

Community Conversation Summary

West Bend, WI

February 18, 2008



Prepared by:

Project Summer

On February 18, 2008, about 17 members of the West Bend community, 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 West Bend 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 West Bend Community Conversation was held at the Clairemont Inn and Meeting 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 West Bend 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 need for employing students
- May not be aware of supports available
- Businesses who employ students are a good resource

Solutions generated:

- Work with businesses who have hired or worked with the schools to share their positive experiences with other businesses through articles or testimonial letters
- Develop mentorships between businesses who have hired students with disabilities and those interested in hiring, and want to learn more
- Presentations to businesses clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber, Lions) from school personnel, parents, and students
- Move beyond ‘typical’ jobs such as bagging, add variety to work and ensure employee visibility
- Create a list of employers interested in participating and working together
- Provide opportunities for youth job shadow experiences
- Work with businesses to advertise through school for employment openings

Students

- May need to learn to market skills to employers
- May need to identify jobs and areas of interest

Solutions generated:

- Student-developed brochure describing abilities
- Presentations by students to businesses about their abilities and strengths

- seek jobs, in partnership with teachers, that are enjoyable, but understand that summer jobs may be short term
- train their own successor if leaving a job
- seek out volunteer opportunities in early years
- fill out a personal skills checklist

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Those who support students in finding and maintaining employment

- Development of a formal partnership between businesses, schools, and service agencies could benefit everyone
- an avenue for communication between businesses and schools could be created.

Solutions generated:

- Inform businesses about supports that exist for students to be successful in employment
- Connect with businesses personally – school personnel, families, students. Use networking to develop employment opportunities
- Develop a list of business groups and when they meet, assign people to speak to different groups, including existing employers
- Develop a bridge between youth and employers through job shadowing, tours of business, having employers assist in mock interviews, students interviewing employers about their needs, etc.
- Teach youth how to handle potential issues that may arise at jobs
- Educate employers about effective ways to communicate with students
- Contact chamber for advice and help on preparing youth for work, including strategies for funding opportunities
- Job coaches form partnership between youth and business
- Designate a central contact person for businesses to contact with questions and employment opportunities
- Investigate grants from Workforce Development

Community

- Can be a very effective group for helping develop employment opportunities

Solutions generated:

- Develop a list of networks and use those networks to increase opportunities for students
- Designate a liaison between businesses, school, students, and families
- Initiate partnerships with recreation or Boys & Girls Club
- Invite students to speak to community organizations, such as Chamber, Kiwanis, Lions

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Parents and Families

- Parents and families can encourage businesses and help students prepare for jobs

Solutions generated:

- Make personal connections with businesses to help facilitate employment opportunities
- Teach students to advocate and share their strengths and abilities

Transportation

- Transportation may not be sufficient or reliable

Solutions generated:

- Provide reduced taxi fares or school transportation for students going to jobs
- Set up ride-sharing with taxis to offset costs
- Partner with recreation department
- Investigate what district can do to fund transportation for youth in summer employment

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Next Steps

- Develop a list of business organizations and designate individuals to contact and speak to each on the benefits of hiring students with disabilities
- Make personal contacts with businesses using personal networks, encourage them to hire students
- Create a liaison or committee to look into increasing partnerships between businesses (and business organizations), schools, and students.

Additional Resources

Project Summer

www.projectsummer.info

World Café

www.theworldcafe.com

West Bend 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	47%
Employer or business community	20%
Human services agency or organization	20%
Parent or family member of a youth with disabilities	13%
Youth	7%
Other	--

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.	--	--	40%	60%	--
2. Tonight, I learned about resources, opportunities, or connections in my community that I <i>previously did not know about</i> .	--	8%	54%	39%	--
3. Tonight's conversation will contribute to better employment opportunities for youth with disabilities in my community.	--	--	53%	47%	--
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.	--	7%	33%	60%	--
5. I would invite someone I know to attend another event like this if one were held in the future.	--	7%	27%	60%	7%
6. Employers in my community are generally receptive to hiring youth <i>with</i> disabilities in after-school or summer jobs.	--	27%	13%	--	60%
7. My community <i>currently</i> has the capacity to support youth with disabilities in jobs.	--	14%	57%	14%	14%
8. Strong partnerships between schools and employers <i>currently</i> exist in my community.	--	13%	27%	7%	53%
9. Numerous employment opportunities exist in my community for youth with disabilities <i>in the summer months</i> .	--	20%	33%	--	47%
10. Employers in my community may need help learning how to support youth with disabilities on the job.	--	--	13%	87%	--
11. I believe that my community leaders believe it is important to improve employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.	--	20%	40%	13%	27%
12. Follow-up events or actions on this issue are needed in our community.	--	--	36%	64%	--
13. The conversation this evening improved my perceptions of the capacity of our community to improve work outcomes for youth with disabilities.	--	--	64	36	--
14. I work with people with disabilities regularly as part of my job.	8%	8%	15%	62%	8%

**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
- Rotary Club
- West Bend Chamber of Commerce
- Job coaching services

