

Employment and Disability Summit White Paper

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As part of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, and with a strong belief that the American Dream belongs to everyone, three organizations formed a collaborative network to service individuals with developmental disabilities living in North Dakota. The network was named the North Dakota Developmental Disabilities Network (NDDDN), and includes: The North Dakota Protection and Advocacy Project, the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities, and the North Dakota State Council on Developmental Disabilities. The trio strives to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to culturally competent community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion in all facets of community life.

The activities of each entity belonging to NDDDN fall within core emphasis areas established at the federal level. Emphasis areas include:

- quality assurance activities
- education and early intervention activities
- child-care related activities
- health-related activities
- employment-related activities
- housing-related activities
- transportation-related activities
- recreation-related activities
- other services available/offered to individuals in a community, including formal and informal community supports that affect quality of life

To gather current input on these emphasis areas, a series of summit meetings were designed. The summits were structured to encourage discussion and input from participants, and to gather information from professionals working in the emphasis areas. Each summit meeting covered one emphasis area, began with a keynote speaker, involved the audience in small group work, and featured a panel of presenters who discussed their particular experience with some aspect of the emphasis area. During the small group work, participants developed lists of actionable steps that could be used by NDDDN agencies in planning yearly goals and objectives. Results of the summit meetings were published in white papers and broadcast through websites to make information available to a broader range of constituents.

On May 20, 2009, the Employment and Disability Summit took place at the Best Western Doublewood Inn in Bismarck, ND. The summit opened with an explanation of the NDDDN network and its purpose.

Participants of the workshop were introduced, and asked to identify their expectations for the summit. Identified expectations included:

- Employment barriers
- Resources
- Help improve employment outcomes
- Employment trends
- SSI
- More employment opportunities
- Collaboration
- Networking
- Share resources
- Obtain input
- Advocacy

Issues also brought up during the expectations' session included:

- Funding for support services
 - ✓ Reg. Mental Health – VR referrals
 - ✓ More support needed
 - ✓ Need ongoing job coaching
 - ✓ ASD fall through the cracks
- SSI – (loss of benefits)
- Transportation - getting to and from work

To start the presenters' session, Vickay Gross, a coordinator/advocate for the Beneficiaries of Social Security Program at the North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project presented her role of assisting beneficiaries of SSI and SSDI to address barriers to employment such as inadequate or inappropriate training and employment supports, transition for students with disabilities, reasonable accommodation in the workplace and education and training on work incentives and employment rights. Terry Peterson, a coordinator for Community Work Incentives at Minot's Rehab Services, Inc., presented on benefit planning. He has set up an informational website, which can be accessed at www.disablognd.blogspot.com. Terry can also be contacted at rsi5@srt.com or 701-839-4240 for one-on-one advice. Terry covers the eastern half of North Dakota while information regarding the western half of North Dakota can be found by emailing ndbenefits@hotmail.com or dialing 701-478-9122 and asking for Mark.

Based on the information presented by the keynote speakers, four main topic areas were developed and written on flow charts, which were then placed around the room. Following the keynote presentation, summit participants were directed to pick the topics they were most interested in, and spend ten to fifteen minutes in discussion to identify actionable steps that could be address each topic area. This process was completed three additional times, which provided participants the opportunity to discuss a total of all four topic areas. Topic areas and actionable steps identified during the small group work included (with total number of votes received from the participants):

Technology: (2)

State:

- Worksite Access
- Training for technology
 - ✓ Employee and employer – support staff e.g. sign language, Braille, etc
- Understanding/education on simple uses for technology (i.e. visual aids, etc)
- Statewide tech conferences

Local:

- Promoting knowledge that VR can be technology resource

Both State and Local:

- Worksite Access
- Training for technology
 - ✓ Employee and employer – support staff e.g. sign language, Braille, etc
- Education of available technology (IPAT)
- Bring cost down for all involved
- Use of ordinary items for assistive technology
- What is available
 - ✓ Assessments
- Promote Assistive Technology with Chamber of Commerce
- Website with Assistive Technology options/Resources as well as links to IPAT, VR, ect./Classifieds for used equipment
- Assistive Technology outreach/promotion to rural areas – in-home training
- Bring Assistive Technology to Ag venues....shows, etc.
- Promote universal design to construction companies
- Expand IPA's. . . . increase numbers
- Do assistive technology show for Chamber or in some public venue like Civic Center
- Awareness and training, training, training!
- Awareness of the Job Accommodation Network

Employment Supports/Integrated Employment: (20)

State:

- Maintain funding
- Equalize funding/opportunities for those with ALL disabilities (Increase \$ SEP)
- More involvement by people with disabilities in the legislative process to ensure supports
- Insure continuity of programs
- Find ways to bring community support (employ) services to individuals receiving day support/ISLA/etc. services

- More money into transition
- Offer job assessments to businesses
- Develop a pot of funding for extended for all persons who need it.

