
DiscoverAbility NJ - New Jersey's Strategic Plan to Create a Comprehensive Employment System for People with Disabilities: Final Public Progress Report December 2012

New Jersey believes that people with disabilities are an integral part of the labor force and are active and valuable participants in the economic growth and vitality of the state. DiscoverAbility NJ is New Jersey's comprehensive employment Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), funded through a grant from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

DiscoverAbility NJ is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Human Services, the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the State Employment and Training Commission, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation, and a myriad of community-based agencies and organizations.

Since 2008, DiscoverAbility NJ actively worked to support the goals surrounding increased job and career opportunities for people with disabilities in the state. DiscoverAbility NJ has engaged the business community, supported tools for benefits planning to job seekers with disabilities, provided job and career information to youth and adults with disabilities, provided training and capacity building for frontline staff and other professionals, and contributed to research and data about the employment of people with disabilities. Key activities of the DiscoverAbility NJ project are described below:

Engaging the Business Community

Disabilities At Work

The New Jersey Business Leadership Network (www.njbln.org), a committee-based, employer-led effort of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce Foundation, launched a multi-pronged program called Disabilities At Work in 2008. The fundamental intent of the program was to encourage more businesses to support people with disabilities by publicizing and rewarding their efforts, thus providing significant value as their potential consumer markets became aware of that support.

MIG funding provided the opportunity to showcase those companies doing good things for people with disabilities with the production of the Disabilities At Work Internet Radio Show. Broadcast on VoiceAmerica Internet Radio, the New Jersey Business Leadership Network (NJBLN) produced a series of radio shows, aired twice weekly, spotlighting businesses that support people with disabilities on the job, that go beyond compliance in recruitment practice, or that support disability causes with their philanthropy. The show also highlighted people with disabilities, service providers, cutting-edge research, and promising practices in helping people with disabilities get to work. Once aired, Disabilities At Work programs were available for

download through iTunes and on the Disability At Work Web site (www.DisabilitiesAtWork.org).

1. Twenty-five (25) one-hour shows were produced and archived sound files are available at: http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW_Previous_Radio_Shows.html
2. A special arrangement was developed with a nonprofit organization to make the shows accessible to the hearing impaired since MIG funding did not cover that expense. The organization received special mention on the show, and the project received text transcripts of the programs.
3. Data available to NJBLN indicate that over 10,000 people accessed the radio show while it was being aired or in archived format. However, many agencies downloaded the sound files and posted them to their Web sites.
4. Show announcements, which were distributed electronically in advance of the programs, have been attached to this email as a separate file.

Concurrent funding from the Kessler Foundation supported the production of a Disabilities At Work e-newsletter, which was mailed to more than 40,000 human resource specialists in 2011. In 2012, more than 101,000 people received the e-newsletter.

These newsletters drove traffic to the Disabilities At Work Web site and increased listenership for the Disabilities At Work Radio Show; thus the Chamber Foundation was able to leverage MIG funding with private funding. Links to all of the newsletters are below:

February 2011 – <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-2-2011.html>
April 2011 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-4-2011.html>
June 2011 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-6-2011.html>
August 2011 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-8-2011.html>
October 2011 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-10-2011.html>
January 2012 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-1-2012.html>
March 2012 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/DAW-Newsletter-3-2012.html>
June 2012 - <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/Newsletter/6-2012.html>
September 2012 – <http://disabilitiesatwork.org/Newsletter/9-2012.html>
December 2012 - pending

In addition, MIG funding was used to promote the Disabilities At Work Honor Roll in each of two years. This effort intended to provide businesses with a greater Return on Investment for their outstanding efforts to support people with disabilities.

People with disabilities, their family members, service providers, and supporters control an astounding amount of disposable income — billions of dollars, in fact. Any business would welcome the opportunity to access that capital. To further leverage the business desire to penetrate those markets, NJBLN provided service providers, nonprofit and school personnel, and state agencies with the opportunity to “endorse” businesses they determined were worthy of being appointed to the Disabilities At Work Honor Roll. Nominating entities were screened, and

the criteria for making the Honor Roll were carefully defined. The process was conducted electronically through the Disabilities At Work Web site.

A unique logo was developed and printed on window decals and plaques. Businesses that made the Disabilities At Work Honor Roll were encouraged to display program window decals. A concurrent campaign was launched to notify people with disabilities and their supporters to patronize businesses that displayed the logo.

