Lipscomb. The ultimate goal of IDEAL at Lipscomb University is to equip students to obtain better employment options. The program will address this goal by helping students with IDD strengthen their independence, social, communication, and vocational skills in order to prepare students for their preferred job settings. Ideally, students will leave Lipscomb with a job in place and will be prepared to live and work independently.

Incorporating Person-Centered Planning

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Program staff encourages students to begin thinking about their career goals as early as when they are applying to the program. Students answer application questions about their “dream jobs” and how they might focus their time on campus to intentionally work toward meeting their career-related goals. Upon enrollment, students attend the Next Steps Summer Institute (NSSI) prior to their first full academic semester. This serves as their summer orientation. When students come to the NSSI they are given a career assessment and they participate in their first person centered planning meeting with their families and staff. The Next Steps staff is seeking to better understand each students’ interests, skills, and aptitudes. From this information, Next Steps staff make decisions on the best place for each student to have his or her first internship. The PCP meetings that follow help staff get to know each student and his or her personal goals for the two-year program and beyond. During the 2-year program, Next Steps staff also have employment person-centered planning meetings with each student. These employment PCP meetings allow students to explore their ideal job conditions,

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share their interests, discuss the assets they might bring to a business, consider locations, and suggest actual employment sites they would like to approach. The employment PCP information is gathered primarily during their third semester as program staff shift toward assisting students to find paid employment after graduation. The Next Steps job developer takes all of this information into consideration when heading out into the community.

IDEAL at Lipscomb. The IDEAL program holds a person-centered planning meeting with each student during each semester of the program. This meeting incorporates feedback and ideas from the students as well as their parents, professors, peer mentors, and internship supervisors. For example, IDEAL staff asks each person to identify (a) what makes a good day or a bad day for the student; (b) what is and is not working with the student at home, at the internship, in class, or with peer mentors; (c) what they admire about the student; and (d) what the student has contributed that semester. By contribute, IDEAL staff are asking what has the student brought to the table in the class, mentoring relationship, or internship site. Some of the responses they have received include “positive attitude,” “work ethic,” and “unique perspective and insight.” Staff use the term “contribute” purposefully as a reminder to partners to thinking about IDEAL students as people who have something to give, rather than as people who only receive (e.g., services, supports, help). This feedback is used to brainstorm the ideal work environment for the student, the types of jobs that offer this sort of environment, and the skills and attitudes students should develop over the course of the program.

Accessing Job Coaches and Developers

Most PSE programs have staff who fulfill the role of job coach and job developer to ensure students have access to the support they need to prepare for and enter the workforce. Both Next Steps and IDEAL programs have a designated staff person for this support role. These staff identify potential internship and work opportunities; train supervisors and others to support students; teach students the skills they need to interview effectively, write resumes, and complete job applications; provide direct support on the job site, as necessary; and equip other college students to serve as job coaches.

Incorporating Internships and Externships

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. To increase exposure to a variety of work experiences, students access internships each semester.



New placements are identified as students develop their skills and broaden or narrow their interests. Examples of internship sites on the Vanderbilt campus have included the various libraries, the student recreational facility, an inclusive preschool, the Occupational Health Clinic, and student media. Internship supervisors continually collect data on the individual progress of students. These data help staff support each student to develop strong employment skills. Each student is also asked to self-evaluate each internship site at the end of the semester. This collective information is used to steer future job development in direction that will be most meaningful to individual students.

Externships (i.e., off-campus job placements) provide more focused career exploration and skill development in areas that align with student interests. For example, one student’s desire to work in radio broadcasting led staff to explore local radio stations. His final externship was at a small radio station in his hometown of Franklin, Tennessee, where he read obituaries over the air. Another student’s desire to work in an early childhood setting resulted in staff approaching local preschools and finding a good match for her to gain valuable experience. At the Tennessee Justice Center, students have been able to explore a number of tasks including editing video, preparing and updating Power Point presentations, organizing and filing documents, mailing letters to clients, and many other roles.

“The Tennessee Justice Center has hosted interns from Vanderbilt University’s Next Steps program for the past two semesters. The internship program has provided office assistance which has been immensely beneficial and has contributed to our work helping vulnerable Tennesseans access health care. Our interns have assisted with a wide variety of tasks including editing video, preparing and updating Power Point presentations, organizing and filing documents, mailing letters to clients, and a host of

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other things. The interns have been hard-working, flexible, conscientious, and willing to learn. The program is structured so that interns have the resources they need to thrive, with Next Steps' staff members providing support and oversight along the way. We are grateful for the Next Steps program and look forward to continuing this partnership."

John Orzechowski, Client Advocate

IDEAL at Lipscomb. IDEAL students use internships to focus on learning the "soft skills" of employment. The purpose of the internship—as reflected in the expectations and the evaluation supervisors are asked to complete—is to work on consistent attendance, appropriate dress, co-worker and supervisor interpersonal relations, work speed, endurance, and following directions. Students begin on-campus internships their very first semester. Particular jobs are sought once career goals are identified with each student. The goal is to scaffold necessary skills so each student is always learning and practicing skills that will benefit them in their future job placement.

"Rashaad has just a great outlook. He is on time and he strives to do his best. His smile is infectious."

—Internship Supervisor

"[A.T.] was so shy at first and now I can't imagine him not speaking to me and saying hello as he enters the room. He wants to get everything just right. He also knows his limits and is able to tell you of his needs (not bossy but gently with tact)."

—Internship Supervisor

Students will be placed in off-campus externships in their second year of the program. The students' job interests and abilities will be matched with available openings. Students will have at least four work experiences to place on their resume when leaving the program.

Paid Work Experiences

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Next Step students must complete an individual program of study to receive a certificate of completion. This program of study requires a certain number of hours of internship each semester. Since this is a program requirement, internships on the Vanderbilt campus cannot be paid. Students without disabilities are also not paid for internship experiences on campus that are required for their programs and so Next Steps is following this policy. If an off-campus placement wanted to pay a student this is allowed. If a student is eligible to receive federal work study funds and they wanted to work a job over and above

their internship hours, they could do so and get paid. In the summers when school is not in session, students are encouraged to seek paid summer employment and the Next Steps job developer is available to help find such jobs.

IDEAL at Lipscomb. The first students began the IDEAL program this year and paid work experiences have not yet been developed. IDEAL plans to have students complete community externships during their second year in the program and several businesses have approached them to request interns. IDEAL students can participate in paid work experiences as opportunities present themselves.

Training and Career Exploration

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. All entering students must attend the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Summer Institute, a week-long residential orientation session. Students complete a career assessment and the first person-centered planning session involving students and their families is completed. From the very start, Next Steps strives to learn about each student's interests,

Next Steps at Vanderbilt Employment Success Stories

Rachel took classes related to education while at Vanderbilt University, completed two internships where she worked with children, and also completed coursework in Early Childhood studies at the Tennessee College of Applied Technology. When she graduated she had three part-time jobs working in this field. Eventually, her hours increased at one preschool and she was able to drop one of her positions. She now works over 35 hours each week.

