

Community Conversation Summary

Fond du Lac, WI

January 31, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On January 31, 2008, more than 40 members of the Fond du Lac community came together for a Community Conversation to discuss employment for youth with disabilities. The event was hosted by Fond du Lac 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 Fond du Lac Community Conversation was held at Stayer Center’s Sodexo Hall, Marion College. It was facilitated by staff from Project Summer, a project through the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Milwaukee. More than forty 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 Fond du Lac 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 and a CD-Rom of a 4-minute video featuring local businesses that hire people with disabilities . The resource 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

- May not be aware of opportunity to employ youth with disabilities
- May have concern about support needed for youth on jobs
- May need to be exposed to positive examples
- May not be aware of tax incentives for hiring people with disabilities
- Need to hear from other businesses who have hired individuals with disabilities
- Need information on how to support individuals with disabilities on the job

Solutions generated:

- Encourage employers who have been successful in hiring individuals with disabilities to speak to other businesses, either individually or through business association meetings. In addition, service providers and teachers can also present with an employer at local business meetings. Show videos such as “Johnny the Bagger” and locally-produced video featuring FDL businesses that have hired people with disabilities.
- Provide opportunities for youth to participate in “job shadowing” where they can see what different jobs entail and can talk with employers about what they are looking for in employees.
- Business to business mentoring: employers who currently employ youth with disabilities could talk with other businesses interested in doing the same.
- Illustrate examples of success stories through media (e.g., newsletters, newspapers, presenting to groups)
- Employer presentations conducted at school about different job types and opportunities

- Provide training and assistance to employers regarding strategies for supporting individuals with disabilities

Transportation

- Difficulty in getting to and from job locations

Solutions generated:

- Extend time for public transportation
- Talk with individuals who are retired to provide transportation

Those helping students to find and maintain jobs

- Businesses may need additional information to understand how to employ a student with disabilities and what benefits may be
- Students aren't aware of jobs
- Students may need support

Solutions generated:

- Educate employers to potential incentives (e.g., tax credits, statistics on job accommodations, turnover statistics (DuPont Study), etc.) for hiring individuals with disabilities (available at the end of this document)
- Market the need for employment opportunities and success stories through newspaper, newsletter, TV, internet (such as youtube), and through individual businesses and business groups – use the Fond du Lac Business Connection DVD to promote hiring individuals with disabilities
- Create a central marketplace of available summer jobs for youth
- Set up natural supports on jobs: train coworkers on ways to work with individuals who have been hired
- Discuss support needs with employers and discuss ways to support both the employer and individual with disability
- Provide a central contact person for businesses
- Consider micro-enterprise, where students can have own business
- Have a website for teachers and others to access with job information and employment issues and solutions
- Send a survey to employers to find out employability and job set skills they would like a student to have.

For Students

- May not market themselves well-won't emphasize strengths and abilities
- Don't know where to begin looking
- May not have specific employment skills that an employer seeks

Solutions generated:

- Students work with staff or volunteers to prepare for job interviews and searches, creating resumes and learning how to speak with potential employers.
- Establish a job fair for youth
- Teach a course for all students on job skills
- Create an understanding between youth and employer that some skills will be learned on the job

For Families

- Families may not all be aware of available resources and steps to employment for youth with disabilities

Solutions generated:

- Create a handbook and education experiences for families who are navigating the employment process, including information on available transportation options. Start early in high school.

Community

- Community members could help increase potential job markets and prepare students

Solutions generated:

- Enlist the help of retired teachers and professionals to act as mentors for youth. This could include mock interviews and resume writing.
- Join with other communities and districts to work on employment issues
- Create a teen area at the job center. Involve teens to act as mentors to other teens.

Next Steps

Students/parents, and school/adult service personnel will work with local employers to present information to local business groups (e.g., Small Business Association, Rotary, Lions) to showcase success stories and educate the business community about this untapped labor source.

Set up a volunteer database for individuals from community willing to help students to prepare for job interviews and contacts.

Additional Resources

Project Summer

www.projectsummer.info

World Café

www.theworldcafe.com

Fond du Lac 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

Roles of Individuals Attending:**

School staff	16%
Employer or business community	19%
Human services agency or organization	29%
Parent or family member of a youth with disabilities	27%
Youth	--
Other	10%

Summary of Participants' Responses to the following statements:

	Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Strongly	Don't
				Agree	Know
1. Tonight's conversation was a valuable investment of my time.	--	3%	39%	55%	3%
2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <u>previously did not know about</u> .	3%	10%	53%	33%	--
3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.	--	10%	48%	26%	16%
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.	--	--	61%	32%	7%
5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.	--	3%	55%	42%	--
6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <u>with</u> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.	3%	48%	29%	3%	16%
7. My community <u>currently</u> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.	--	17%	53%	17%	13%
8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <u>currently</u> exist in my community.	3%	33%	37%	13%	13%
9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <u>in the summer months</u> .	3%	33%	23%	10%	30%
10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.	--	3%	17%	80%	--
11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.	--	10%	43%	20%	27%
12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.	--	--	28%	72%	--
13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.	--	--	40%	57%	3%
14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.	10%	13%	17%	60%	--

**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)

- More business owners
- Clergy
- City officials
- Manufacturing employers
- Community leaders
- Service organization leaders
- Representatives from every school district
- Center of Influence (COIs)