

A SUMMIT TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT AND
DECREASE POVERTY AMONG
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



S U M M I T
RECAP

Summary and Recommendations

Presented by Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities and Starbridge



UNIVERSITY of
ROCHESTER
MEDICAL CENTER



For the Hope and the How

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ROC EmployABILITY Summit was born of a recognition that people with disabilities in the City of Rochester are the poorest of any city in the country. The primary reasons for this startling statistic are poor educational outcomes; underemployment in the lowest paying jobs; and unemployment. The Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, a University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and Starbridge collaborated to create an opportunity for employment experts and community stakeholders to come together and brainstorm barriers and strategies for decreasing poverty and increasing employment for people with disabilities in our community. Retired Senator Tom Harkin, an author and Senate sponsor of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), the keynote speaker, led the day by noting that employment is the area in which the ADA has been the least successful and challenged our community to begin to unpack barriers and identify strategies and recommendations for a path forward.

This document serves as a summary of what was learned during the summit, and highlights recommendations and takeaways for the work that is to come next. Key recommendations include:

- Development of a funded taskforce and/or coalition to plan a strategy to move forward the work begun at the Summit and develop a goal, ex. Increase employment of people with disabilities in the Rochester area by 50% in 5 years.
- Strengthen and align formal partnerships with key stakeholders, including businesses, schools, adult systems, families and people with disabilities.
- For profit businesses and not for profit agencies must understand the benefits and return on investment of hiring people with disabilities.
- We must help businesses identify their need for employees (demand) rather than relying on placing people with disabilities (supply) in available jobs.
- Job coaches and developers need to be better attuned to the skills required for each job and how to develop natural support within the job setting.

It was clear from the Summit that if we are to address the issue of the poverty of people with disabilities in Rochester, a community commitment must be made by businesses, government, agencies, and educational institutions. This commitment needs to have clear goals and measurable outcomes.



WHY AN EMPLOYMENT SUMMIT?

“Employment is the one sector (of the Americans with Disabilities Act) we have not been able to move the needle on, after all these years. The unemployment rate is still the same as the time we started, 27 years ago.” – Senator Tom Harkin

People with disabilities in Rochester face poverty at a level that is the greatest of the 75 largest metropolitan areas in the country.

The goal was for the community to gain a better understanding of this population and key barriers they face to obtaining self-sufficiency.

The City of Rochester developed a White Paper that takes a deeper dive into the intersection of disability and poverty in Rochester. Key Findings include:

- People with disabilities have significantly higher rates of unemployment and show significant disparities in earning.
- People with disabilities are over-represented in the lowest paying industries and earn less than their nondisabled counterparts, which overlaps with data from previous reports.
- Educational attainment is low among people with disabilities; more specifically, the low graduation rate for students with disabilities in the Rochester City School District perpetuates the cycle of poverty.
- Employment rates for people with disabilities in Rochester are almost three times lower than for their nondisabled peers.



RECAP OF SUMMIT LOGISTICS



- What: Roc EmployABILITY Summit at the Strong Museum of Play
- When: October 4, 2018
- Who: Collaboratively hosted by the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities and Starbridge
- Self-advocates, family members, government officials, business partners, and community representatives
- What: Participants were challenged to brainstorm strategies to decrease poverty and increase employment for people with disabilities in our community

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What We Learned

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

1. Convene a funded taskforce comprised of:

- Businesses
- Self-Advocates
- Family
- School leaders
- Government Officials (including both local and state agency reps)
- Adult service providers
- University / Research
- *Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), RMAPI & Chamber of Commerce identified as key players

2. The community wants to continue the conversation.

3. The taskforce should develop assignments/next steps for people in respective categories based on Summit findings.

4. Summit attendees overwhelmingly stated they want a plan of action, timeline and identified outcomes to keep the momentum moving forward.



LESSONS FROM SPEAKERS

Retired U.S. Senator Tom Harkin

- The community needs to raise expectations for people with disabilities.
- Youth preparedness is key (early work experiences).
- The private sector needs to commit to offering more competitive, integrated employment options to people with disabilities.