The Chamber Foundation is in conversation with the National Organization on Disabilities to define a partnership that might allow this program to continue.

Disability Supplier Diversity Program

In partnership with the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN), the Chamber Foundation, working as the NJBLN, recruited 27 organizations to the certification program. The Diversity Supplier Diversity Program is an effort that officially certifies disability-owned businesses and prepares them to be suppliers for large corporations and provides connections to procurement professionals at corporations wanting to expand the diversity of their supplier networks.

One measure of the success of the initiative that was used to gauge impact was the number of connections on various social media. As of December 1, 2012, the Disabilities At Work sites on Facebook and Twitter had reached a total of 8,111 friends/followers.

Implementation of an Economic Development Pilot

With the National Organization on Disability (NOD), DiscoverAbility NJ implemented a model for building a stronger “disability workforce connection” with New Jersey employers, state economic development officials, and regional workforce intermediaries that looks to better connect employers seeking to diversify their workforce with qualified workers with disabilities.

NOD’s Bridges to Business program helps employers to effectively recruit, train, and retain job seekers with disabilities. In October 2010, NOD launched Bridges to Business in New Jersey with an expanded role of serving as an intermediary between the corporations seeking to hire people with disabilities and the workforce development agencies and organizations that support job seekers with disabilities. NOD’s work in New Jersey aimed to build partnerships between select businesses and community rehabilitation agencies and their providers.

MIG funding allowed NOD to build linkages with several businesses and to assist rehabilitation programs to better understand the needs of business by becoming a “partner” for business rather than a “single point of contact.” To accomplish this, NOD conducted many fact-finding meetings with the New Jersey Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, local community rehabilitation providers, colleges and universities, and workforce agencies to explain the Bridges to Business model that is successful in other localities. NOD made over 25 presentations and webcast training activities to providers, colleges, and other associations to raise the understanding of the Bridges to Business model.

NOD used MIG funds to host three different summits. Over 150 individuals, including representatives from the business community and state and local rehabilitation and workforce representatives, attended these events. These summits highlighted the Bridges to Business model and explored ideas to create better partnerships between businesses, state/local rehabilitation programs, and institutions of higher education in New Jersey:

- Bridges to Business with NOD on June 7, 2011 addressed the “disconnect” between the demand and supply in recruiting and hiring people with disabilities.
- Business and Postsecondary Education Summit on Disability Employment was a program co-hosted by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and NOD on November 4, 2011; the program addressed jobs in four major industry sectors and the necessity of communication between college career and disability offices.
- Planning for Change: What You Need to Know About Federal Contracts and Compliance on Tuesday, November 27, 2012 included staff from the Office of Federal Compliance Control Programs and corporate leaders who presented and discussed the proposed 503 regulations from the Office of Federal Compliance Control Programs with a discussion facilitated by NOD.

NOD established relationships with several large companies in New Jersey, including Sodexo, ADP, Aetna, St. Barnabas Health Systems, and Toys R Us. NOD provided training to over 50 business managers, recruiters, and leaders at Toys R Us in New Jersey. Over 25 Sodexo managers received training along with staff at ADP and Aetna. NOD created a database to assist the providers and their business partners to track the new hires, productivity, accommodations, and salary. Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) is the community services partner for Sodexo and will continue the partnership post-MIG. NOD partnered with several other local providers to assist with developing a pipeline of candidates with disabilities for businesses. These relationships with companies, government entities, and service providers will continue after DiscoverAbility NJ ends.

Under a new initiative, NOD worked closely with Toys R US and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development to assist Toys R Us with an ongoing disability hiring initiative. Toys R Us expressed interest in hiring 10 individuals with disabilities and indicated a desire to hire more. However, due to difficulty identifying candidates, only two individuals were hired. Since Toys R Us is a NOD business partner, NOD will continue its efforts post-MIG to help with a candidate pipeline and hiring initiative in New Jersey.

In its outreach efforts, NOD identified a critical issue in recruiting students with disabilities and engaged over 22 university career and disability offices to discuss how to work more closely to meet the needs of the businesses, especially those seeking higher-level skill sets. NOD worked with Sodexo to create a pilot process for recruiting students with disabilities and hopes to expand that in several markets, including New Jersey. This activity will continue since Sodexo is a key partner and JVS will continue work with the local sites in New Jersey.

