

Community Conversation Summary

Stoughton, WI

April 17, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On April 17, 2008, approximately 80 members of the Stoughton community, including parents, business owners, teachers, young adults, community members and service providers, came together for a Community Conversation to discuss employment for youth with disabilities. The event was hosted by the Stoughton Mayor's Committee on Human Services, Stoughton Area Chamber of Commerce, Stoughton Area School District and Stoughton Time 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 Stoughton Community Conversation was held at Victoria's of Stoughton. The process 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 Stoughton 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**

- May not be aware of potential for hiring individuals with disabilities
- May not know how to find individuals looking for employment
- Greater collaboration between businesses, schools, agencies, and families could result in more employment opportunities.

Solutions generated:

- Establish three-way education between businesses, schools and adult service providers, which provides information to businesses on how to employ students and information to schools and service providers on what skills are needed and what employment is available.
- Use Chamber of Commerce to bridge the gap, providing educational opportunities for employers, such as through monthly luncheons, where employers and employees could showcase their successes.
- Hold a job fair for students.
- Businesses who employ students with disabilities network with other businesses with whom they have connections, and encourage them to hire.
- Work together with those providing support to students to create natural supports: peers at employment sites who can help.
- Educate businesses about tax incentives available for hiring individuals with disabilities.
- Increase understanding for employers of what disability is to alleviate fears or misconceptions.

- Chamber of Commerce will host a meeting to discuss employment opportunities in October – educate the business community through informational meetings and articles about success stories

## **Students**

- May not know how to seek out jobs
- May not have employment history

Solutions generated:

- Develop a website to match students and employers, potentially in conjunction with Time Bank.
- Encourage students to volunteer and be active in their community
- Organize a peer coaching program for students on job sites, where they are paired with volunteer peers.
- Develop a mentor program with business members or retired citizens
- Create resumes (possibly using video clips)

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

- Work with schools, families, and business to open avenues of communication
- Develop partial jobs, where students could potentially do a portion of a job.

## **Families**

Solutions generated:

- Develop educational opportunities for parents that relate information on finding and maintaining employment
- Seek out opportunities and resources for connecting and supporting parents, such as WI FACETS, Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative, and the parent liaison for CESA 2

## **Community**

- Community members can serve a valuable and influential role in helping youth with disabilities to find employment.

Solutions generated:

- Give feedback to employers who hire or may potentially hire individuals with disabilities; focus on the benefits of hiring and also patronize businesses who do so.
- Investigate laws and regulations perceived as barriers to employment and work together to educate the public and legislators, as well as to find solutions.
- Publish stories of successful employment in the local newspaper and other venues
- Encourage the local and state organizations and government to hire individuals with disabilities.
- Work with the Stoughton Time Bank that places value on work.

### **Transportation**

- Transportation may hinder students from finding and maintaining employment

#### Solutions generated

- Recruit other students or retired citizens to provide employment. Potential link with StoughtonTime Bank.
- Use local volunteers (e.g., churches, elderly transportation) or organize volunteer drivers that students can pay a fee per ride
- Provide transportation as part of compensation package from employer.

### **Next Steps**

- Set up educational opportunities for businesses through Chamber of Commerce (October)
- Educate schools and service providers about resources available, such as Time Bank
- Create an avenue for communication between businesses and potential student employees, such as a job fair or website)
- Organize volunteers through school and retired citizen groups

### **Additional Resources**

Project Summer

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

World Café

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

Stoughton 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)

**\*\*\*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	Agree	Strongly	Don't
	Agree			Agree	Know
1. Tonight's conversation was a valuable investment of my time.	1.9%	--	23.1%	75.0%	--
2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <i>previously did not know about</i> .	--	9.8%	39.2%	49.0%	2.0%
3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.	--	--	41.2%	47.1%	11.8%
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.	--	5.9%	49.0%	45.1%	--
5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.	--	2.0%	33.3%	62.7%	2.0%
6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <i>with</i> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.	--	10.2%	42.9%	14.3%	32.7%
7. My community <i>currently</i> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.	2.0%	7.8%	45.1%	27.5%	17.6%
8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <i>currently</i> exist in my community.	3.9%	23.5%	49.0%	7.8%	15.7%
9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <i>in the summer months</i> .	2.0%	20.4%	36.7%	10.2%	30.6%
10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.	--	4.0%	24.0%	72.0%	--
11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.	--	12.2%	42.9%	38.8%	6.1%
12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.	2.0%	--	21.6%	76.5%	--
13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.	--	3.9%	43.1%	51.0%	2.0%
14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.	2.2%	22.2%	22.2%	51.1%	2.2%

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

#### (Summary of Responses)

- City Council members
- School Board members
- Clergy
- Local newspaper
- More parents
- Business owners
- Service Organization leaders
- Special Education teachers
- Nursing homes