Jeanne has a passion for musical theater. She came to Next Steps wanting to work at TPAC. Her time in the program helped her learn to be more flexible and how to work as a team member. Her final internship was at TPAC. As her support needs were substantial, she had assistance from job coaches and several tasks were carved out for her to perform weekly. She works 4 hours each week and is successful. She thoroughly enjoys contributing to the field that so closely aligns with her passion. [See her story at <http://tennesseeworks.org/success-stories/youth/>]

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skills, strengths, and needs. All Next Steps students participate in a course called Career Technology each semester. During these classes they build computer skills while learning about a myriad of topics covering career exploration, career readiness, and job seeking skills. They also create a resume and an e-portfolio which drawn upon throughout their job search. Each month the students also attend a “Lunch & Learn.” During these events, local employers are invited to tell the students about their business or organization and describe what makes someone a “good employee.” Students hear from employers from different occupational areas. Not only do these Lunch & Learns expose students to important perspectives on what employers are looking for, it also raises awareness among local employers about the possibilities of employing people with disabilities.

Next Steps also encourages participation in volunteer activities to build experience and confidence, as well as to help create a richer work history and job references. For example, one student volunteered at a local Vacation Bible School program to work with small children. This experience helped her secure paid work with a local school district’s extended day program.

As mentioned previously, 80% of Next Steps at Vanderbilt graduates are currently employed. They are working in childcare, retail, health club, and office/clerical settings. One graduate was able to obtain her “dream job” working at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center. All graduates are working part-time, with the exception of one who is working full-time.

IDEAL at Lipscomb. IDEAL ensures that every aspect of their program contributes to the overarching goal of increased employability and paid employment for students. IDEAL works with students to complete the “My Future Preferences” career inventory during their first week on campus. The results are used to identify 8-10 jobs that align with their skills and interests. Students then do research to find out what sort of education each job requires, what skills an employee in that role will need, what tasks the job includes and what the average wage is for each job.

IDEAL program staff teach two courses each semester in the area of Employment Skills. These courses include guest speakers to discuss real-world work scenarios, informational videos, trips to job sites, interviews with employees of various departments on campus, and other instructional methods. These courses also teach life skills that double as employability skills such as “accepting no,” technology skills, and self-advocacy.

All Lipscomb undergraduate students are required to complete at least two service projects in order to graduate. Thus, IDEAL



students are also required to complete two service projects. This spring IDEAL students went to Second Harvest Food Bank with about 20 other Lipscomb undergraduates to participate in Spring Service Day. Further, all IDEAL students participate in a yearly campus-wide Service Day with their peers. The purpose of this experience is two-fold: (a) it allows IDEAL students an opportunity to practice their job skills in a low-pressure environment, and (b) it also shows community members that people with disabilities have skills and talents to offer.

Post-Graduation Support

Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Next Steps is currently collaborating with The Arc Tennessee to offer continuing education practices. Arc chapters are holding a monthly Job Club for local individuals and alumni of the Next Steps program are invited to these meetings. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and Next Steps at Vanderbilt is also collaborating with the Academy of Country Music Lifting Lives Foundation to offer an eight-month career exploration series for Next Steps alumni. Thirteen alumni and soon-to-be graduates are participating in this year’s cohort. The goals of the program are continued career/professional development, forging future externship sites for students, and identifying competitive employment opportunities in the entertainment industry in Nashville.

IDEAL at Lipscomb. While IDEAL is still three semesters away from their first graduating class, IDEAL has all of their students apply with Vocational Rehabilitation upon entering the program so they are building relationship with their VR counselor now and so that IDEAL staff can make sure that the job training that they provide aligns with what VR looks for when they assist with

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placement (i.e. IDEAL has objectives for job training cross-listed with VR's and teaches both). In addition, IDEAL students are encouraged to attend Job Clubs through The Arc Tennessee, which teach job-seeking and job-sustaining skills. IDEAL is also planning to facilitate meetings with other providers about how to mutually support IDEAL students transitioning out of the program.

Finally, IDEAL students have access to the Career Development Center on campus which has agreed to facilitate practice interviews, host resume building classes, and assist in portfolio development.

Conclusion

Participation in a PSE program holds great promise for strengthening pathways to meaningful employment, a richer social life, and greater independence. Although longitudinal research is just beginning, we are optimistic about the new possibilities PSE programs in Tennessee have introduced to young people with IDD. We are convinced inclusive postsecondary programs provide a compelling context within which students can develop the skills, supports, experiences, and aspirations they need to launch a meaningful career in their community. We are also hopeful programs will proliferate to the point where any student living in any corner of the state will have access to the PSE experience.

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Personal Perspectives: If Feels Really Good to Have a Job

Rachel Pearson, a graduate of the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Program. She lives in Tennessee.

My name is Rachel and I am a teacher's assistant. I work at two preschools. I like that I get to be around the children. I like playing with them and doing art with them. I like to try to figure out what they like to do and to protect them when their parents are at work.

When I interviewed for my jobs I was nervous. I didn't know what to say. Before I would go to my interviews, I would practice a lot. I would practice in front of the mirror. I was still nervous, but I got better.

Going to college helped me get a job. I went to Next Steps at Vanderbilt [a 2-year postsecondary education program for

students with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee]. It helped me figure out what I wanted to do as a job. I had internships at preschools, and I was in class at Tennessee Technology Center to learn how to work with kids. It helped me get a certification. In my internships, I got to get experience figuring out what kids like to do and what they play with. Also, I learned about how they learn. I worked with 4-5 year olds.

It feels really good to have a job. I like to make money so I can maybe get an apartment or a house or something like that and have a better future.

I think it is important for people to figure out what kind of job you might want to have. You can research different things to figure out what you want to do. Whatever you want to be you can try to do it.

Personal Perspectives: Get a Paycheck and Be Happy

Clayton Huffman, a student in a community-based transition program in middle Tennessee.

My name is Clayton. I am 19. I go to school and I work at the Holiday Inn in Nashville, TN. I'm so good at breaking down boxes and serving employees for lunch. I do garbage and put away plastic bags too. I have a uniform. I wear a black shirt, black pants, black shoes, and a hat.

The main thing I do is I serve employees for lunch. I put food on the plates and serve them something to drink and say "hello," "welcome," and "thank you." Yesterday I served meatloaf. I get to eat the food too. It is very good. Employees pay for lunch and I take the money and count it. If they don't have money, they sign a piece of paper.

I am good at my job. I am an excellent hard worker. I get a paycheck. I really like that. The first thing I bought was a hoodie that was black and gold.