Three products that reflect the Bridges to Business work in New Jersey were created by NOD and posted on the NOD Web site as well as distributed to its CEO Council:

- http://nod.org/assets/downloads/identify_select_community_rehab_vendor.pdf

- http://nod.org/assets/downloads/best_practices_recruiting.pdf
- http://www.nod.org/assets/downloads/Bridges_to_Business_NJ_DiscoverAbility_Project.pdf

Community Outreach/Benefits Planning Assistance

Improve Web site and Materials Accessibility

DiscoverAbility NJ partnered with TecAccess, a nationally recognized firm, to evaluate New Jersey state hiring Web sites from an accessibility standpoint and to make recommendations for improvement. DiscoverAbility NJ also worked to increase the number of people with disabilities featured in employment-related materials. DiscoverAbility NJ contracted with TecAccess and worked with its technical consultants who developed an action plan for state Web sites and training sessions for state Web site administrators who have received and implemented recommendations for Section 508 (Subpart B) compliance for the following:

- <http://www.njnextstop.org/njnextsop/index.shtml>
- <http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/wnipn/findjob/onestop/services.html>
- http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/wnjpin/snj/in_index.htm
- <http://www.state.nju.us/>

Social Media Under DiscoverAbility NJ

In 2011, there was much interest amongst stakeholders in using social media to engage with and educate the public about disability and employment-related issues. To support this effort, a DiscoverAbility NJ blog (www.discoverabilitynj.org), a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a LinkedIn group, and an e-mail newsletter were created. These media were used to post links to articles related to disability employment and to share webinars, reports, and other information developed through the DiscoverAbility NJ project.

While initially the goal was to use social media to engage with and educate the public, it became clear as work progressed that the real target audience for these tools was staff at the various disability employment service provider agencies in New Jersey. In part, this was because the NJBLN/Disabilities At Work project had started its own Facebook group that was engaging people with disabilities and it was not desirable to duplicate work that was already being done effectively. It was also found that staff needed both more and better information about 21st century job search and job development, as well as experience in using technology. It was determined that educating staff would be more sustainable, as they could then use these tools in their ongoing efforts to engage with the public and with people with disabilities and their families after the MIG had ended. In making this shift to more effectively serve staff through online tools, an e-mail-based Google group, the Peer Learning and Leadership Network (<https://groups.google.com/forum/?pli=1#!forum/discoverabilitynjpln>) was started because many staff reported that social media was blocked at their work sites and that e-mail was easiest for them to access.

In the latter half of 2011 and throughout 2012, the Google group and the DiscoverAbility blog became the two major online tools used to provide information and resources to staff. The blog served as the project Web site, where all webinars, reports, etc. were posted. The Google group was used to post and share links to upcoming events and activities in the state, as well as links to articles, resources, and other materials on job development, job search, and the employment of people with disabilities. At the end of the MIG project, 117 people were on the listserv and 682 topics had been posted.

The greatest challenge in using social media and online tools with staff was lack of access. One of the reasons the email-based Google group was developed was because staff began reporting that social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, and Twitter were blocked at their work sites, despite the fact that all of these tools are used for modern job search. In addition, once the Google group became the primary communication vehicle, it was discovered that many staff do not have work e-mail addresses and/or access to computers at work. This is particularly true for job coaches. It was also found that it was difficult to get people to sign up for the e-mail group. Although promoted at every event, people did not follow through to sign up when they returned to their offices.

Despite these challenges, it became apparent over time, that those who were members of the DiscoverAbility NJ group began to use it as a forum for sharing information and asking questions. It is anticipated that the Peer Learning and Leadership Network will continue to be somewhat active following the end of the MIG, although less so without the presence of an active facilitator for the group.

Staff Development Webinars

Throughout 2011 and 2012, monthly webinars were held on a variety of topics related to the employment of people with disabilities. These webinars focused on topics related to job search (such as using LinkedIn, building a better résumé, disability disclosure, and interviewing skills) as well as to broader disability employment-related topics, such as entrepreneurship and transportation issues.

All webinars were recorded and posted to the DiscoverAbility Web site, along with follow-up links and transcripts of the sessions.

