

Community Conversation Summary

Oak Creek, WI

February 20, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On February 20, 2008, approximately 17 members of the Oak Creek and Franklin communities, including parents, business owners, teachers, and service providers, came together for a Community Conversation to discuss employment for youth with disabilities. The event was hosted by Oak Creek High School and North Shore Bank.

### **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](http://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.”<sup>1</sup>

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 Oak Creek/Franklin Community Conversation was held at the Oak Creek 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 Oak Creek 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?

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<sup>1</sup>The 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**

- Businesses may not be aware of benefits and opportunities of hiring youth with disabilities
- Businesses may not be aware of potential supports for youth with disabilities

Solutions generated:

- Invite youth who have had successful job situations to business breakfasts to share their stories; have youth serve as hosts for the event and have it in a business location (not the high school)
- Host a breakfast together with the school and adult service providers with a focus on educating businesses about employing students with disabilities
- Show success stories through advertisements, an employer recognition banquet, stories in the chamber newsletter or articles in the local paper
- Look for meaningful employment opportunities with employers through networking with families, school personnel and other businesses
- Create opportunities for students to shadow employees to observe different types of jobs and careers. Allow students to interview employers to find out what they are looking for in employees
- Educate businesses about job supports available, and of the fact that students will gradually becoming more independent on the job
- Develop a list or database of employers
- Presentation to businesses by job coaches or teachers about benefits of hiring youth with disabilities, including tax benefits. Include youth who have been successfully employed and businesses who have hired.

- Presentation to school board and county board to increase the support and network with those who know businesses in the community
- Hold a job fair to match employer needs with students

### **Students**

- Students are not necessarily aware of how to find jobs
- Students may not know how to effectively interview for jobs and market themselves

#### Solutions generated:

- Take a trip to the local job center to learn about the services available. Utilize tools at the local Job Centers
- Advocate for opportunities to learn job skills and develop a career plan
- Create business cards and mini-resume to give to potential employers that highlight strengths and skills
- Highlight own strengths and skills during interviews
- Start looking for summer jobs in early spring
- Videotape student while working or have a job portfolio with photos, letters of recommendations and evaluations to give to potential employers
- Vary how interviews are conducted-consider alternate formats, such as task-oriented interviews
- Become involved in clubs and events at school
- Create a summer job camp to help youth develop vocational skills – bring in local businesses as guest speakers or providers of work experiences during the camp
- Offer a summer school class on job skills
- Require a careers class for every high school student

### **Those who support students in finding and maintaining employment**

- Serving as a bridge for students and businesses
- Increased education for businesses and community may create more job opportunities

#### Solutions generated:

- Share success stories through multiple avenues: job coach, parents, teachers
- Begin job shadows in middle school
- Contact the businesses who have hired students and ask for references to new businesses.
- Write up success stories/nominate employers for awards (e.g., WI APSE) to promote hiring individuals with disabilities
- Create a list of students seeking employment
- Invite business owners to a school-sponsored educational breakfast
- Teach students to focus on their abilities in interviews
- Develop natural supports at jobs
- Connect and present to civic organizations, such as Lions or Kiwanis to educate businesses and network with employers
- Address the attitudes of peers, who are future employers
- Go to decision makers in larger companies to discuss employment needs and opportunities

## **Community**

- Community can be key resource for helping to build a positive attitude toward hiring youth with disabilities

### Solutions generated:

- Establish formal school/city partnership
- Look into organizations that might use summer volunteers
- Educate and inform the community on the value and contributions of people with disabilities
- Connect with churches – put information in church bulletins about possible business connections or transportation assistance
- Contact political figures, and ask them to work together to make transportation a priority, potentially partnering with the Chamber of Commerce
- Seek out employment opportunities in municipal and community organizations

- Ask local leaders to build community awareness of the capabilities of people with disabilities by providing visibility through a 'shadow' day or other options
- Students can teach or utilize skills such as website building for the city
- Ask city to serve as a model for hiring individuals with disabilities

### **Parents and Families**

- Families may not know how to become involved in employment opportunities

Solutions generated:

- Encourage other parents to become involved, especially those in organizations
- Attend community and other events to provide visibility, if willing
- Provide students with responsibilities at home
- Help to maintain high expectations in terms of employment and careers

### **Transportation**

- Lack of adequate transportation can be a barrier in maintaining employment

Solutions generated:

- Partner with senior organizations to provide transportation
- Investigate a grant to support transportation needs
- Work with partners from Best Buddies
- Set up a rideshare board at school
- Consider retirees to help with transportation
- Establish carpools with co-workers

### **Other ideas**

- Form a committee of individuals to overcome barriers in connecting youth to businesses
- Network with family, friends, businesses to share successes

### **Next Steps**

- Presentations by youth, employers, school, and support personnel to Chamber of Commerce businesses at a breakfast meeting
- Form a team to connect between municipality, bus., and schools (school/city team) to develop list of potential jobs and students
- Institute earlier opportunities for job shadowing
- Designate an individual from the business community to facilitate conversations between schools and businesses
- Ask current business for recommendations and ask them to share success stories with others
- Follow-up on employment opportunities with city, specifically part-time student jobs

### **Additional Resources**

Project Summer

[www.projectsummer.info](http://www.projectsummer.info)

World Café

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

Oak Creek/Franklin Community Resource Map (linked)

[http://projectsummer.info/Project\\_Summer/ResourceMaps.html](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](http://www.projectsummer.info/Project_Summer/Schools.html)

### Roles of Individuals Attending:\*\*\*

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| School staff   | 19% |
| Employer or business community                       | 13% |
| Human services agency or organization                | 19% |
| Parent or family member of a youth with disabilities | 31% |
| Youth  | --  |
| Other  | 25% |

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

### 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.   | --                | --       | 31%   | 69%            | --         |
| 2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <u>previously did not know about</u> .                | --                | 6%       | 44%   | 50%            | --         |
| 3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.                         | --                | --       | 31%   | 56%            | 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. | --                | 6%       | 44%   | 50%            | --         |
| 5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.  | --                | --       | 38%   | 56%            | 6%         |
| 6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <u>with</u> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.                     | 6%                | 19%      | 31%   | 13%            | 31%        |
| 7. My community <u>currently</u> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.   | 6%                | 6%       | 38%   | 25%            | 25%        |
| 8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <u>currently</u> exist in my community.  | --                | 38%      | 25%   | 6%             | 31%        |
| 9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <u>in the summer months</u> .                              | --                | 38%      | 25%   | 6%             | 31%        |
| 10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.   | --                | 13%      | 19%   | 69%            | --         |
| 11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.                  | --                | 19%      | 31%   | 31%            | 19%        |
| 12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.  | --                | --       | 25%   | 75%            | --         |
| 13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.  | --                | --       | 38%   | 63%            | --         |
| 14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.   | --                | 13%      | 31%   | 50%            | 6%         |

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

#### (Summary of Responses)

- More business owners
- Council of City
- More parents
- More school staff
- Pupil Services Director
- SECUB Members
- Special Education teachers
- Police/Fire Chief