Local:

- Increasing education for employers/employees
- Grass roots education and little people forming network to push state legislators starting from the bottom and working the way up

Both State and Local:

- Universal/Uniform Procedures in different regions
- More opportunities for those currently in sheltered work situations

Job Development: (22)

State:

- Lobby with legislators about wages of staff - decrease turnover
- Awareness that someone who has a disability may be educated and able to do the job.
- Reconsider minimum number of hours for S.E.P.
- Focus on helping people find the job of their choice
- More funding for ongoing supports (Extended services)
- Educate employers on tax incentives
- Educating employer and answering questions
 - ✓ Training employers and co-workers to build natural support

Local:

- Use employers who employ people with disabilities as a reference
- Need appropriate assessment for those with limited work experience
- Training for those on mayor's and other committees – city, county

Both State and Local:

- Move away from disability/Focus on Ability – (strengths, talents)
- Changing titles and definitions
- People first language
 - ✓ Employers should not be intimidated by legislators, etc. by lack of knowledge of people first language, say what they need. Action: Workshop for providers, VR coaches, etc. to pull together all the programs available
- Partnership with VR, Job Service, Job Development and other entities
- Educate business on programs available
- Job carving – action specific training for vendors on job carving
- Teach job hunting skills during the job development process – how to search a newspaper, fill out an application and create a resume
- Self employment

- Be aware of current technologies for job development
 - ✓ Computer kiosks
 - ✓ Online applications
 - ✓ Ongoing training
- Tour jobs to understand what job involves
- Understand what is offered in employer benefit packages

Education – Employers/Community: (20)

State:

- More awareness at the legislative level
- Go to State to aid in funding for various committees
 - ✓ Governor's
 - ✓ City
 - ✓ County
- Verify definitions
- Create disability education standards that HR managers in the state need to attend/complete

Local:

- Increase number of seminars conferences to smaller communities – public welcome
- More visibility
 - ✓ Get involved in civic organizations
 - ✓ Chamber membership
 - ✓ More PR
 - ✓ More contact with news organizations
- Education
 - ✓ One on one "sales" calls on employers.
 - ✓ More hands-on training
- Get on city administration agendas
- Get on city Mayor's committee on employment of disabilities or other various city commissions/committees

Both State and Local:

- Achieve better "marketing" ideas and programs for providers, agencies and people with disabilities.
- Achieve better identification of groups who help provide support – public, others
- Make use of websites/computer/etc. to DD resources
- Involving people with disabilities in the process at both the state and local levels
- Using committees like Mayor's Committee, Chamber, etc., to get people with disabilities involved in the business community.
- Make use of self-advocacy groups like United Voices, ARC Board, ARC Buddies, etc.
- Presentations for area colleges and businesses
- Using employers who employ people with disabilities to educate other potential employers
- Volunteering to maintain/gain community contacts

After completion of the small group work, a panel presentation took place. Panelists shared their perspectives and experiences, identifying challenges they face, unmet needs they have identified, and potential solutions for those needs. The panel, composed of a combination of professionals, included the following individuals:

Darcy Severson – Employment Coordinator with Pride, Inc. Darcy specializes in assisting people with disabilities to find a successful career path. Darcy was nominated and chosen as professional of the year by the ARC of Bismarck in 2006.

Tom Schiwal – Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Consulting and Services for the Bismarck region. Tom previously was a Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant for the Bismarck and Devils Lake region.

Tom Alexander – Project Director on the Comprehensive Employment Services grant with NDCPD. He is a current board member for the Association of Persons in Supported Employment.

Jeannie Pedersen – Peer Program Coordinator with the Dakota Center for Independent Living. She is also a board member and long time advocate of the Bis-Man Transit.

Outcomes/Lessons Learned:

Upon completion of the panel discussion, participants of the workshop were asked to vote on what they felt were the highest priority steps that had been identified during the earlier small group work. Each participant was instructed to cast three votes, and had the options of voting for three separate issues, or casting all three votes for one issue that they felt the strongest about. Actionable steps identified as highest priorities as well as the number of votes cast for each are as follows:

<u>Number of votes:</u>	<u>Issue</u>
2	Technology
20	Employment Supports/Integrated Employment
20	Education – Employers/Community
22	Job Development

The identified issues and proposed actionable steps can now be used in strategic planning for the agencies belonging to NDDDN, providing the agencies with a road map of needs and priorities to look at when designing programs and work tasks for the future. Although the summits were originally designed to elicit feedback from constituents on priority issues and actionable steps, other outcomes also resulted from the interactive group work, including:

- Networking among professionals from various agencies
- Education regarding services offered by agencies and programs
- Identification of new/increased priority areas for agencies
- Identification of possible funding sources for additional training
- Discussion of how agency personnel can collaborate on various issues

The objective of the Employment and Disabilities Summit to gather current information on issues and identify actionable steps was successfully met. As a result of the excellent interactive group work and

lively discussion among attendees, participants unexpectedly identified individual action steps for themselves and their agencies.

NDDDN agencies now have current information to carry forward into planning processes. Using the information gleaned from the summit meeting, NDDDN members can structure work plans and design programs that are relevant to the needs of consumers and that ensure individuals with developmental disabilities have access to high quality programs and services that will promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in all facets of community life.

Sponsored by the
North Dakota Developmental Disabilities Network (NDDDN)

