

New England Workplace Inclusion & Equality Summit: People with Disabilities Reaching Competitive Employment

June 27, 2014

Rhode Island College | Providence, RI

SUMMIT CO-HOSTS



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About the Summit

New England Workplace Inclusion & Equality Summit Report

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

On April 8, 2014 the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it entered into a statewide settlement agreement that will resolve violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for approximately 3,250 Rhode Islanders with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The landmark 10-year agreement is the nation's first statewide settlement to address the rights of people with disabilities to receive state funded employment and daytime services in the broader community, rather than in segregated sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs.

Approximately 450,000 people with I/DD across the country spend their days in segregated sheltered workshops. Most are paid below the minimum wage or no wage at all. The agreement implements the Supreme Court's decision under the ADA in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which requires persons with I/DD be served in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.

As a result of the settlement:

- 2,000 people with I/DD across the state will have opportunities for the first time to work at real jobs with competitive wages;
- State dollars that fund people with I/DD to participate in segregated, separate day programs will be re-directed for the first time to provide integrated, community-based options for non-work hours; and,
- 1,250 students with I/DD will get a package of transition services starting at age 14 so that when they leave school, they can land real jobs at competitive wages.

Rhode Island's 10-year commitment under the settlement agreement will benefit employers, people with disabilities, and Rhode Island communities, as employers benefit from the skills and perspectives of new employees, as people with disabilities benefit from integrated work and competitive pay, and as communities benefit from the contributions and engagement of people with disabilities.

Following the announcement of the settlement agreement the US Business Leadership Network[®] (USBLN[®]), Walgreens, Rhode Island College and the State of Rhode Island invited business leaders, federal contractors, individuals with disabilities and their guests, government delegates, provider representatives, and community partners from across nine states— Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont— to attend the **“New England Workplace Inclusion & Equality Summit: People with Disabilities Reaching Competitive Employment.”**

The USBLN led the Summit because its member companies, like Walgreens, have realized the many benefits of hiring talented people with disabilities and USBLN sought the opportunity for member companies to share their successful experiences. The event was made possible through the support of Walgreens, the lead sponsor, Rhode Island College, CVS Caremark, The TJX Companies, Inc., US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Attendees came together to share best practices, identify barriers to hiring individuals with disabilities, propose meaningful recommendations for overcoming such barriers, and make real commitments to employing individuals with disabilities.

The purpose of this report is twofold:

1. Document the Summit, the objectives and outcomes of the event; and,
2. Serve as a roadmap to begin charting a path of improved collaboration that results in real jobs with competitive wages for people with I/DD across the nine Northeast states.

1.1. Planning and Goals

The Summit Planning Committee arrived at the following goal for the Summit:

Every participant should leave with a practical strategy for, and commitment to, building successful partnerships between business, employment service providers and government to enable qualified people with disabilities to become valued employees in competitive workplaces.

Following the establishment of the Summit goal, key questions were developed to ensure the goal of the Summit would be met. The questions were:

- a. What are the six common hurdles to the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities?
- b. What innovative solutions will overcome the hurdles identified?
- c. Post-Summit what commitments need to be made to work collaboratively to increase the employment of people with disabilities?

A modified “World Café” format was used at the Summit to create a “safe” environment to make each participant feel comfortable offering their best thinking. Questions were developed to drive the outcome of our inquiry toward solutions-based results and a unified voice. Ground rules were also established to encourage both participation and listening.

2.0 THE SUMMIT

Approximately 200 business leaders, federal contractors, individuals with disabilities and their guests, government delegates, service provider representatives, and community partners from across nine states - Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont - attended the day-long Summit.

2.1 Approach to Development of Recommendations

Representatives broke up into groups to discuss the overarching questions developed by the Co-Host Summit Planning Committee. A facilitator led each group through the questions, and the discussions were recorded in notes and on flip charts. These findings were then synthesized by the USBLN and Rhode Island College staff into brief statements and presented to the full group.