I am very independent. I work with a lot of people. They are my friends. I work three days a week. I work 12 hours a week. I really like it at work. It's a business.

I was doing training at the Holiday Inn and then I got a job there. I did an interview. I felt confident. I practiced for my interview with my teacher, Mr. L. We did that for school. Then I had a real interview. They told me I get benefits like free breakfast or lunch.

Mr. L was happy for me to get the job. He helps me have confidence. My dad picks me up sometimes. Sometimes I take



the bus after work all by myself. I like riding the bus. My favorite thing about my job is serving the lunch. I like to meet and greet and we talk to each other.

Ms. Colleen helped me when I started. I learned more independence. Now I can work by myself. The chef helps me too. He helps show me how much food is for the plates. It is easy for me at my job. I don't need help now. I would like to keep working there. I want to grow up and live with a friend. Maybe I can.

I think it is important to have a job. People need a job. For advice, I would say get a paycheck, don't complain at your job, and be happy.

Answering Employers Questions About Hiring People with Significant Disabilities

Lynnette Henderson and Alicia A. Cone

The success youth with significant disabilities have in the area of employment is strongly influenced by the attitudes of employers in their communities. The role of the employer is critical to improving the employment landscape for youth with disabilities. Employers who see youth with disabilities as a potential labor pool feel confident in their ability to make any needed accommodations, believe that hiring youth with disabilities increases their workforce diversity, have experienced the commitment and dedication of employees with disabilities, and create opportunities for young people with significant disabilities to get the chance to share and develop their talents in the workplace. Employers who have hired people with disabilities are now making an impassioned case to their fellow business owners that it makes good sense to hire workers with disabilities. Many refer to this as the “business case” and it is this employer-to-employer education that is affecting changes in employer attitudes and expectations.

Yet employers continue to hold a wide range of attitudes, expectations, and questions about hiring people with disabilities. In our efforts to advocate for paid, integrated jobs in community settings for youth and young adults with significant disabilities, we know that employers, who have experience with employees with significant disabilities, can be critical allies in these efforts. However, to be effective in our efforts, we must have a ready

answer to the questions employers who are new to hiring, training, and retaining employees with disabilities are most likely to raise. In this article, we present a list of ten common questions often raised by first time employers of workers with disabilities. For each, we offer potential responses that draw upon available data and industry examples.

1. Will hiring a person with a disability increase my liability?

Employees with and without disabilities are covered equally by your workers’ compensation insurance. Hiring people with disabilities will not automatically increase your workers’ compensation liability. Factors that can make your workers’ compensation insurance premiums increase are the frequency and severity of claims (How can you control workers’ compensation cost?, 2013). In a large database study by Price and colleagues (2012), the most frequent cause of injury was falls, occurring at a higher rate among people with disabilities than those without a disability. This study showed that although workers with disabilities are more likely to be injured, those injuries occur at home, not in the workplace. Hiring workers with disabilities does not contribute to increased compensation costs or lost time injuries in the workplace (Unger, 2002). More recent data from the Walgreens distribution center in Anderson, South Carolina showed that paid medical costs, paid indemnity costs, and paid expenses in workers’ compensation cases were between 67-77 % lower for team members with disabilities over two years from 2008 to 2010 (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012).

Research suggests that no matter what industry is under review, the primary way to keep the cost of workers’ compensation insurance premiums under control is to avoid injury claims in the first place. The only way to prevent employee injuries is to create a safe environment, to develop and implement an effective safety training program, and to ensure the company has ongoing work place programs that reward safe work habits (*How much does workers’ compensation insurance cost?*, 2013)

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2. Can employees with disabilities work safely in my business?

As the major safety concern documented by Price et al. (2012), falls are a very preventable accident. Businesses can pay attention to good safety hygiene in keeping the workplace clean, dry, well-lit, and free of hazards to prevent falls and tripping, as some people with disabilities (depending on the disability of course) may be less steady on their feet and more prone to falls. Employees with disabilities can work as safely as their co-workers without disabilities with thoughtful planning and the right accommodations and are more likely to follow safety protocols if they are trained properly (Kaletta et al., 2012; Martella, Agran, & Marchand-Martella, 1992). Recent data for Days Away Restricted Transfer (DART) at the Walgreens distribution center in Anderson, South Carolina reinforce this claim with the days away due to injury peaking at almost 6 in 2006 and decreasing steadily to hover around 2 in 2009 and 2010 (Kaletta et al., 2012).

The Walgreen's Distribution Center in Anderson can attribute their high performance to the following: the building's technology, a strong safety culture, unambiguous policies, clear language, flexible training options, and a management commitment that includes a daily focus on safety issues and incidents. By starting from scratch with a newly built and staffed distribution center, Walgreen's was able to set the tone and expectations for workplace safety even before the first day of operation. This allowed the Anderson group to avoid having an already established safety culture that might have been resistant to implementing best practices in workplace safety and instead create a culture where safety is valued and expected from and for all employees.

One interesting result has been discovering that in the process of coming up with processes and strategies to ensure the needs of employees with disabilities were met, they developed management, equipment and work culture improvements that benefit all employees, with and without disabilities.

3. Who is building the business case?

Increasingly, companies are seeing the value of hiring workers with significant disabilities and are sharing this insight with their colleagues. This is referred to as the "business case" for hiring employees with disabilities, especially intellectual and developmental disabilities. This business case includes five key points: (1) employees with disabilities have equal or better

reliability and retention rates, (2) hiring employees with disabilities improves morale and productivity, (3) employees with disabilities provide assistance in product development by allowing the design of products to be fine-tuned to customers with disabilities, (4) customers prefer to do business with companies that employ people with disabilities, and (5) hiring people with disabilities expands the labor pool available to employers (Nicholas, 2010). Examples of these companies include American Airlines, AT&T, Best Buy, Booz Allen Hamilton, IBM, Lockheed Martin, Lowes, Manpower, Motorola, Microsoft, Office Max, PepsiCo, Sears/K-Mart, SunTrust, Walgreens, and Walmart. Many of these businesses include information about their initiatives on their websites.

Others groups making this case are summarized below:

Many businesses have come together through the US Business Leadership Network* (USBLN; www.usbln.org). The USBLN is a national non-profit that helps business drive performance by leveraging disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain, and marketplace.

Other non-profit initiatives include the media campaign *Think Beyond the Label* (www.thinkbeyondthelabel.com) operated by Health & Disability Advocates, a national nonprofit organization. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is an **Alliance partner** of the **U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)**; <http://www.dol.gov/odep/alliances/index.htm>). Both SHRM and ODEP



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work together to increase the employment of individuals with disabilities. As part of this partnership, SHRM has joined *The Campaign for Disability Employment* (<http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org>), a nationwide effort to highlight the value and talent people with disabilities bring to the workplace as well as the dividends realized by their full inclusion at work.