Dan Habib, Filmmaker, University of New Hampshire

- Attendees previewed his film, "Untapped" featuring Anthony Canty, a former RCSD student who participated in the City of Rochester Project SEARCH and is now working for Rochester Regional.
- Promote self-determination, community based experiences in high school, inclusive opportunities, cultural and linguistic responsiveness in all transition services.

Dr. Cedric Alexander, Deputy Mayor, City of Rochester

- The City of Rochester strives to be a leader in inclusive hiring.
- The City of Rochester also encourages businesses to have more inclusive hiring practices.

John Robinson, CEO, Our Ability

- New York State Business Leadership Network (NYBLN) – it will take a business commitment to shift statistics.
- Why should businesses hire people with disabilities? Because they have financial buying power that exceeds any other diversity category.
- Our Ability serves as virtual link between business and qualified people with disabilities.
- Rochester under-utilizing both the NYBLN and Our Ability.

Colin Garwood, CEO, Starbridge

- Disability Provider Agencies need to be a leader in both supporting people with disabilities in employment opportunities but also hiring people with disabilities at their organizations.



Senator Harkin speaking about setting high expectation for individuals with IDD

PANEL SESSIONS

I. LIVED EXPERIENCE OF EMPLOYMENT AND DISABILITY IN ROCHESTER

Facilitated by Jeiri Flores, self-advocate

- “As a person with a disability finding a job has been like winning the lotto. It doesn’t matter how many times I play or how many lotto tickets I buy my numbers are rarely called. And I've done everything that society says you're supposed to do. I graduated high school, I graduated college and then I eagerly tried to join the workforce.”
- “It’s not my lack of skill that complicates my journey to competitive employment, but its people's perception of me that limits me, that the systems we have in place will punish me for exceeding their expectations.”
- Language used directly impacts the narrative about perceptions of employment programs and people with disabilities.

Rebecca Hetherington, Owner & COO, Instant Monogramming

In what ways has hiring people with disabilities shifted your thinking?

- Discovered accommodations weren’t expensive.
- The first person with a disability the company hired was reliable – found value added in the company’s bottom line.

Karen Loughlin, Talent Sourcing Manager, Wegmans

Why has Wegmans continued to commit to hiring people with disabilities?

- Wegmans is a family owned company and feel it’s important to reflect the community they serve in the people that they hire.

Rick Wright, Staff Accountant, Starbridge Inc.

What was the biggest barrier you faced in entering the workforce?

- Rick described one of the biggest barriers to getting employed was the interview process – he felt like once people saw his wheelchair they wrote him off.

What has made long term employment possible?

- Starbridge has been flexible with work schedule while expecting that the work is done in full.
- Expectations were not different for him than they were for anyone else in the finance department.

Adrian Hale, Senior Manager, Rochester Chamber of Commerce

What do you see as the role of the Chamber of Commerce in supporting the hiring of people with disabilities?

- Disability is a component of diversity which folds into all of the Chamber’s goals and efforts related to poverty reduction in Rochester.
- Continue to encourage businesses to think about triple bottom line; people, planet, profit – which includes people with disabilities in our community.

PANEL SESSIONS

II. ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

Facilitated by Andy Imparato, Executive Director of the Association of University Centers on Disability

- The system is set up to discourage some people with disabilities from considering employment. Many people with disabilities require government assistance such as Medicaid to work and live in the community, but bringing in an income can often jeopardize these types of assistance. Need full systems reform to start to move the mark.

Luticha Doucette, ADA Coordinator, City of Rochester

What do you see as the biggest barrier to employment in the City of Rochester?

- There is not one single barrier – access to education, transportation, housing, etc. all play into the intersection of poverty and unemployment in the City of Rochester. Addressing one issue on its own will not result in a meaningful solution – we need comprehensive change to address years of discrimination in the City.

Erin Riehle, founder and Director, Project SEARCH®

What strategies have proven successful in partnering with businesses to eliminate barriers to employment for people with disabilities?

- Project SEARCH is a formal partnership with a business that allows people with disabilities to learn work skills through internships that are fully immersed in a business.
- Employment preparation is key to successful transition into employment, but it will take a commitment from business to open their doors and give all people the opportunity to learn.