The full list of webinars is below:

Intro to DiscoverAbility Peer Learning and Leadership Network – Community of Practice
January 20, 2011

Using Labor Market Information to Serve People with Disabilities
February 15, 2011

Introduction to Employment Networks
February 23, 2011

Cleaning Up Your Digital Dirt

March 3, 2011

Employer Engagement Strategies

March 10, 2011

Using Social Media in the Job Search

April 7, 2011

Using LinkedIn for Branding

April 21, 2011

Job Leads

May 12, 2011

Résumé

June 22, 2011

Disclosure

July 20, 2011

Cover Letters, Thank You Notes

August 10, 2011

Interviewing

September 8, 2011

Employment Service Provider Attitudes Toward Providers

November 15, 2011

DB101

November 16, 2011

Job Development Practices: Are They What Employers Want?

November 19, 2011

Social Entrepreneurship

December 15, 2011

Microenterprises

January 24, 2012

Asset-Based Coaching

March 12, 2012

Talent Network – Health Care

April 16, 2012

Assistive Technology

June 12, 2012

Transportation 101

July 17, 2012

New Jersey Labor Market Information: What's Hot and What's Not?

August 15, 2012

Relationship of Job Development Types, Training, and Job Placement Success

November 20, 2012

Community Provider Outreach Connecting Coffees

During 2011, more technologically enhanced strategies to support connections between disability employment service provider staff and agencies were sought, as so many staff had reported that it was impossible to meet in person. However, as the final year of the MIG started, the uptake on social media and online tools was not as vibrant as expected. As a result, focus shifted to adding face-to-face informal events that would allow staff from different agencies to meet and network. It was believed that they would then be more likely to connect online once they'd met in person. It was also hoped that as the MIG was winding down, staff would be encouraged to keep these networking events going on their own, without a facilitator to organize them.

To test this approach, a series of Connecting Coffees were developed and provided free, one-hour networking/professional development opportunities for disability employment service providers, including job coaches, job developers, Disability Program Navigators, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, One-Stop Career Center staff, etc. Each event included structured networking/sharing activities and a professional development topic or activity related to supporting the employment of people with disabilities.

Connecting Coffees were set up for each region of the state (North, Central, South) and members of the Peer Learning and Leadership Network were consulted to identify locations that would be convenient to staff. The Connecting Coffees were advertised through the Peer Learning and Leadership Network Google group, on the DiscoverAbility blog, and to One-Stop staff through the Garden State Employment and Training Association (GSETA) blog.

While staff seemed enthusiastic about the sessions and those who attended said they were extremely valuable, it became a struggle to get more than two to three people to attend. As the months wore on, several events were canceled for lack of participation. When staff were questioned about why they were not participating, they indicated that they didn't have time for networking and/or their agencies were not paid for the activity, so they were not allowed to participate. As a result, the Connecting Coffees were suspended in October 2012.

The full list of Connecting Coffees is listed below:

- May 1, 2012 - Voorhees, NJ (Southern Region)
- May 24, 2012 - Raritan, NJ (Central Region)
- May 24, 2012 - Cherry Hill, NJ (Southern Region)
- May 30, 2012 - West Orange, NJ (Northern Region)
- June 5, 2012 - Princeton, NJ (Central Region)
- June 5, 2012 - Morristown, NJ (Northern Region)
- June 6, 2012 - Cherry Hill, NJ (Southern Region)
- July 10, 2012 - Bridgewater (Central Region)
- July 10, 2012 - Cherry Hill (Southern Region)
- July 18, 2012 - West Orange (Northern Region)
- July 24, 2012 - Voorhees (Southern Region)
- August 2, 2012 - Cherry Hill (Southern Region)
- August 14, 2012 - Bridgewater (Central Region)
- August 21, 2012 - West Orange (Northern Region)
- August 29, 2012 - Mays Landing (Southern Region)
- September 21, 2012 - Cherry Hill (Southern Region)
- September 25, 2012 - West Orange (Northern Region)
- September 25, 2012 - Bridgewater (Central Region)

World Café

In 2012, as part of the experimentation of sparking more conversations about disability employment issues, it was decided to explore using the World Café process with key stakeholder groups. The World Café is a structured conversational process used by business, nonprofit, and community groups to explore key questions and generate action. It has been used successfully in a variety of settings and it was known that the national APSE group had been using the technique at conferences and other venues.

An initial Café was held on June 7, 2012 through the State Employment and Training Commission's (SETC) Disabilities Issues Committee, which has served as the leadership group for DiscoverAbility. This Café was designed to identify key questions about the state's newly implemented Employment First policy and its implementation. The plan was to use this as a "kick-off" to sponsor additional World Café events in other venues, such as through local

Workforce Investment Board areas and with groups of disability employment service providers, educators, people with disabilities and families, etc.