2.2 Morning of the Summit

The morning of the Summit featured introductory remarks from:

- Rhode Island College President Nancy Carriuolo, Ph.D.
- The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee, Governor of Rhode Island
- Steve Pemberton, Walgreens Divisional Vice-President and Chief Diversity Officer
- U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez

Attendees then heard from a Panel on Successful Partnerships that included:

- Dave White, New England Market Vice President Operations and Community Management, Walgreens, Massachusetts
- Sherman DeShields, Store Manager, & Arina Kalinin, Employee, CVS Caremark, Rhode Island
- Greg Murphy, Owner, Progress Auto, and Orquideo DePina, Employee, Rhode Island
- Patrick Flavin, AVP Director of Workforce Initiatives, The TJX Companies, Inc., Massachusetts
- David Bartage, Finance Manager, Procter & Gamble Auburn Maine Plant, Lead Employer of the Maine Business Leadership Network, Maine
- Oswald "Oz" Mondejar, Vice President, Communications, Community Relations and Human Resources, Partners Continuing Care, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, Massachusetts
- Gary Furtado, President/CEO, Navigant Credit Union, Rhode Island

- Michael Yudin, Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

From there, the representatives broke into assigned groups according to common industry. With the assistance of experienced facilitators, the workgroups were tasked to identify six common hurdles to the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities. The groups then came back together to report their discussion outcomes.

2.3 Afternoon of the Summit

For the afternoon plenary session attendees received two demonstrations:

1. Kathy West-Evans, Director of Business Relations, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), demonstrated the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), an online platform that links employers with a talented pool of candidates with disabilities; and,
2. Michael Callahan, President of Marc Gold & Associates, presented Pathways to Careers' program goals, employer incentives and key partnerships.

Then attendees were again divided into workgroups. This time the workgroups were combined to include private and public partners to discuss innovative solutions to the hurdles identified during the morning workgroups. The groups then came back together to report their recommended solutions to work collaboratively to increase the employment of people with disabilities

Following the discussion closing comments were made by:

- Commissioner Janet LaBreck, U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) provided the public sector perspective; and,
- Keith P. Wiedenkiller, Chief People Officer, AMC Theatres, (AMC) (Retired), President & CEO, Humane Society of Greater Kansas City, Chair, US Business Leadership Network provided the private sector perspective.

The event concluded with the announcement of the creation of a Workplace Inclusion Taskforce (Taskforce) that will work together to advance the recommendations from the Summit. The Taskforce will be housed at the US Business Leadership Network® (USBLN®) and will be staffed in partnership with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation – The National Employment Team (CSAVR-NET).

3.0 SUMMIT RESULTS

Workgroup discussions occurred in the morning and afternoon. Participants were led through the discussion by a facilitator in each group, and responses were recorded on flip charts and in notes.

3.1 Hurdles Identified by Business

Three groups of business representatives comprised of small, medium and large employers were assembled to identify six common hurdles to recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities. As a result of the facilitated group discussions, the following themes emerged:

1. Culture and education inside the organization. Recruitment managers and co-workers with misconceptions about people with disabilities, and the lack of visible support from the top of the company create major barriers to the employment of people with disabilities. There was consensus that if a company doesn't have at least one high-level champion for the inclusion of people with disabilities, then the lack of support becomes a large barrier to going beyond minimal compliance.
2. Small business has unique challenges. Small businesses often have less flexibility and resources to address hiring employees with disabilities. Specifically, small businesses have a perceived lack of resources to identify qualified candidates and information to overcome the perception that it's going to be difficult to hire someone with a disability that can perform the job.
3. Shortage of qualified candidates. Recruitment managers don't feel like they're getting their talent needs met across their organizations - not just with people with disabilities, but across the board. In particular, they're challenged to find qualified candidates in STEM and healthcare.
4. Low expectations. Recruitment managers, service providers, educators and sometimes families often make assumptions about what people with disabilities can't do. Low expectations lead to diminished opportunities.
5. Lack of consistency in the supports delivered by service providers. There are strong indications that many businesses that work with service provider organizations do not believe that they received the level of service that they needed. Obviously, there are many good provider organizations but businesses need a mechanism to identify and connect with them.
6. Lack of information. Businesses need access to information on best practices for recruiting, hiring, retaining, providing on-the-job training, internships, etc. Businesses of all sizes need access to information on what's working.