NYS Senator Robert Ort

What do you see as the role of legislature in eliminating employment barriers or supporting inclusive employment opportunities?

- The State of New York's unemployment rate for people with disabilities of 70%. One way to address this is working on updating the 43-year old New York State Preferred Source law.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS



I. SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Systems Defined: *Systems impacting employment for people with disabilities in NYS*

- Department of social services; local presence with federal implications: administered at a local level.
- Social security; federal system : administered at a local level.
- OPWDD (Office for People with Developmental Disabilities).
- Medicaid: federal-state partnership.
- Education system; districts, schools, higher education, etc.
- Health care system, including care coordination.
- Transportation.
- Office of Mental Health.
- NYS OASAS (Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services).
- Vocational Rehabilitation; ACCES VR in NY State.
- Non-profit organizations; service delivery and advocacy systems.
- Family systems; considering people's families as part of a system.
- Housing system; economic development system, considering where to build and how to build: subsidized housing environment comes with a set of complicated regulations.
- Developmental Disabilities System (Federal law, implemented at State level): Protection and Advocacy: Disability Rights NY; Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC), University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDS).

Barriers:

- Gap between school and adult system – transition process needs to change. Systems (family, school, adult agencies) need to be better aligned and informed: Transition Coordinator is a key role.
- What will employment look like with managed care?
- Fear of loss of SSI & Medicaid.
- Structural ableism.
- Definition of Disability.

Recommendations:

- Need a coalition to lead this work and paid staff behind it (this is how this community made a difference with lead poisoning) with a time frame, goal, and strengths based perspectives.
- Partner with RMAPI – frame is bigger than disability but there is an opportunity to make disability a bigger part.
- Transition coordinator a key role in schools - RCSD needs a Director of Transition.
- Hire family navigators specific to transition.
- Need to develop self-advocates who speak for themselves as opposed to their parents.
- School boards need to become aware of the system so they dedicate dollars to it.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

II. TRANSITION

Transition defined: Leaving high school & transitioning from supported setting to integrated job

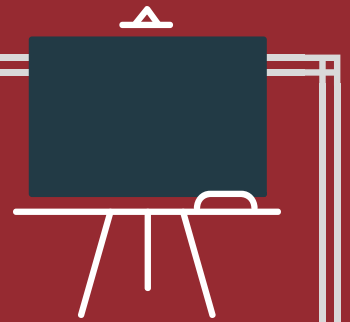
Barriers

SCHOOLS

- Teachers know how to teach, not well versed in business (limited knowledge of what is available).
- Systems don't have capacity for individualized transition planning.
- Diploma track doesn't allow for job preparation because of academic time constraints.
- Need to align diploma with business needs – conversation with businesses to explain all options (CDOS, Skills & Achievement Credential, etc.).

Recommendations

- Improve pre-service teacher prep programs – ensure they include employment preparation.
- Emphasize employment in professional development offerings.
- Strengthen and align formal partnerships with schools and adult systems.



Barriers

COMMUNITY

- Community doesn't understand dignity of risk & tries to protect people with disabilities: the right to take risks when engaging in life experiences and the right to fail in those activities.
- Systems are siloed (schools, adult agencies, state agencies) – each system has its own goal.
- Job postings include physical demands that aren't necessary (kneeling, lift 50 pounds).
- Society doesn't hold people with IDD to higher expectations – subminimum wage violates rights.
- People with IDD need to work alongside people without IDD.
- Finding mentors that aren't paid and are devoted to career development of people with disabilities.
- Families/students often not included in conversations.
- Transition options not always clear to students/families.

Recommendations

- Provide accommodations trainings to employers (natural supports).
- Partner with community more – faith or civic community – support with soft skill development.
- Provide professional development/trainings to teachers and families on the importance of increasing the belief in each student's abilities.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

III. BUSINESS



Barriers

- Misalignment between job requirements & skills needed; this includes barriers with NYSED diploma and exit credential requirements
- Students with disabilities are coming out of high school lacking relevant experience
- Language in job descriptions doesn't seem appropriate or accurate. However, job descriptions (if accurate and appropriate) help job coaches, schools and families know how to help young adult with a disability prepare for work
- Lack of common language between disability service agencies and businesses
- Companies not measuring how well they work with people with disabilities
- Business don't connect people with disabilities with training for skill gaps seen on the job – they fire