This initial event provided a great deal of information and ideas for future potential Cafés that were brought back to the Disabilities Issues Committee for further discussion. However, the Disabilities Issues Committee decided not to pursue any further Cafés.

One more World Café event was facilitated in October through the Greater Raritan Workforce Investment Board, upon request of its local staff.

Capacity Building with Disability Employment Service Providers, Workforce Investment Boards, and One-Stop Career Centers

A primary activity of the MIG was to build the capacity of community service providers and the One-Stop Career Center system in the state to better serve the employment needs of people with disabilities. The previously mentioned webinar series was a major part of this capacity-building effort. MIG staff and the disability social media consultant also worked closely with the SETC's Disabilities Issues Committee to address key issues at their meetings, such as Employment First and microenterprise.

A number of face-to-face training and capacity-building events were held, many co-sponsored by local and state disability employment service provider groups. These included:

Learning at Work

November 15, 2010

Becoming an Employment Network at NJDHS (Trenton)

April 15, 2011

Southern Region DBTAC Training on Hidden Disabilities and ADA

May 10, 2011

Northern Region DBTAC Training on Hidden Disabilities and the ADA

May 17, 2011

Bridges to Business with the National Organization on Disability

June 7, 2011

Central DBTAC Training on Hidden Disabilities and the ADA

June 23, 2011

Social Media Training - Verona Community Center

September 6, 2011

Social Media Training - Katz Jewish Community Center

September 20, 2011

Social Media Training - Greater Raritan One-Stop
September 21, 2011

Employment First with the Alliance for Full Participation and the Boggs Center
October 28, 2011

Business and Postsecondary Education Summit on Disability Employment - Heldrich Center and the National Organization on Disability
November 4, 2011

Supporting Our Veterans, Celebrating Our Female Veterans: U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs with Patricia Shiu, National Director
July 31, 2012

Social Media and Job Search Workshop for ARC of New Jersey
February 7, 2012

Social Media and Job Search Workshop for New Jersey Rehabilitation Association
June 1, 2012

DiscoverAbility NJ/New Jersey Talent Network Panel
Tuesday, September 11, 2012

Social Media and Job Search Workshop for Mental Health Association of New Jersey
October 26, 2012

Office of Federal Compliance Control Programs and National Organization on Disability - On Proposed Regulations
Tuesday, November 20, 2012

Asset-based Coaching and Case Management Workshop for New Jersey Rehabilitation Association
November 30, 2012

Marketing and Training on Disability Benefits 101 (DB101)

The New Jersey MIG has allowed for a multi-year, sustainable investment in the deployment and use of state-centric, online decision support tools for New Jersey job seekers with disabilities. New Jersey's DB101 has emerged as a powerful, interactive, Internet-based tool designed to support New Jersey-based job seekers with disabilities. These users and the people who work with them can carefully plan for the transition to work through enhanced knowledge about health care coverage and other public benefits.

DiscoverAbility NJ supported these efforts and worked to increase knowledge and use of the customized disability benefits Web site, www.nj.db101.org. NJ DB101 maintained services are provided by the World Institute on Disability (WID), Berkeley, CA, www.wid.org.

The list of benefit programs covered on the NJ DB101 Benefits and Work Calculator is found directly below. Each one of these programs can interact with the employment planning of a New Jersey resident using one or more of these benefit systems:

- [SSI](#)
- [SSDI](#)
- [CDB](#)
- [Section 8 HUD Earned Income Disregard](#)
- [Medicaid](#)
- [Medicaid's New Jersey WorkAbility program](#)
- [Medicare](#)
- [New Jersey SNAP](#)
- [Temporary Disability Insurance \(TDI\)](#)
- [Employer-sponsored health coverage](#)
- [Earned Income Tax Credit \(EITC\)](#)

NJ DB101 Highlights:

