

Community Conversation Summary

Madison, WI

March 13, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On March 13, 2008, approximately 40 members of the Madison community, including parents, business owners, teachers, young adults and service providers, came together for a Community Conversation to discuss employment for youth with disabilities. The event was hosted by the Madison Schools.

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 Madison Community Conversation was held at the Fitchburg Community Center. It was facilitated by staff from Project Summer, a project through the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Milwaukee. For two hours, those in attendance explored issues and generated solutions around employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in the Madison 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?
2. What would I be willing to do to facilitate 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>

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

- May not be aware of the potential of hiring students, or of the benefits that exist
- Can be very influential with other businesses
- May need avenues to share employment opportunities and match students
- May benefit from a centralized place to learn about employing youth with disabilities and to ask questions
- Offer trial internships to students
- Create online job database
- Educate the co-workers of those hired (in partnership with job developer and youth)
- Host a career day to help youth identify their interests

Solutions generated:

- Businesses who currently hire youth with disabilities can provide references of other businesses who may hire individuals
- Build an Employer Alliance in partnership with schools and agencies to share job openings and improve job matches
- Establish a panel of current employers to speak to business organizations such as Chamber of Commerce and Rotary
- Work with schools and agencies to carve out jobs that may be specific to the individual
- Set up a corner on Craigslist for employment
- Provide clear written expectations for students
- Build on natural supports available at the workplace

Students

- May not know how to effectively market themselves and their skills
- May not have had the opportunity to identify skills and career interests
- May need more information on basic job skills

Solutions generated:

- Gain employment skills through community organizations such as Toastmasters.
- Create a resume' that highlights their own unique skill sets and strengths
- Develop an anonymous website to match students and potential employers
- Practice mock interviews

Those who support students in finding and maintaining employment

- Could use additional employment leads
- May be able to partner together to increase employment chances for all
- May not have a business background

Solutions generated:

- Create interest inventories for youth to help them assess their career interests
- Pursue opportunities for employment outside of disability-specific resources, such as temp agencies and job placement organizations
- Showcase successful employment situations through the media
- Build long-term relationships between schools and employers (e.g. schools could contract with businesses for supplies or other goods and services, thus paving the way for the employer to be more open to hiring a student because an existing relationship is in place)
- Work together to share job opportunities and employment, and so that businesses are only approached by one job developer
- Develop training for school and service providers on job development and marketing strategies and skills
- Utilize a broader pool of people for job developing so a job developer can be assigned to a specific business to create and maintain a relationship and reduce the number of people approaching the business about hiring youth with disabilities
- Create a DVD or Powerpoint which includes FAQs about employing individuals with disabilities and provides tips and resources for troubleshooting. Share with businesses.

- Ensure jobs are of value and importance
- Explore possibilities for younger work experience (shadows and interviews)
- Write social stories to help youth know what to expect.
- Consider and address fears of students and employers first
- Help students understand social situations at work (i.e. through high school business courses or curricula such as W.A.G.E.S., which allows students to problem-solve social situations in work settings)

Parents and Families

- Connect with other parents and families to share resources and ideas

Other Ideas Generated:

- Provide interdisciplinary courses for those going into business and those entering disability-related fields (such as Business and Special Education)
- Incorporate students' skills and abilities through Dane County Timebank
- Connect youth interested in the sciences and technology with UW-Madison's Alliance for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).
- Partner with organizations and businesses for summer internships
- Share information with others in community, including personal contacts and community organizations

Next Steps

- Create an interest inventory for students to begin to assess career interests
- Formulate a group of current employers who will serve as a panel to speak at business organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and Eastside Business Association.
- Research other existing 'pools' and associations of job developers, and how they function collaboratively
- Establish alliance that pools job developers from different high schools with a group of businesses in Dane County that might be interested in employing youth with disabilities
- Establish a group to build on a partnership between businesses and job developers, including cross-training

Additional Resources

Project Summer

www.projectsummer.info

World Café

www.theworldcafe.com

Madison 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

Roles of Individuals Attending:***

School staff	9.1%
Employer or business community	18.2%
Human services agency or organization	36.4%
Parent or family member of a youth with disabilities	24.2%
Youth	--
Other	24.2%

***Not all participants completed the evaluation form . The data displayed here represents only those who completed the form, not all participants.

Summary of Participants' Responses to the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
1. Tonight's conversation was a valuable investment of my time.	--	3.0%	36.4%	60.6%	--
2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <i>previously did not know about</i> .	--	6.3%	34.4%	59.4%	--
3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.	--	6.3%	50.0%	37.5%	6.3%
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.	--	6.3%	71.9%	21.9%	--
5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.	--	3.1%	28.1%	65.6%	3.1%
6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <i>with</i> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.	--	15.6%	43.8%	9.4%	31.3%
7. My community <i>currently</i> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.	--	9.1%	27.3%	36.4%	27.3%
8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <i>currently</i> exist in my community.	--	31.3%	34.4%	6.3%	28.1%
9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <i>in the summer months</i> .	--	15.6%	43.8%	3.1%	37.5%
10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.	--	--	18.8%	78.1%	3.1%
11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.	--	15.6%	56.3%	9.4%	18.8%
12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.	--	--	28.1%	68.8%	3.1%
13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.	--	3.1%	43.8%	50.0%	3.1%
14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.	6.5%	19.4%	19.4%	54.8%	--

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

(Summary of Responses)

More business people

Temporary Agency representative

Government officials

Youth

Madison Area Down Syndrome representatives