Government agencies supporting the business case use <http://askearn.org/BusinessCase/> as one webportal organized around the major ideas of human capital, innovation, marketing, diversity, return on investment, and social responsibility.

The Small Business Administration speaks to small businesses through their website at <http://www.sba.gov/content/hiring-people-with-disabilities>.

The United Nations' International Labor Organization has also addressed this issue by presenting 12 contemporary case studies of employers' organizations and business networks and their work around the issue of disability in the workplace.

4. What are successful businesses doing in this area?

Many of the nation's leading companies are coming to see people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as a valuable resource to meet their workforce needs. Kevin Bradley, Director of Inclusion and Diversity at McDonalds USA, captured the essence of the business case when he said, "Hiring people with disabilities is not an act of charity; it's a smart move for business" (Nicholas, 2010, p. 14).

What seems to be true of successful demand-side initiatives (i.e., employment models that focus on the employer, the needs of the employer's business, and the work culture of the business, as well as emphasizing the preparation of youth with disabilities for jobs that employers need filled) is that employers seek partnerships with disability service systems (such as vocational rehabilitation, special education, disability services departments, and providers) for assistance in outreach, screening, recruitment, training, and ongoing supports for employees with disabilities. These partnerships can take a variety of forms, but all result in partners coordinating for the business the full range of resources and services available in the workforce and disability services systems.

We include brief examples of these models—drawn from an information brief crafted by Robert Nicholas (2010)—below:



Partnerships supporting a single large employer. This model is used by Walgreens at the company's distribution centers and is being replicated by other companies with nationwide distribution centers. A designated entity such as vocational rehabilitation or a local provider agency serves as a single point of contact for the employer and coordinates services from vocational rehabilitation, a department of intellectual and developmental disabilities, school systems, Career Centers, and/or community colleges.

Partnerships supporting multiple local employers. This model is used by Chambers of Commerce in Chicago, Illinois and New Bedford, Massachusetts who serve as a single point of contact for local employers and coordinates services from an organization of community provider agencies for the recruitment, training and retention of employees with disabilities.

Project SEARCH replications. This model began as a local partnership to meet the workforce needs of Cincinnati Children's Hospital with employees with disabilities. It involves partnerships with school systems for internships and vocational rehabilitation and state department of intellectual and developmental disabilities for training, job placement, and retention. It has been replicated successfully throughout the country in hospitals and other industry sectors.

Partnerships supporting school-to-work transition. This model is based on the *Start on Success Program* developed by the National Organization on Disability. It provides internships for transitioning students with disabilities at a diverse network of local employers who rely on graduating students to meet their workforce needs. It is based on a local partnership between vocational rehabilitation, the local school system, the workforce system, and participating employers.

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5. How much might hiring a person with a disability cost?

Generally speaking, accommodations to the workplace that allow businesses to hire employees with disabilities are very inexpensive and the benefits to the company far outweigh the cost. Knowledge of how to provide accommodations is a service of the Job Accommodation Network (JAN; <http://askjan.org>). They can provide realistic information on the benefits and costs of accommodating employees with disabilities in the work place. For example, a study conducted by JAN (2013) shows that workplace accommodations are usually low cost and have a positive impact on the workplace. Moreover accommodations help retain or promote current employees. Often they cost nothing and for one third of companies, the one-time cost was \$500 or less.

Their study also provided crucial information on the direct *and* indirect benefits of making accommodations. The direct benefits most often mentioned by employers included retaining a valued employee, increasing the employee's productivity, eliminating the costs associated with training a new employee, increasing the employee's attendance, increasing the diversity of the company, and saving worker's compensation or other insurance costs. The indirect benefits highlighted by these employers involved improving interactions with co-workers, increasing overall company morale, raising overall company productivity, improving interactions with customers, promoting workplace safety, increasing overall company attendance, and enhancing profitability.

6. Are there special rules or laws that apply to employees with disabilities?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rehabilitation Act, Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VERVA), and Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) are five important federal laws protecting individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment and the job application process. A short summary of each law—as well as links to additional information and compliance resources—can be found at the Department of Labor website (www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/laws.htm). These laws provide guidance on what constitutes discrimination and outline the civil rights of people with disabilities in employment contexts. They call upon employers to treat people fairly and to be flexible enough to provide what is needed to ensure employees with disabilities have every chance to be successful in their job.

7. How might employees with disabilities impact our work environment?

The short answer is that employees with intellectual and developmental disabilities can have a positive impact on the culture and environment of the workplace. Among the most compelling example of this impact comes from the Walgreens Company. When Walgreens decided to open a distribution center in Anderson, South Carolina, they created an integrated work environment where workers with disabilities were held to the same standard as the workers without disabilities.

The Walgreens study found that employees with and without disabilities had similar productivity rates (Kaletta et al., 2012). This finding upholds the long-held belief that employees with disabilities not only contribute to the production goals of their work units, but can also lead in reaching production goals. Walgreens also looked at employee turnover data from four locations over 3 years. They found that their employees with disabilities left their jobs at a lower rate than their co-workers without disabilities. This research provided support for the claim that employees with disabilities typically stay longer in their jobs. Employers know that when workers stay in their jobs they contribute to a stable workforce for their company and contribute to their company's bottom line by costing the company less dollars in recruitment and training.

8. What changes may I have to make in my workplace?

Accommodations in the workplace should be based on individual needs. There are two questions to consider: Was an accommodation requested? Is the accommodation reasonable? Once the request is made, the employer must engage in a productive process with the employee to meet the need.

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to successfully compete for and gain employment. It is important to note that an employer only has to make the accommodation for the qualified applicant (or employee) as long as it does not result in an undue hardship on the operation of the business. "Undue hardship" is defined as an "action requiring significant difficulty or expense" when considered in light of a number of factors. These factors include the nature and cost of the accommodation in relation to the size, resources, nature, and structure of the employer's

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operation. Examples of accommodations might include memory aids; flexible work schedules; visual cues; programmed watches; making existing facilities accessible; job restructuring; acquiring or modifying equipment, software, or devices; changing tests, training materials, or policies; providing qualified support services or assistants (e.g., readers or interpreters); providing assistive technology or devices; and retraining or reassigning employees. Accommodating potential and current employees with disabilities can lead to changes in practices, software, equipment, and policies that benefit both the specific employee *and* the entire business.

9. Where can I find qualified people with disabilities to hire?

Although people with significant disabilities may respond to ads you post, you can also be more strategic about recruiting people with disabilities for open positions. Your local Career Center should be able to connect you with jobseekers with disabilities. They also have relationships with other employment professionals who work specifically with job seekers with disabilities. You can also connect directly with the Vocational Rehabilitation professionals in your area.

