

Connecting Individuals With Disabilities With Meaningful Employment

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES



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The overall unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is 12.7% (U.S. Dept. of Labor, Nov. 2012), and according to a report from the President's Committee for People With Intellectual Disabilities (2004), individuals with severe disabilities, such as an intellectual disability or autism, the unemployment rate fluctuates between 80-90%. It is clear that individuals with disabilities are facing a number of challenges and barriers to gaining meaningful employment. Though vocational service providers and others focus their efforts in improving employment outcomes, partners are needed in the community to make a real difference. Faith communities are natural partners in these efforts.

How a Faith Community Can Help Make Connections

There are a number of ways, both formally and informally, that a faith community and its members can assist in connecting individuals with disabilities with meaningful employment.

You've heard the saying, "It's who you know." On average, individual faith communities have 186 attendees. Many of these people are employers themselves or are connected to employers that have the potential to hire people with disabilities. To help make these connections:

- Hire people with disabilities.
- Host networking sessions or job fairs.
- Partner with nonprofits or businesses in the neighborhood that are looking for employees or volunteers. While paid employment is ideal, sometimes volunteering can lead to a paid position. It can certainly boost a resume.
- What identified needs in the community could the person provide? Could meeting those needs turn into a small business or create employment-related references?
- Talk with potential employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Employers report that their employees with disabilities model characteristics they want in all of their employees. Loyalty, gratefulness, dependability, and dedication are among the terms used to describe their employees with disabilities.

How a Faith Community Can Support Jobseekers With Disabilities

- Hire people with disabilities.
 - Offer career counseling and assessment.
 - Assist the person in identifying his or her strengths and challenges. Help to match interests with career options.
 - Offer support groups or career ministries.
 - Assist in creating resumes and cover letters.
 - Offer job training classes.
 - Offer computer access for online job searches.
 - Assist in filling out job applications.
 - Offer transportation to and from interviews.
 - Offer job shadowing/mentoring opportunities.
 - Offer support, encouragement, advice, and prayer.
- Searching for a job is stressful. There may also be financial or psychological stressors at play. Talk with the jobseeker and offer support.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers. The VKC has developed a series of Employment Resource Sheets for employment professionals and jobseekers with disabilities. They can be found at: vkc.vumc.org in the "Resources" section.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by TN county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

TennesseeWorks

Over twenty TN organizations working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have come together to form the Tennessee Collaborative for Meaningful Work. The collaborative is focused on obtaining equal access to employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Its website serves as a resource clearinghouse and gathering place for the collective work of the Collaborative and partners throughout the state. www.tennesseeworks.org

Other Resources

- **Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee*** provides persons with disabilities opportunities to be self-advocates, make their own decisions regarding living arrangements, means of transportation, employment, social and recreational activities, as well as other aspects of everyday life. www.cilmtn.org/
- **Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee*** is an agency advocating for the rights

of Tennesseans with disabilities to ensure they have an equal opportunity to be productive and respected members of society. www.dlactn.org

- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** is a source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace. askjan.org/index.html
- **My Next Move** is an online tool that provides job seekers with information on occupations, local job openings, and training opportunities. Users can search for jobs with a "bright outlook" in growing industries, jobs that are part of the "green" economy, and jobs with Registered Apprenticeship programs. www.mynextmove.org/
- **Social Security's Ticket to Work** is a program that offers people with disabilities an opportunity to achieve greater independence by providing choices in employment services. The Ticket is a free voluntary program. www.chooseworkttw.net
- **Tennessee Department of Rehabilitation*** is a federal and state-funded program providing services to help individuals with disabilities enter or return to employment. <http://tennessee.gov/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html>
- **The Arc Tennessee*** advocates for the rights and full participation of all people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. www.thearctn.org, (800) 835-7077

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*Similar agencies present in each state.

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