

Memphis 2015 Community Conversation

On Promoting Meaningful Work for People with Disabilities

BACKGROUND...

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

Through funding provided by the Disability Employment Initiative, we partnered with the Tennessee Department of Labor to host two "Community Conversations" focused on how best to equip employers to hire and effectively support people with disabilities in integrated, competitive jobs. Our first event was a joint conversation with Hickman & Dickson Counties, and our second event was in Memphis.

Together with the Department of Labor and Tennessee Career Centers, we formed a local committee of employers, providers, and community leaders. Phyllis Brunson, of The Workforce Investment Network, led the planning efforts in Memphis, and shared invitations widely throughout the community to gather a diverse group of people invested in improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Family members, local employers, disability service providers, educators, faith community members, community organizations, and civic leaders were all invited to the event.



THE MEMPHIS 2015 COMMUNITY CONVERSATION



A community conversation is a creative, fun, and powerful way of identifying how diverse members of a community might work together in compelling ways to solve an important challenge. The focus of this event was on generating ideas, sharing resources, and making connections with other community members to enhance employment and community involvement for people with disabilities and, ultimately, to strengthen the community.

The Memphis community conversation was held at the Memphis Public Library. This evening event took place on March 23rd and involved 88 members of the community. Using the World Café model, the group began a series of “coffee-house” conversations—first at small tables and then as a whole group—in which they shared their best ideas related to three questions:

- How can we encourage more employers in our community to hire people with disabilities?
- How can we work together to support these employers (and their employees) well?
- What are the most promising ideas you have heard this evening? Where should we go next to launch meaningful change here?

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

After the event, all of the notes taken at each of the individual tables and during the whole group discussion were compiled and organized. A sampling of ideas and next steps is included on the next two pages.



AGENDA

- 5:45-5:50 Greeting
- 5:50-6:00 Opening Remarks
- 6:00-6:10 World Café Process
- 6:10-6:30 Round 1 Discussion
- 6:30-6:50 Round 2 Discussion
- 6:50-7:10 Round 3 Discussion
- 7:10-7:30 Harvesting of Best Ideas
- 7:30-7:45 Closing Remarks

A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT EMPLOYERS IN HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Families

- **Make a connection with the employers you visit regularly.** Speak with them about your work expectations for your son or daughter. Ask about bringing your child in for a tour of the facilities or to learn more about the kinds of jobs available in their industry. Improve your child's career awareness and establish relationships simultaneously.
- **Get involved.** Encourage your child's involvement in a range of recreational and social activities in your community. Build soft skills in a natural environment while increasing your family's community connections.



Ideas for Disability Service Providers & Community Organizations

- **Showcase commitment.** Create a public way for local businesses to identify themselves as committed to the employment of persons with disabilities, such as a storefront sticker or other public acknowledgment.
- **Identify need.** Meet with employers one-on-one to learn what tasks keep their employees from critical job functions, what positions have the highest turnover rates, and future expansion opportunities. Use this knowledge to drive your recruitment and placement strategies.

Ideas for Civic Leaders

- **Create a task force.** Implement a local employment initiative and advocacy group to spearhead a strategic plan regarding increasing employment of people with disabilities in the county.
- **Improve career awareness.** Develop a mentoring project involving local government that links professionals in the community to young people with disabilities to expose them to a variety of possible career paths.

Ideas for People with Disabilities

- **Speak up.** Share your vision of the future with family members, friends, and school staff. Set early employment goals to add to your IEP transition plan, and make sure you know the educational experiences and skills necessary to make your goal a reality. Don't be afraid to ask for help along the way.
- **Practice your skills.** Seek out opportunities to practice interviewing, share your resume, and talk to others about accommodations that make you successful on the job. Learn about disability disclosure, and work with family and teachers to determine what information your employer may need to know.

Ideas for Educators

- **Raise expectations.** Commit to having high expectations for your students. Share your classroom and community successes with employers, families, and the community to let them know all that your students are capable of. You can share success stories through parent newsletters, a classroom website, or video journals.
- **Host a job fair.** Seek out local employers and connect them to job-seeking youth with disabilities. Make sure to invite employers who have made a commitment to hiring people with disabilities and provide a forum for them to share their experiences. Involve civic and community leaders to recognize employers at the event.

A SAMPLING OF IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT EMPLOYERS IN HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SHARED DURING THE EVENT

Ideas for Faith Communities

- **Build programs.** Identify the employment-related needs of people with disabilities through churches and other places of worship, a natural network of community members. Develop ministries to assist with job coaching, interview preparation, and skill building.
- **Contribute resources.** Explore avenues for employing accessible vans and buses used for church events to meet the transportation needs of people with disabilities to get to and from work.

