

Community Conversation Summary

Baraboo, WI

February 7, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On February 7, 2008, 36 six members of the Baraboo community came together for a Community Conversation to discuss employment for youth with disabilities. The event was hosted by the Baraboo Area Chamber of Commerce and Baraboo High School.

Background:

The Community Conversation was modeled after the World Café process, which is a community-building tool used to discuss important an issue impacting a community. “World Café is an easy-to-use method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in service of the real work. It has become a movement to support conversations that matter in community settings. This process allows for us to see new ways to make a difference in our lives and work by listening to the conversation.” (www.theworldcafe.com)

“The Café is built on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. Given the appropriate context and focus, it is possible to access and use this deeper knowledge about what’s important.”¹

The World Café process begins with small groups of 4-5 individuals at tables. Each table discusses a question that is posed. After a set amount of time, the participants change tables, bringing along the ideas discussed at their previous table. At the new table, participants are asked to summarize the conversation they just participated in, and discussions continue. At the end of the small group discussion rounds, the large group comes together to share new ideas and insights.

Overview:

The goal of this evening was to gather local ideas, resources and connections that could lead to improved employment and community involvement for youth with disabilities and, ultimately, to a stronger community.

The Baraboo Community Conversation was held at the Baraboo Arts Banquet Hall. It was facilitated by staff from Project Summer, a project through the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Milwaukee. About 36 community members were in attendance, including parents, students, business owners, teachers, and service providers. For two hours, those in attendance explored issues and generated solutions around employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in the Baraboo area. The evening began with a presentation by Project Summer staff about the current employment situation for youth with disabilities and information about the workforce in general. Following the presentation, small group discussions occurred. Specifically, those in attendance discussed the following questions:

1. What can we as a community do to open up summer employment opportunities for youth with disabilities?

¹The World Cafe Community, (2002). Café to Go. Retrieved February, 2008, from The World Café Web site: <http://theworldcafe.com/articles/cafetogo.pdf>

2. What would I be willing to do to facilitate summer employment opportunities for youth with disabilities?

After several rounds of small table conversations, the large group “harvested” their ideas, bringing together ideas and suggestions that came from the small group discussions.

At the end of the evening, attendees were also given a community resource map (see link at end) that provided information on different resources in the community. This map is a living document, and additions can be made through the Project Summer website.

Discussion Summary

Among the issues and solutions presented by participants:

Businesses

- Employers may have questions or need additional information to be able to begin to provide employment opportunities

Solutions generated:

- Sharing of success stories with between businesses and community through the Chamber of Commerce or Optimists
- Education through the Chamber of Commerce newsletter (articles) and newspaper
- Create a central place for businesses to ask questions and connect with other employers
- Partner with high school to host a job fair for students
- Educate employers about the realities of hiring individuals with disabilities-and help overcome myths that may exist
- Publish a ‘hot list’ of jobs available
- Offer job shadowing and job ‘tryouts’ for students to find their interests and abilities
- Provide opportunities for students to learn skills on the job
- Schools, parents, and students can talk to employers about benefits of hiring youth

Students

- May not be aware of career options and may lack necessary job skills
- Increased self-advocacy skills may lead to higher employment rate

Solutions generated:

- Build a career focus into classes for job skills and accountability

- Establish teen clubs, for social purposes and to focus on employment skills
- Enroll in video production classes and other existing opportunities at the high school to tell the story of youth wanting and needing jobs
- Develop a resume
- Attend youth advocacy trainings
- Consider micro-enterprises (jewelry, art, etc.)