3.2 Hurdles Identified by Service Providers, Government Representatives & Educators

Three groups of service providers, government representatives and educators were assembled into working groups and asked to identify six common hurdles to the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities. As a result of the facilitated group discussions, the following themes emerged:

1. Ignorance/low expectations. The general consensus was that the many stereotypes and stigma surrounding people with disabilities create barriers to employment. There needs to be more openness, acceptance and inclusiveness of people with disabilities. Everyone, including people with disabilities, need to establish high expectations for their futures. Often, people assume what one's disability is and immediately want to fix the person and/or put limits on what the individual can do. Additionally, because many people's disabilities are episodic in nature it can be difficult to explain breaks in employment on a resume or work history.
2. Risk aversion. Employers have misconceptions that employing people with disabilities will increase their costs (i.e. reasonable accommodations, liability insurance, lawsuits).
3. Transportation. The lack of accessible, affordable transportation is a huge barrier in all communities, but especially in rural areas.
4. Fear of impact of earnings on Social Security benefits and healthcare. People with disabilities who want to work often find it difficult to get clear, accurate, consistent information about how work will impact their Social Security and other government benefits. In addition, service providers often assume that people with disabilities will not be willing to give up government benefits in order to accept employment.
5. Transition. Making the transition from high school to college or from high school to work is difficult for any student. But for students with disabilities the transition can be especially difficult because of gaps and inconsistencies between service systems.
6. On-line recruitment systems. Many companies have begun utilizing on-line behavioral assessments as part of their recruitment, and these have become an additional barrier to employment for all, including people with disabilities.

3.3 Innovative Solutions to the Hurdles

Six workgroups were combined to include private and public partners to discuss innovative solutions to the hurdles identified during the morning workgroups. As a result of the facilitated group discussions, the following ideas emerged:

Businesses

- Participate in the Workplace Inclusion Taskforce
- Join in a public pledge to hire people with significant disabilities, including those leaving sheltered workshops, to talk about the commitment, to keep track of progress, and to document the benefits.
- Leverage opportunities for business to learn from each other (i.e., BLN affiliates) about practices that work;
- Generate opportunities for more storytelling and recognition of success (i.e., award recognition, business publications);
- Participate in more awareness training (e.g., customized technical assistance);
- Have Corporate Employee Assistance Programs provide work incentives/benefits counseling;
- Engage businesses with students/schools early so that students and educators have an understanding about the future workforce needs;
- Engage with the advocacy community in order to develop better partnerships;
- Work with schools to help students to build the skills associated with emerging high-demand careers;
- Engage the public sector in working together to create business-based training programs;
- Leverage existing job shadowing and internship programs to build partnerships between schools, service providers, government, and business. Additionally, this would provide individuals with disabilities an opportunity to build work experience and soft skills;
- Inform service providers, disability organizations, and government disability agencies about expected workforce needs and seek out people with disabilities to hire;
- Develop affirmative action programs to overcome traditional barriers to hiring people with disabilities.