- DiscoverAbility NJ upgraded the New Jersey DB101 Benefits and Work Calculator in 2012 to the latest 5.0 version deployed in the other five DB101 states (Arizona, California, Missouri, Mississippi, and Minnesota). New Jersey residents now enjoy the latest DB101 technology and content advances that have been worked on, tested, and improved on in recent years.
- DiscoverAbility funded NJ DB101 to be translated in 2012 into Spanish for New Jersey residents who are bilingual or use English as a second language. Given the strong Hispanic population groups in New Jersey, DiscoverAbility NJ placed a priority on adding this service.
- New Jersey managed a consortium of DB101 in other states that included production of a timely, process evaluation of its effectiveness with targeted users. As a result, on November 16, 2012, JBS International Inc., an independent, woman-owned, private evaluation firm, published its multi-state process evaluation of DB101 services entitled *Evaluation of Disability Benefits 101 Information Services*. The WID team that produces DB101 services provided Web site and content technical assistance to evaluation period activities, including launching online surveys and production of user data reports.
- DiscoverAbility NJ funded and received monthly WID reports on NJ DB101 quality assurance and maintenance activities that are needed to ensure that the content and the online technology remains current, fresh, accurate, accessible, operational, and readable throughout the month. The reported maintenance services and activities included specific tasks completed each month in the following categories:
 - Statewide features including content management system improvements to enhance content across DB101 state Web sites;
 - Parameters (numerical data that changes and is updated);

- Calculator functionality, quality assurance testing, text, and current accuracy in English and Spanish;
 - Glossary term updates and additions;
 - Field report entries, analysis, triage, responses and action taken by the WID DB101 Core Team;
 - Publication events to the general public after maintenance tasks are completed; and
 - Maintaining and improving DB101 state-specific Google Analytics, as to NJ DB101 user volume, sources, and navigational patterns once on the NJ DB101 website.
- DiscoverAbility NJ received specific, monthly NJ DB101 Google Analytics data reports customized to allow review of user use patterns and concentrations of use across the state of New Jersey.
 - NJ DB101 benefits content is complex, and supports serious decision making during transition periods of its end users. As treated in the evaluation report cited above, DB101 online tools and services are popular, and their regular use linked to a proportional investment in outreach and training activities. The WID DB101 Core Team has developed a sophisticated, and as critical, a cost-effective annual regimen of NJ DB101 maintenance services. DiscoverAbility NJ has participated in end-of-project discussions to support securing resources for the modest annual maintenance costs needed to fund NJ DB101 maintenance services.

Training and Technical Assistance to Improve Service Provider Capacity

Capacity Building of Frontline Service Provider Staff and Practitioners

DiscoverAbility NJ worked with training providers in New Jersey to coordinate efforts, eliminate overlap of training offerings, and identify and fill gaps in training for service providers and frontline workforce professional staff.

The Leadership Academy

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services provided grant funds to states to develop Medicaid infrastructure to support the competitive employment of people with disabilities by facilitating targeted improvements to the state's Medicaid program and/or developing a comprehensive employment infrastructure that coordinates disparate state service delivery systems. DiscoverAbility NJ, the State of New Jersey's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant funded program, identified a need for a "Leadership Academy" for rising professionals who work in the field of disability employment.

The Leadership Academy was created in the fall of 2011 through the combined efforts of Rutgers University's John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the Rutgers School of Social Work. The purpose of the Leadership Academy was to provide specialized

training designed to meet the specific needs of disability employment professionals in New Jersey.

The initial training project, completed in December 2011, provided emerging and mid-level leaders in the disability employment field with a learning experience that led to a *Leadership Qualities in Disability Employment Certificate*. The need to build the leadership skills of mid-level and emerging disability employment leaders was seen as a strategic need for succession planning in disability employment field in New Jersey. The program was widely marketed and participants were selected through a competitive application process. A group of disability employment professionals from varied work settings enrolled in the training series that provided a hybrid model of training combining three in-class sessions and seven live online webinars.

Participants learned how to begin application of leadership skills to benefit their career, their organization, and the job seekers they serve. By empowering leaders in the earlier stages of their career, the goal was to improve the functioning of disability employment organizations, and, thus, to improve job seeker outcomes. A long-term goal of the Leadership Academy was to ultimately be a catalyst in the preparation of these new leaders to successfully assume senior leadership positions in the future.

The Leadership Academy developed and conducted a second certificate program in 2012, specifically designed to enhance the skills of job developers and employment specialists. The program was called the *Professional Skills in Job Development Certificate Program* and provided advanced training for professionals who assist individuals with disabilities to develop and obtain employment. The certificate covered the essential skills required to effectively work with clients and employers in generating high-quality and enduring job connections for persons with disabilities. The certificate provided six days of in-class training covering diverse topics *specific* to the needs of job development professionals. Participants were selected via a competitive application process resulting in a cohort of professionals from varied work settings in nonprofit, government, and educational organizations.