You can also contact your local high school or vocational rehabilitation services about becoming an internship or summer work site. This will allow you the opportunity to see first-hand how having employees with disabilities can improve your bottom line. It also ensures your new employee has sufficient training and support to learn his or her new position. While everyone can benefit from work experiences in high school, it is especially valuable for youth with significant disabilities to gain these early work experiences.

If your position requires a broader search to find the combination of skills you need, several national websites offer disability-specific job matching. These include:

- ◆ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment>
- ◆ <http://www.jobaccess.org>
- ◆ <http://www.gettinghired.com>
- ◆ <http://www.disABLEDperson.com>
- ◆ <http://www.usbln.org>

10. How do I create an inclusive workplace environment that will attract employees with disabilities?

In a 2012 letter introducing the publication *Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion*, Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Jill Houghton, then Acting Executive Director of the U.S. Business Leadership Network, wrote that:

“successful businesses recognize that incorporating disability in all diversity and inclusion practices positively impacts their companies’ bottom line. Corporate CEOs understand that it’s cost effective to recruit and retain the best talent regardless of disability. Chief technology officers know that technologies that are usable by all employees lead to greater productivity. Senior purchasing managers recognize the economic benefits of broadening their supplier bases to include diverse categories, such as disability-owned businesses, and savvy marketing directors eagerly embrace opportunities to increase their companies’ share of new markets” (U.S. Business Leadership Network, 2012, p. 2)

What are businesses doing to bring inclusion into their recruiting efforts? They are specifically using the term disability in the company’s diversity and inclusion materials. Companies are actively recruiting job applicants with disabilities. They are making sure recruiting and application materials are available in alternate formats. And they are regularly looking at the accessibility of their physical plant/building to applicants and employees with disabilities. After companies have hired an employee with a disability, they are employing strategies to ensure high productive by having a companywide reasonable accommodation policy in place; supporting employee resource groups, often referred to as an affinity group, which focuses on disability issues; and including disability in all diversity and inclusiveness training. In the area of marketing, companies with a desire to be inclusive of people with disabilities have images of people with disabilities appearing in advertisements, brochures, sales presentations, web content, sales scripts, and other external communications. Additionally, these companies are using disability appropriate language in all documents, press releases, presentations, and communications.

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Answering Employers Questions About Hiring People with Significant Disabilities

Summary

The conclusion is simple; adding employees with significant disabilities enhances the bottom line of a business. Employees with disabilities are likely to be on time, show great loyalty to the company through high retention, work safely and consistently, increase the pool of available labor in an ever decreasing workforce, increase the morale and productivity of the business they work for, increase customer loyalty to the business, and increase the diversity of the company's workforce, while needing only minor low-cost accommodations to the work place. What businesses have learned and are teaching their fellow employers is that hiring youth and adults with disabilities is a win-win for the business community.

About the Authors

Lynnette Henderson, Ph.D., is the Associate Director of Adult Community Services, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and a member of the TennesseeWorks Research Team. She has pursued her interest in helping people with autism spectrum disorders since 1996.

Alicia A. Cone, Ph.D., works for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities as the Grant Program Director. Over the past 20 years, Dr. Cone has worked in a variety of positions in the field of developmental disabilities ranging from job coach, vocational training director, to policy analyst.

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Personal Perspectives: As Well as Anybody Else

Greg Schumacher

Greg Schumacher of Bateman Senior Meals in Nashville encourages other employers to look beyond any reluctance they might have in hiring people with disabilities. Speaking from his own experience, Greg says, “What I’ve learned from hiring people with disabilities is that they can do a job just as well as anybody else can. They come to work on time and they do everything that you ask them to do without any headaches, and they’re very self-sufficient once they’re trained.” Greg clearly sees the benefits.

Through Bateman’s partnership with Metro Nashville’s Community Based Transition Program (CBTP), Greg and his staff welcome students with intellectual and developmental disabilities several times a week into their facility. These students are assigned various tasks. For example, one student is a dishwasher and helps prepare freezer meals. Another student bags a high volume of bread each day. Early work experiences such as these are crucial to the employment success of young people after graduation. In fact, Greg has already hired two former students as paid employees. On their first day of work, these employees were already well trained to do their job because of their hands-on experience in CBTP.

The students are continually learning new skills and mastering increasingly complex tasks. Greg advises other employers to

invest in training and support through bringing in job coaches or partnering with school programs such as CBTP. Although his employees with disabilities work efficiently and independently once trained, job coaches often provide support for the first few weeks on the job. For example, the students from the CBTP are always accompanied by their teacher and two job coaches. Sure Greg gains valuable employees. But he also stresses, “I believe the reason to hire people with disabilities is to give them a chance to be successful in life, to be able to do a job for a company, and be successful and earn a good living.”

What employer factors contribute to success?

- ◆ Understanding the value of partnerships with schools
- ◆ Working closely with school staff to support youth
- ◆ Demonstrating a commitment to hiring good employees with disabilities
- ◆ Providing students the opportunity to train and learn new skills

What school factors contribute to success?

- ◆ Developing long-term partnerships with employers
- ◆ Offering work-based learning programs for their students
- ◆ Encouraging employers to hire graduates from the program

Personal Perspectives: Our Commitment to Integrated Employment

Dwayne Webb & Genni Sasnett

In the mid 1980s, St. John's Community Services (SJCS), now a multi-state provider of services, was located only in Washington, DC. The agency provided education services to children and young adults with disabilities, as well as residential services (i.e., group homes with six residents in each) and facility-based day services to adults with disabilities. SJCS also operated a small sheltered workshop.

As time passed, staff and leadership of SJCS became concerned about the future of the adults supported in the facility-based adult day program. The people supported in SJCS's sheltered workshop were primarily older students with intellectual disabilities from the local school program. Many adults from the day program had been deemed inappropriate for the workshop. In fact, due to the evolving nature of the workshop contracts and the limitations of the environment, adults with disabilities generally did not do well there.

Staff reached out to find meaningful alternatives for these adults. The concept of supported employment was relatively new, and no one at SJCS had experience providing this service. That did not stop staff from approaching the local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency to ask if funding was available for supported employment. In a few months, VR contacted SJCS and asked the agency to become involved in a project providing supported employment services to 12 young adults with disabilities. With some much-needed technical support and a great deal of hard work and determination, SJCS was able to successfully find jobs for all 12 of the targeted individuals over a three-month period.

The placements were diverse and included the Smithsonian museums, the Departments of the Treasury and Agriculture, and the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception at Catholic University. Much to the staff's surprise and pleasure, these individuals were generally very successful in their jobs.

This success initiated a time of values clarification and change for the organization. SJCS began to realize that integrated employment was the key to successful inclusion in the community and to achieving strong, quality lives for people SJCS supported. And so SJCS began the long journey to becoming an "agency without walls" supporting people in the community only, and focusing on employment as the lynchpin to full citizenship.