Service Providers & Government Agencies

- Build a credentialing program for service providers like the ISO standard;
- Establish coalitions of service providers in geographic locations to help each other, as well as relieve the burden from employers;
- Develop a ranking system that would allow individuals to find effective service organizations, as well as help business to locate partners to help source talent;
- Identify, summarize and widely disseminate the effective public-private partnership models that work;
- Create incentives for businesses, especially small businesses, to hire people with disabilities in the short term, in exchange for long-term commitments (e.g., utilize a reverse unemployment paradigm by using unemployment benefits to pay for an individual to work.)
- Create a strong media campaign – e.g., hiring people with disabilities is good for business;
- Educate individuals with disabilities and their families about balancing work and benefits;
- Convene solution-focused forums regarding transportation;
- Educate individuals on how to talk about their disability, as well as how to request workplace accommodations (peer to peer);
- Align internships, apprenticeships and training dollars with the needs of businesses;
- Connect disability student services offices on college campuses with placement centers;
- Support community colleges to prepare people with disabilities for high-demand jobs.
- Engage the private sector in working together to create business-based training programs;

3.4 Next Steps

Attendees found the Summit to be a valuable learning experience and left with tremendous momentum. They heard from Proctor & Gamble that their employee turnover rate declined by 90% after the facility decided to hire a significant number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They heard from Walgreens that some of the company's most productive facilities are those that hire a significant number of people with disabilities. Additionally, participants learned about a change in morale at stores like CVS. In fact, they learned quite a lot about the positive impact of disability inclusion on morale from employers ranging from a small automotive shop to large retailers like the TJX Companies.

Two very important tools to address the identified barriers came to light during the Summit.

1. Talent Acquisition Portal. The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation – The National Employment Team (CSAVR-NET) – made up of state VR agencies across the country – is launching a powerful new online tool to match supply and demand. This is a job bank and a resume bank – a “match.com” for disability hiring – that holds tremendous promise for streamlining the hiring process.
2. Culture and education inside the organization. The belief by corporate leadership in the potential of people with significant disabilities, including those with I/DD, to be successful employees - and the need to replicate hiring models built by companies with such leaders.

When Fortune 500 companies decide that it's both in their business interest, as well as the right thing to do, to hire people with significant disabilities, they create templates – streamlined vehicles for recruiting, hiring and retaining such employees. It seems clear that, for many companies, the fastest way to jumpstart disability hiring will be to study how companies like Lowe's successfully hired over 500 people with disabilities in a year, and replicate the model.

It also seems that a virtuous cycle is getting ready to launch. The status of certain brand name corporations that are now hiring many more people with disabilities sends an important signal that has a ripple effect for smaller or lesser known companies– it says, “We think this is good business – why wouldn't you?”

3.5 Real Results

Stories and personal anecdotes illustrate the power of state partnerships with business. As a result of the U.S. Department of Justice's statewide settlement agreement with Rhode Island, many individuals have already begun to make successful transitions from sheltered workshops to competitive wage jobs in the community. Lori, Tom, and Brad all received the services and supports necessary to transition to real jobs in the community since entry of the settlement agreement. (All names have been changed to protect the individual's privacy)

“Lori” had expressed interest in cooking and possibly starting her own business. With support, Lori created her own business selling ice cream cakes. Business was not as profitable as she would have liked and Lori stated that she wanted a more consistent and stable income. She attended a disability service provider’s culinary program for 12 weeks. Upon completing the program, Lori applied for a position at a restaurant that had just opened a new store in the local mall. Lori was hired for a position in food prep. Lori’s job was to portion out food and to do other prep tasks. Portioning at different weights was difficult for Lori. A job coach worked with the restaurant to develop some simple accommodations for Lori. These included a picture chart with all of the possible portions for the variety of foods. The restaurant was hesitant about putting the charts on the wall, but eventually posted them to assist Lori to learn the job. Once this was put in place, it became a tool that was used both by Lori and by the other staff. Lori has been at her place of employment for more than six months now. This week Lori was awarded “Employee of the Month” for the Month of January. Lori has been able to increase her hours over the last few months and she is very happy in her new position.