Both training series were well received by the participants with strong evaluation feedback, strong attendance, and active participation in all the workshops. The final components of the series included an evaluation of the impact of the training on the work and careers of the *Leadership Qualities in Disability Employment Certificate* training cohort participants. The second cohort, in the *Professional Skills in Job Development Certificate Program*, was evaluated to assess knowledge acquisition received from the training. A final report on the evaluation findings and a summary report examining both certificate programs offered through the Leadership Academy were completed.

Resources and Strategies for Enhancing Transportation for New Jersey's Disabled Population

With the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers University, DiscoverAbility NJ collaborated to examine how to expand the resources available to improve and enhance community transportation services for people with disabilities in New Jersey. Investigating this issue was a key recommendation included in the five-year plan VTC prepared for the New Jersey

Division of Disability Services in 2005, entitled *Meeting the Employment Transportation Needs of People with Disabilities in New Jersey*. The plan's recommendations were intended to increase employment opportunities for New Jersey's population with disabilities by addressing work-related transportation barriers.

Getting New Jerseyans with Disabilities to Work: Transportation Initiatives

VTC undertook two research studies on behalf of DiscoverAbility NJ.

1. Resources and Strategies for Enhancing Transportation for New Jersey's Population with Disability Seeking Employment

The focus of this study was to examine how to expand the resources available to improve and enhance community transportation services for people with disabilities in New Jersey. Investigating this issue was a key recommendation included in the five-year plan VTC prepared for the NJ Division of Disability Services in 2005. Significant project activities and final deliverables were as follows:

- Performed research to better understand and document New Jersey county paratransit providers in terms of their history, services, and current use of various federal, state, local, and NGO funding sources.
- Investigated federal, state, and other transportation-related funding programs for potential application in New Jersey by community transportation providers.
- Conducted key informant interview sessions with 35 stakeholders representing 26 organizations. These interview sessions served to document the impacts the funding crisis has had on New Jersey's county providers and their ability to serve persons with disability seeking employment transportation and other transportation disadvantaged persons. Strategies being pursued to combat economic challenges to maintain and enhance services were also discussed.
- Developed and implemented a nationwide community transportation provider online survey. Over 180 providers responded, sharing feedback on how they are coping with reduced funding. Several best practice organizations were identified through the survey effort.
- Convened two consumer focus groups with a total of 23 persons with disabilities who were employed or actively seeking employment to better understand their transportation needs and usage of county paratransit services.
- Shared information on the study progress and key findings with a variety of stakeholders in the disability and transportation community including the national MIG transportation workgroup, convened by the Center for Workers with Disabilities, the NJ Transit ADA Task Force, the New Jersey Council on Special Transportation, and project-related presentations were given at both the 2011 and 2012 TransAction conference convened in Atlantic City for New Jersey's transportation community.
- There are two final product deliverables. The principal deliverable is a comprehensive final report entitled *A Strategy for Getting People with Disabilities to Work: Supporting*

New Jersey Community Transportation. The report is presented in seven chapters that focus on an introduction to the study's purpose; an overview of the New Jersey county paratransit providers in terms of their history and services; a discussion of county paratransit provider current usage of various federal, state, local, and NGO funding sources; a summary of the key informant interview sessions; a discussion of the nationwide community transportation provider survey; a summary of key findings from the consumer focus groups convened; and a series of recommendations to provide guidance to New Jersey's community paratransit providers in moving forward to address their economic crisis so they can increase access to employment opportunities for New Jersey's population with disabilities.

- The other key project deliverable is a paper entitled *Community Paratransit and the Economic Recession: Challenges & Opportunities*. This paper was submitted to the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies and has been accepted for presentation at their January 2013 annual meeting in Washington, D.C. and for possible publication in their research journal, the *Transportation Research Record*. The paper presents highlights from the national survey effort that focus on the innovative strategies pursued and the associated challenges encountered by paratransit providers in their quest to maintain and enhance services for the transportation disadvantaged community.

2. Getting New Jerseyans with Disabilities to Work: A Train-the-Trainer Initiative

The focus of this study has been to work with the travel training organization, NJTIP Inc., to develop and implement a transportation familiarization and information program targeted specifically to employment counselors/job coaches at select New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services field offices. The program developed is entitled Connect to Transit. With continuing support from DiscoverAbility NJ, the pilot of the Connect to Transit program was expanded and offered to employment counselors/job coaches at select nonprofit organizations in the state.