Ideas for Employers

- **Create options.** Offer interview and application alternatives to support people with disabilities throughout the hiring process. Focus on learning about their strengths and the ways they can contribute to your business.
- **Mentor others.** If you've already made the commitment to hiring people with disabilities in your business, mentor other employers through the process. Talk with them about potential obstacles you overcame, how you create an inclusive environment, and how your company has benefited. Meet regularly to brainstorm strategies and ideas for successful hiring.

Ideas for Our Entire Community

- **Think big.** Find ways to share employment success stories at major community events. Utilize festivals, music celebrations, and sporting events. Reach those not typically involved in disability efforts through social media, local television stations, and popular radio shows.
- **Make summer count.** Reach out to local community organizations, schools, and civic leaders to build summer employment programming. Develop recreational meet-ups, summer skills training programs, and paid job opportunities. Involve provider agencies and raise funds locally to offer resources such as job coaches and transportation to maximize involvement.

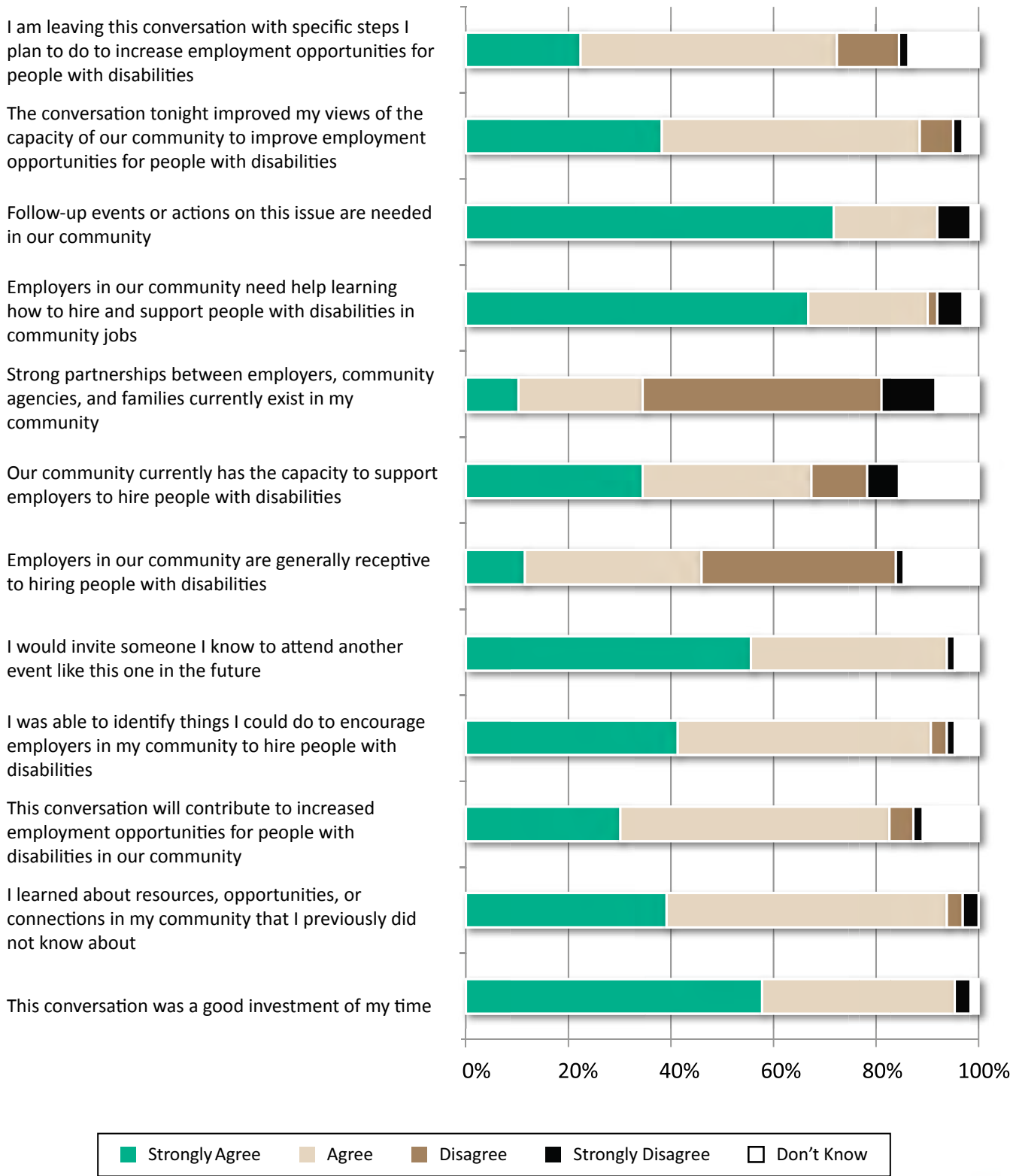


RESOURCES ON EMPLOYMENT

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

WHAT ATTENDEES SAID ABOUT THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

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





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

ABOUT TENNESSEWORKS

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

For more information, see www.tennesseeworks.org
or contact us at tennesseeworks@gmail.com

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