Though this transition began over 25 years ago, SJCS remains steadfast in the belief that employment is key to fulfilling lives and continuously rekindles the commitment to employment. One of SJCS's strongest beliefs is in the "employment first" philosophy. For each person, regardless of condition or circumstance, employment should be the first option. Individuals can "opt out," but they *should not* have to earn the right to work. SJCS also strongly believes in "one person, one job" meaning that there is the right job for everyone. SJCS carefully matches the needs of an employer and the interests, skills and potential of the job seeker on an individual basis rather than trying to make job seekers fit into jobs that may not be right for them.

SJCS is proud of the success of the people whom they support in employment across the four states in which they now provide services, including Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and of course, the District of Columbia. The following two stories exemplify this commitment to community employment. They also highlight the multitude of benefits being gainfully employed can bring.

Articles from our Contributors

Personal Perspectives: Our Commitment to Integrated Employment

Michael's Success Story

In April 2012, Michael reached out to St. John's Community Services to assist him in finding gainful employment. In June 2012, Michael was hired as a stocker for Save-A-Lot Store where he began by working 15-25 hours a week. A month into his job, he encountered personal circumstances that limited his hours and placed him in jeopardy of losing his position at the store. SJCS diligently worked with Michael and his manager to overcome the obstacles he was facing on the job. A year later, SJCS is proud to share that Michael received a promotion to Produce Manager.

Michael took the produce department to new heights by increasing the overall sales and profits of the store by three percent. He takes pride in placing all the orders for the produce department and ensuring it always meets the highest quality of standards for his customers. Michael now works 45 hours a week and has the opportunity to participate in Save-A-Lot's benefits package, which includes a profit-sharing program for employees.

Michael's manager sees potential and has begun preparing Michael for the next move within the company to Assistant Store Manager, which Michael is working very hard to achieve. Ongoing supports are in place from St. John's Community Services and his manager to ensure he continues to advance within the company.

Marvin's Success Story

Marvin was supported by an SJCS Employment Specialist to find the right match for his future. Marvin desired to work in a clean environment with healthy foods and a supportive, friendly staff in a particular neighborhood. After handing out his resume to over 40 businesses in his neighborhood, Marvin was asked to come back for interviews at three different locations. Marvin was nervous before his interviews but was well prepared by his Employment Specialist to interview and dress for success. Marvin received a job offer at a small, European style deli and market, which he was very excited about. His supervisors work with him to add new tasks and responsibilities at a pace that is customized to him, and he regularly receives new trainings and constructive feedback. This collaborative environment empowers Marvin to grow this job opportunity into what he hopes will be a long-term career in food services.



These examples are just two of many St. John's has experienced over the past 20 years of providing employment services. Employment is much more than a "nine to five"; it is our link to the community where we cultivate relationships, gain economic independence, and attain a sense of personal value. It is where we learn responsibility, interdependence, integrity, and skills that help us become better employees and, ultimately, better citizens. Integrated employment is, and will continue to be, a key element to providing quality support for people with disabilities. At St. John's Community Services, access to employment and supportive resources to maintain jobs is a civil right the organization will continue to strive towards for long into the future.

About the Authors

Dwayne Webb is the Director of Employment in Martin, TN, for St. John's Community Services. Mr. Webb has 18 years of experience in the field and was recently elected as a member of the Tennessee APSE Board.

Genni Sasnett is the former Chief Operating Officer of St. John's Community Services. Ms. Sasnett dedicated over thirty years to SJCS with a strong belief that all people are capable of working, building relationships and growing to become more independent.

Perspectives: Employment for All in Tennessee

Amy Gonzalez, M.S., CRC

Tennessee is one of many states still relying on the use of facility-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Although an original intent of sheltered workshops was to allow individuals with disabilities to gain vocational skills that would eventually lead to employment in the community, the transition to integrated employment far too rarely takes place and most individuals remain in workshops for long periods of time (or indefinitely). The lack of integrated, competitive employment options is detrimental to both individuals with disabilities and to broader society. Not only is a person deprived of real opportunities to make valued contributions to the community, but they may also miss out on the sense of purpose and personal relationships that often come through the world of work. People with disabilities do not always get the opportunity to participate in other aspects of community life due to their lack of real income. And they are unable to contribute to the local economy by paying taxes thus continuing their dependence on public assistance.

As our state pushes forward with significant efforts to expand integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities, many factors must be taken into consideration. One major factor is the “bricks and mortar” issue. Understandably, sheltered workshop administrators are concerned about buildings in which they have invested heavily and the potential financial losses associated with downsizing. Facility board members will need

to recognize the benefits of approving new programmatic and financial models that promote integrated employment. Moreover, creative resources should be identified to help Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP’s) feel more confident about transitioning to integrated, community employment as the first and desired choice.

The United States Department of Justice, using the *Olmstead* decision and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as the basis, recently filed lawsuits regarding the unnecessary segregation of individuals with disabilities in sheltered workshops. Their investigations indicated there was an overreliance on placements in facility-based services resulting in segregation of individuals from their respective communities. Although many well-intended arguments for time-limited, pre-vocational services have been offered, most individuals in our state never transition to integrated employment. Therefore, immediate and substantial efforts must be made to dedicate more time and resources to place individuals with disabilities in integrated jobs in which they can work alongside and develop relationships with non-disabled citizens in their communities.

Tennessee is one of three “protégé states” diligently working under the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program (EFSLMP) funded by the United States Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). As a protégé state, ODEP has provided Tennessee with an abundance of resources and technical assistance from subject-matter experts (SMEs) who have experience and knowledge regarding the transformation of services and the development of policies aligned with the Employment First initiative. Moreover, Washington is serving as an Employment First mentor state, which means they are providing Tennessee with guidance for integrating individuals with disabilities into the community through employment. The resources and networking opportunities have placed Tennessee in an excellent position to successfully advance this initiative.

The responsible agency for the EFSLMP initiative in Tennessee is the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). The Department is the agency responsible for the administering of HCBS Waiver services through an agreement

Articles from our Contributors

Perspectives: Employment for All in Tennessee

with the Bureau of TennCare. The Department also contracts with agencies that provide actual services to individuals with disabilities who meet eligibility requirements. The Department has identified ways in which agencies can partner with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development to learn about becoming an Employment Network. An Employment Network is a public or private agency that can provide employment services for individuals with disabilities who are receiving Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). By becoming an Employment Network, agencies can diversify their funding by providing employment services to people with a wider range of disabilities. Individuals who have a Ticket to Work (www.choosework.net) can assign their ticket to the Employment Network of their choice. The Ticket to Work program is a free, voluntary program that provides beneficiaries with assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment.