“Tom” recently graduated from high school. Although he was quite capable, he had very limited job experiences. His expressed interests were in culinary arts and working at a religious goods store. Tom had seen a catalogue of religious items, memorized most of the inventory and often said “that’s the job I want”. He came to a disability service provider with those interests in mind. He quickly signed up for culinary training through a Vocational Rehabilitation program – he completed the program, but decided that cooking was a hobby and not a career. The provider assisted Tom in revisiting working at the religious goods store. Tom had an internship in a retail setting similar to the religious goods store to help Tom acquire the skills he would need. With support, he developed a résumé and started to network. Through networking, his caseworkers were able to find people who had close ties to a small, family owned religious goods store. The store reviewed Tom’s resume and gave him an informational interview. Tom was well prepared for the interview – as his caseworkers had set up mock interviews, rehearsed body position/language and waited for the big day. Tom nailed the interview and was hired. Although it is a part time position, it means the world to Tom and his family.

“Brad” recently graduated from high school with little job experience or preparation. He did find a part time job at a fast food store. Although he enjoyed working, it was not where he really wanted to work. Brad came to disability service provider looking for alternatives – he wasn’t sure what he wanted to do – he just wanted to do something different. Through a series of trial work experiences, internship and classes – Brad decided on retail. He felt he would do best at a small location with predictable set responsibilities. Job Developers worked with Brad looking at a variety of settings. From the opportunities presented, Brad felt that a market could be a perfect fit. Job developers helped Brad polish his resume and apply to the market. The developers helped Brad negotiate the application process, including obtaining a waiver exempting him from some of the mandatory standardized computer testing. Brad proudly accepted a position last month and is enjoying his job.

In June 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice entered into an interim settlement agreement with the state of Rhode Island and the city of Providence, requiring the state and city to provide the employment services necessary to help workers at one large adult workshop and students at a school-based workshop move into integrated, competitive-wage jobs. Both the state and business stepped up to the plate. The change in individual lives has been remarkable, and, like the statewide settlement agreement, the interim settlement agreement has demonstrated the power of state and city partnerships with business.

Steven, who was earning \$2.00 an hour for decades now earns minimum wage at a small company called Alternative Business Solutions; Steven is now pursuing computer training.

Pedro, a student at the Birch School sheltered workshop, was earning just 48 cents an hour. Pedro now makes minimum wage working in the kitchen at Gregg's Restaurant. Pedro is known at the restaurant for his positive work ethic, and just a few months after starting work at the restaurant, Pedro was selected as Employee of the Month. His manager said that Pedro "has changed the culture of the company by inspiring everyone around him to reach higher; he has led by example."

Peter, another former sheltered workshop service recipient who was earning approximately \$1.50 an hour, now has a job earning more than minimum wage working for the state of Rhode Island as a custodian at a hospital. Peter recently completed driving lessons, received his driver's license few months ago, and purchased his first car.

4.0 CONCLUSION

2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the landmark legislation that outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin. It ended segregation in schools, at the workplace, and by facilities that served the general public. Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) calls for an end to segregation based on disability. Yet, approximately 450,000 people with intellectual or developmental disabilities across our nation spend their days in segregated sheltered workshops.

After nearly 25 years of the ADA and 15 years since the Olmstead decision, the nation is witnessing a convergence of factors aligning to make this a moment of great potential for employment of people with disabilities. There are efforts across agencies and evidence of a remarkable shift in Federal disability policy that makes integrated employment not the exception for people with disabilities – but the default option of the future.

Meanwhile, media articles continue to be published about non-profits that receive significant public support in the form of Federal and State dollars – non-profits that employ people with disabilities for pennies an hour, while CEOs take home six and seven figure salary and benefit packages.

It is time to reimagine the employment of people with significant disabilities – what would it look like if integrated employment was done successfully? What if those Federal and State dollars were used to support: real jobs in the community, earning equal pay and held to equal standards.

More events are needed like the October 2014 [White House Disability Employment Champions of Change](#). The White House honored local people from across the country doing extraordinary things to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Other campaigns like “[I’m in to Hire](#)” unify the voices of employers and employees to promote the business benefits of hiring people with disabilities.