Recommendations

- “Diploma or equivalent experience” may be more inclusive than jobs requiring minimum of diploma on applications.
- Schools and disability provider agencies need higher quality internships. This will require a commitment from businesses to facilitate.
- Businesses need to start to think outside the box in terms of interviews – traditional interview not indicative of ability to do job.
- Help business understand role of job coach – Similarly job coach, job developers and business have responsibility to work to use same language.
- Train job coaches to align with business culture/mentality.
- Focus trainings/programming on middle skills (labor force gap).
- Promote videos like Dan Habib's – videos have ability to change perceptions.
- Have Chamber of Commerce meetings specific to disability & have them lead effort related to marketing of benefits of hiring people with disability.
- Businesses need to be able to speak and understand return on investment (triple bottom line).
- Create a network that businesses can connect with related to disability across NYS (VR, Rochester Works! do not seem to be connecting well with business community – business community doesn't know where to go to find a person with a disability to hire).
- Mini grants from government to help businesses search for qualified candidates with disabilities.
- Locally we may see quicker progress with focus on small business – with small business you don't have to climb so far to top to see change.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

IV. POLICY

State policies that help or inhibit competitive, integrated employment

Barriers

- Medicaid Buy-In is overly complicated to understand and there is limited information readily available.
- OPWDD is not doing enough related to workshop transformation and the policy changes that did happen did not come with enough funding to support system change needed. Community prevocational programs are currently not meeting need of the community.

Recommendations

- Each county needs staff to support benefits navigation, including Medicaid Buy-In.
- The state needs to re-evaluate rates within the OPWDD system and consider incentivization.
- The community needs to develop addition, time limited pre-vocational options with a focus on opportunities for young adults with high behavior needs.

Federal policies that help or inhibit competitive, integrated employment

Barriers

- Ticket to Work is underutilized.
- WIOA / PRE-ETS has been slow to roll out in NY. Too soon to tell what barriers might exist but important to continue to monitor.
- Schools doing 'just enough' related to IDEA & transition requirements. It seems schools are not sure what 'meaningful' transition looks like.
- Medicaid has asset limits that limit people related to employment. Part of the solution could be the ABLE Act which is underutilized in NY.

Recommendations:

- Information and training about Ticket to Work with provider agencies.
- Training related to best practices with transition in schools and better communication and partnerships with schools and adult system.
- Information and training about ABLE accounts that is funded by the state or county.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

V. TRANSPORTATION

Barriers

- The transportation system doesn't meet needs of suburban and urban people with disabilities because of lack of accessibility and lack of timeliness.
- Rural folks suffer from the effects of NO transportation and need to rely on family, etc.
- Inability to use self-direction funds for transportation related to employment.

Recommendations:

- Overall theme was that there needed to be more and better options related to transportation for individuals with disabilities.
- Work with OPWDD to change self-direction policy related to transportation.
- RTS must increase accessible transportation.
- Uber and Lyft need accessible vehicles.
- Increase advocacy efforts around improving access and lowering transportation costs.

VI. POVERTY

The group used a multidimensional definition of poverty that considered the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of poverty. This definition of poverty led to a discussion of business/economic perceptions, housing, education and transportation related to disability and employment.

HOUSING & POVERTY

Barriers

- Need for stable long term housing options.
- Depressed wages limits housing options.
- Expectations around living independently.



Recommendations:

- Use of universal design with new construction and development.
- Needs assessment of housing stock in Rochester from an accessibility lens.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

EDUCATION & POVERTY

Barriers

- Need to improve school/education pipeline to work.

Recommendations

- Improve access to CTE courses for students with disabilities (entry requirements limit access).
- Address mental health as a co-occurring disability.

TRANSPORTATION & POVERTY

Barriers

- State systems that supply transportation are not aligned to support employment (i.e. self direction).
- Public transportation is unreliable (RTS & RTS ACCES).

Recommendations:

- Community needs a fleet of accessible vehicles that allows spontaneity needed in workplace.
- Advocacy to align state systems. Agencies do not coordinate transportation efforts due to competition.