This work has received strong support from Governor Haslam, as reflected in his signing of an Executive Order establishing the *Tennessee Employment First Initiative to Expand Community Opportunities for Tennesseans with Disabilities* (Executive Order No. 28). This Executive Order mandates the development of an Employment First Taskforce comprised of several state agencies and stakeholder groups, including DIDD, the Division of Rehabilitation Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Education, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, The Arc Tennessee, family members of individuals receiving services, and CRP's. In addition, we invited individuals from The Bureau of TennCare, the Disability Law and Advocacy Center, the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy, Education, and Employment, and Vanderbilt University. Together these same entities work under the TennesseeWorks Partnership, a systems change project funded by the federal Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities aimed at changing the employment landscape in our state. The task force was charged with a range of duties. For example, we identified state agency policies and procedures that create barriers and disincentives for employment and we developed recommendations to reduce or eliminate the barriers. We are developing a Memorandum of Understanding to create and better align services leading to employment. We are identifying best practices and effective partnerships that provide opportunities for blending and braiding of funding to increase integrated employment outcomes. And

“ODEP has had the privilege of working with the State of Tennessee in supporting its ongoing Employment First state systems change efforts through our Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program,” stated Kathleen Martinez, Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy. “We have been pleased to see the progress Tennessee has made in just the past three years investing strategically in building provider capacity and aligning public policies to help individuals with significant disabilities obtain and maintain jobs in typical community settings at competitive wages.”

we are reviewing recommendations provided by ODEP and providing training on Customized Employment and Discovery to our state partners, CRP's, and families. These latter efforts are designed to raise awareness about the effective strategies for achieving the goal of integrated employment.

While our state has experienced progress with family “buy-in,” we acknowledge the continued importance of educating and empowering family members. With the guidance of our SME Margaret-Lee Thompson from Washington State, DIDD working with TennesseeWorks and The Arc Tennessee created two Parent Coalition Chapters in the Fall of 2013—one in Nashville and one in Memphis. We made the decision to begin with two pilot groups with the intention of expanding in a year or so. The year has been filled with activities aimed at equipping family members to advocate for services that lead to improved employment outcomes. Recently, we added an additional chapter in Chattanooga.

We also acknowledged the need to conduct outreach to additional CRP's who are still providing facility-based services. For the past year, we have met with CRP's throughout the state to

Articles from our Contributors

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discuss the potential of partnering together to transform their services. We began the initiative in 2012 with three participating agencies and have since doubled the number of participating providers. Our partnerships have progressed well and we have expanded our focus to collaboration and state support for transformation activities. We are equipping CRP's with the resources and tools they need to successfully transform their services to align with the Employment First initiative. With state agencies and ODEP serving as mentors and sharing resources, we are certain the providers will continue to move forward with making the necessary changes to increase integrated employment opportunities.

Another component we are addressing is data collection. We acknowledge the power of numbers and the vital role data can play when justifying the importance of the Employment First initiative to families, legislators, and the general public. Recently through the TennesseeWorks Partnership, DIDD partnered with the University of Tennessee Center for Business and Economic Research in an innovative project called the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System. The system—which already includes data from the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission—tracks a person's movement across agencies through departments and the service delivery system. While this system does not track all aspects of employment at this time, we feel confident in the decision to move forward to begin collecting employment and wages data. This project will also assist DIDD and its partners in learning about additional data that may advance our understanding of the current employment landscape.

A public information component also plays a major role in our initiative. We have made significant efforts to create an accessible, public Employment First website. The website contains employment success stories designed to inspire and motivate families, as well as to educate the community about the importance of employment for people with disabilities. It also contains a calendar of events for upcoming training sessions. A resource tab allows providers to review and save tools they need to provide quality employment services. The website also contains a video depicting the first two individuals who left the sheltered workshop at SRVS Industries. Finally, the website contains a blog to publicize events in the state related to employment.

Tennessee and its partners must progress with steadfast diligence and determination in order for the Employment First initiative to reach fruition. With the support of ODEP, Governor Haslam, and all of our partners and stakeholders, we are committed to steadily moving forward with the investment and the belief that employment is possible for every person.

About the Author

Amy Gonzalez is State Director of Employment and Day Services for the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental disabilities. She is responsible for overseeing the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program (EFSLMP) grant for the State of Tennessee.

Association News

Call for Papers | TASH 40th Anniversary Book

Next year is TASH's 40th Anniversary. In celebration of this important event, a book, including memories and reflections by various individuals associated with TASH and the severe disabilities community, will be published. The book will also feature stories and personal narratives from parents, self-advocates, and TASH members like you! We invite you to submit a testimonial for a chance to have it published in the Anniversary book.

For more information and to submit your testimonial, visit <http://tash.org/blog/2014/11/05/call-papers-tash-40th-anniversary-book/>

Congratulations to TASH's New Board Members

Thank you to all members who participated in this year's election as well as all of the nominees. TASH is happy to announce the results of this year's Board of Director elections.

[Get to know TASH's new 2015 Board of Director members!](#)

Cal-TASH to Host 32nd Annual Conference

Cal-TASH is excited to announce its 32nd Annual Conference! The keynote line-up will be highlighting the significant anniversaries of TASH, IDEA and ADA. Join Cal-TASH in Irvine, CA on March 6th and 7th in honoring and sharing stories with the pioneers of these movements!

[Click here to learn more about the Cal-TASH Annual Conference.](#)

TASH is Seeking Interns

TASH is offering internships at its national headquarters in Washington, DC for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students.

[To read more about the available positions and to apply, click here](#)

TASH Signs on to Solidarity Letter

TASH has joined a list of over 30 other disability organizations to support the family of Michael Brown, the people of Ferguson, Missouri, and all people with disabilities. As members of a community that supports justice and inclusion, TASH is happy to join the [Call for Solidarity](#).

TASH Signs on to Letter on Kelli Stapleton Case

For too long, courts shown leniency to those charged with attempted to or murdering individuals with disabilities because of the "burden" imposed by caring for them. TASH is proud to stand with ASAN, the American Association of People with Disabilities, the National Council on Independent Living, and the Arc of Michigan and Not Dead Yet in our shared opposition to this injustice.

[Read letter here.](#)

TASH joins the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Briefing "Ferguson and Beyond"

TASH joined the LCCHR and other leaders from the Civil Rights community at a national briefing on Ferguson, Missouri and the actions taken since the shooting death of Michael Brown.

[Read blog post here.](#)

Thank You 2014 TASH Conference Sponsors!

Virginia Department of Education	LEAD Center	Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center
DC Department on Disability Services	Chapman University College of Educational Studies	University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration
Public Consulting Group	National Children's Center	National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
Maryland State Department of Education	National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth	
WellPoint	National Youth Transitions Conference Support Fund	
ArborSoft	Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council	
MetLife Center for Special Needs Planning		

Thank You to Our Donors!