Those who support students in finding and maintaining employment

- Agency collaboration could increase opportunities for youth
- Youth and families could benefit from greater ease of access to employment information

Solutions generated:

- Place information about jobs and programs into monthly DVR and Chamber newsletters
- Begin work experiences and co-ops earlier in high school (freshman year)
- Establish a cross-organization communication system
- Create a central place for employers to come to meet parents and youth
- Inform employers of medical concerns
- Enable job developers to go to businesses and suggest potential jobs, carve out jobs
- Provide information on different learning styles to the employer, and help the employer and student form a positive relationship
- Partner with UW-Baraboo disability services
- Set up natural supports on jobs; train coworkers on ways to work with individuals who have been hired
- Tap into the seasonal employment opportunities: agricultural field-working with Community Supported Agriculture and Community Gardens (more seasonal work), tourist industry, parks and recreational programs

Community

- Many in community may not be aware of difficulty of finding employment for youth with disabilities

- Community members have valuable skills that could be used to help support individuals with disabilities

Solutions generated:

- Increase visibility by highlighting issues, employment opportunities, and stories on TV, newspapers, and faith communities
- Enlist college and/or high school students who are interested in related disciplines to volunteer as job coaches
- Provide information about employment to public venues, such as the library
- Connect with social organizations and groups for volunteering (retirement communities, senior clubs, interfaith volunteers)
- Match people with similar career interests as peer mentors

Parents and Families

- May not be aware of employment opportunities

Solutions generated:

- Create an education program for parents to learn about employment services
- Form a parent support group, which includes parent and youth self-advocacy training

Transportation

- Student access to transportation may be limited

Solutions generated:

- Offer more transportation options so that students can travel to job sites
- Publicize reduced cab fares for people with disabilities and look into DVR assistance with transportation for vocational activities
- Utilize existing forms of transportation in their 'down times' -VARC vans, Ho-Chunk shuttle buses already running, Sauk County Commission on Aging
- Contact local businesses who have multiple locations about the possibility of transportation
- Raise funds for a bus to transport individuals to jobs

Next Steps

- Enlist high school and college students who are interested in similar fields as volunteers to be job coaches
- Hold a job fair for students
- Attendance by parents, students, and school staff at Chamber of Commerce and Optimist Club meetings to talk about benefits of hiring youth with disabilities
- Create a teen club (led by teens) that is part social, and part focuses on job skills
- DVR begin publishing information regularly in Chamber newsletter

Additional Resources

Project Summer

www.projectsummer.info

World Café

www.theworldcafe.com

Baraboo Community Resource Map (linked)

http://projectsummer.info/Project_Summer/ResourceMaps.html

Tax Incentives for Hiring Individuals with Disabilities

<http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/>

10 Reasons to Hire Youth With Disabilities (available as download)

http://www.projectsummer.info/Project_Summer/Schools.html

Summary of Evaluation Responses

Roles of Individuals Attending:**

School staff	17%
Employer or business community	13%
Human services agency or organization	33%
Parent or family member of a youth with disabilities	10%
Youth	10%
Other	13%

Summary of Participants' Responses to the following statements:

	Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Strongly	Don't
	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Know
1. Tonight's conversation was a valuable investment of my time.	3%	--	27%	70%	--
2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <i>previously did not know about</i> .	3%	7%	47%	43%	--
3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.	3%	--	40%	43%	13%
4. I was able to identify things I could do to enhance the employment opportunities for youth with disabilities as a result of this conversation.	3%	10%	47%	27%	13%
5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.	3%	3%	50%	33%	10%
6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <i>with</i> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.	4%	21%	32%	4%	39%
7. My community <i>currently</i> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.	3%	10%	62%	17%	7%
8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <i>currently</i> exist in my community.	--	14%	55%	7%	24%
9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <i>in the summer months</i> .	--	41%	28%	10%	20%
10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.	--	--	25%	71%	3%
11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.	--	11%	52%	11%	26%
12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.	--	--	29%	71%	--
13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.	4%	4%	46%	46%	--
14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.	--	22%	15%	59%	4%

**Evaluations were not completed by all participants. The summary includes only those who completed the evaluation..

I wish the following people from our community had been present at tonight's event:

(Summary of Responses)

- Faith communities
- Principals
- Service clubs
- County leaders
- Business people
- Large corporations

- Family members
- Political members
- CESAs