TASH relies on the generosity of our members to accomplish our work. Because of your support, we are able to continue to work for equity, opportunity, and inclusion for people with significant disabilities. We are grateful for the support we have received from the following people and organizations:

Barbara Trader	Hussman Strategic Advisors	Sandra Warren
Becky Bitter	Joanne Eichinger	Shirley Rodriguez
Chapman University	Leslie Kolkmeier	Terri Ward
Charlotte Lopes	Lorraine Sylvester	United Way California Capital Region
Cynthia and Peter Mika	Lynne Sommerstein	
Dawn Brown	Nancy Rice	
George Singer	Peter Black	

If you would like to consider making a gift to TASH, contact Dawn Brown at 202-509-9596 or at dbrown@tash.org.

Thank you, donors!



TASH

Membership Application

Effective June 15, 2012

New Membership Membership Renewal Referred by _____

Member Type: Individual Organization (org. member name): _____

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIP: _____ Country: _____

Phone 1: _____ Primary E-mail 1: _____ Primary

Phone 2: _____ Primary E-mail 2: _____ Primary

(Organization Members Only) Are you the primary contact? Yes No

Primary Contact Name: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Level

TASH offers membership at a variety of levels. Please review the details below and choose the membership level that is appropriate for you. Individual and organizational memberships are available. Membership is valid for a 12 month term. A complete summary of member benefits can be found at www.tash.org/membership.

	Basic \$30	Standard \$75	Premium \$150	Student* \$45	Small Org \$250	Large Org \$350
Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, the official TASH research journal (print copy)			X		1 COPY	1 COPY
Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, (online access to current and archived issues)		X	X	X	X	X
Connections, the quarterly magazine written by and for TASH members (includes current and archived issues)	X	X	X	X	X	X
TASH in Action bi-weekly e-newsletter	X	X	X	X	X	X
Training discounts for webinars, publications and other offerings	X	X	X	X	3 STAFF	5 STAFF
Reduced registration rates for TASH Conference and events	X	X	X	X	3 STAFF	5 STAFF
Affiliation with a TASH Chapter	X	X	X	X	X	X
Advocacy Alerts & Updates	X	X	X	X	X	X
----->	<input type="checkbox"/> Select					

*Student members are required to identify university: _____

Demographic Information *(optional)*

Which of the following best describes you? *(select all that apply)*

- Person with Disability Family Member Student Professor/Researcher Early Intervention
 Adult Service Provider/Related Services Special/General Educator Govt/Legal/Public Policy
 Other _____

What is your race or ethnicity? *(select all that apply)*

- American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Black or African American
 White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino Other _____

Are you affiliated with a university? If so, please specify: _____

Please indicate your areas of interest *(select all that apply)*

- Community Living Early Childhood Education Self-Advocacy Public Policy International Issues
 Employment/Transition Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Cultural Competency/Diversity
 Human Rights/Social Justice

Payment Information

Credit Card *(select card type)*

- American Express Visa
 MasterCard Discover

Check *(make payable to TASH)*

Purchase Order

P.O. #: _____

(send copy with membership form)

Card #: _____ Expiration: _____

Name on Card: _____ CVV: _____

Authorized Signature: _____

Would you like to make a tax-deductible donation to TASH?

- \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____

Total Payment *(add membership total and donation, if applicable)* \$: _____

Please submit this membership form via mail, fax or e-mail. With questions, contact (202) 540-9020.

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E-mail info@tash.org

www.tash.org to learn more about TASH

www.tash.org/member to log in to the membership portal

www.tash.org/membership for an overview of member benefits





TASH Connections

Equity, Opportunity and Inclusion for People with Disabilities since 1975

TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. Founded in 1975, TASH advocates for human rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs – those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalization. TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development, policy, and information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates. The inclusive practices TASH validates through research have been shown to improve outcomes for all people.

Policy Statement

It is TASH's mission to eliminate physical and social obstacles that prevent equity, diversity and quality of life for children and adults with disabilities. Items in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect attitudes held by individual members of the Association as a whole. TASH reserves the right to exercise editorial judgment in selection of materials. All contributors and advertisers are asked to abide by the TASH policy on the use of people-first language that emphasizes the humanity of people with disabilities. Terms such as "the mentally retarded," "autistic children," and "disabled individuals" refer to characteristics of individuals, not to individuals themselves. Terms such as "people with mental retardation," "children with autism," and "individuals who have disabilities" should be used. The appearance of an advertisement for a product or service does not imply TASH endorsement. For a copy of TASH's publishing and advertising policy, please visit www.tash.org.

TASH Mission & Vision

As a leader in disability advocacy for more than 35 years, the mission of TASH is to promote the full inclusion and participation of children and adults with significant disabilities in every aspect of their community, and to eliminate the social injustices that diminish human rights. These things are accomplished through collaboration among self-advocates, families, professionals, policy-makers, advocates and many others who seek to promote equity, opportunity and inclusion. Together, this mission is realized through:

- ♦ Advocacy for equity, opportunities, social justice and human rights
- ♦ Education of the public, government officials, community leaders and service providers
- ♦ Research that translates excellence to practice

- ♦ Individualized, quality supports in place of congregate and segregated settings and services
- ♦ Legislation, litigation and public policy consistent with the mission and vision of TASH

The focus of TASH is supporting those people with significant disabilities and support needs who are most at risk for being excluded from society; perceived by traditional service systems as most challenging; most likely to have their rights abridged; most likely to be at risk for living, working, playing and learning in segregated environments; least likely to have the tools and opportunities necessary to advocate on their behalf; and are most likely to need ongoing, individualized supports to participate in inclusive communities and enjoy a quality of life similar to that available to all people.

TASH has a vision of a world in which people with disabilities are included and fully participating members of their communities, with no obstacles preventing equity, diversity and quality of life. TASH envisions communities in which no one is segregated and everyone belongs. This vision will be realized when:

- ♦ All individuals have a home, recreation, learning and employment opportunities
- ♦ All children and youth are fully included in their neighborhood schools
- ♦ There are no institutions
- ♦ Higher education is accessible for all
- ♦ Policy makers and administrators understand the struggles of people with disabilities and plan – through laws, policies and regulations – for their active participation in all aspects of life
- ♦ All individuals have a way to communicate and their communities are flexible in communicating in alternate ways that support full participation
- ♦ Injustices and inequities in private and public sectors are eradicated
- ♦ Practices for teaching, supporting and providing services to people with disabilities are based on current, evidence-based strategies that promote high quality and full participation in all aspects of life
- ♦ All individuals with disabilities enjoy individualized supports and a quality of life similar to that available to all people
- ♦ All individuals with disabilities have the tools and opportunities to advocate on their behalf