The main intent of Connect to Transit was to inform and familiarize participating employment counselors/job coaches with the universe of transportation options and resources potentially available to clients seeking work and how to access and plan those services. Emphasis was given to promoting awareness and familiarity for public transportation services. Participants were also given a hands-on bus demonstration and an overview of how travel training benefits persons with disability seeking to learn independent travel skills. Additionally, Connect to Transit alerted participants to many of the issues and obstacles their clients face when using public transportation to access employment. Significant project activities and final deliverables were as follows:

- Designed and implemented a four-hour pilot transportation familiarization program entitled Connect to Transit. The program includes a curriculum, resource appendix customized by geographic locale, and accompanying PowerPoint presentation.
- Convened Connect to Transit sessions at four New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services field offices, with staff members from three additional offices participating. In addition, the program was expanded to four nonprofit organizations

focused on facilitating employment of persons with disabilities. In total, approximately 100 persons received Connect to Transit instruction.

- Conducted a series of pre-Connect to Transit session informant interviews with managers of participating organizations to acquire a better understanding of the transportation issues facing their clients searching for employment.
- Designed, implemented, and analyzed pre- and post-Connect to Transit participation surveys, which were completed by more than 90 participants.
- Advised a variety of stakeholders in the disability and transportation community on the study progress and key findings. Groups informed include the national MIG transportation workgroup, convened by the Center for Workers with Disabilities; the New Jersey ADA Task Force, and the New Jersey Council on Special Transportation.
- Produced the principal study deliverable — the Connect to Transit curriculum, resource appendix and accompanying PowerPoint presentation. Each of these documents is an appendix to the study final report described below.
- Prepared the study final report, entitled *Connecting to Jobs by Connecting to Transit*. The report is presented in five chapters that focus on an introduction to the study’s purpose, an overview of the Connect to Transit program elements, a summary of participant organization interview findings, an analysis of the participant pre- and post-surveys, and a concluding program sustainability plan.

3. Other VTC NJ DiscoverAbility-related Tasks

The VTC study team also performed the following tasks for the DiscoverAbility NJ program in addition to those directly related to the Center’s scope of services:

- Participated in a webinar on July 20, 2011 through the New Jersey DiscoverAbility series on the topic of disability disclosure in the job search process.
- Completed a Heldrich Center/Kessler Foundation issue brief on a VTC survey effort that sought to document the transportation issues being experienced by persons with disability in the state actively seeking employment. The issue brief was published in September 2012.
- Presented a webinar on October 18, 2011 through the DiscoverAbility NJ series on findings of the survey effort described immediately above.
- Presented a webinar on July 17, 2012 entitled, “Transportation 101.”

Research/Other

Research on Job Developer Attitudes, Beliefs, and Effectiveness

DiscoverAbility NJ partnered with TransCen, Inc. to explore employment service provider characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs toward employers and the employment process in order to determine how these beliefs and values contribute to successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

TransCen conducted a series of related studies to explore employment service provider characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs toward employers and the employment process in order to determine how these beliefs and values contribute to successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. First, TransCen developed and piloted the Employment Provider Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (EPABS). This study produced initially promising results, as it strengthened the scale by improving its reliability and assessing its validity. It also identified three types of job developers: Relationship Builders, Supply Siders, and Job Brokers. These types represent preferred approaches to the job development process. The intention was that such a psychometrically sound self-report tool would enable employment service providers to strengthen the job development and placement skills of their staff by identifying and building on personal approaches to job development.

The second study examined in more detail the practices that accompany those attitudes and beliefs and then compared them with preferred hiring strategies of employers and their expectations of disability employment service providers. The final study, sought to confirm through factor analysis the latent job development “types” identified in the first phase of the EPABS development. It is also explored the relationship between the three job development types derived from the scale and other job placement indicators, such as: a) correlation with Job Development and Placement Efficacy Scale (Fabian, 2004), b) respondents' background and training in job development/placement; and c) association between types and job placement success rates.

The products of each study have included a technical report on the results of the analyses as well as webinars with practitioners and key leaders about the policy and practice implications of the studies, particularly the use of standard training approaches for improving outcomes achieved by job seekers with disabilities assisted or represented by job development professionals.

Postsecondary Improved Access and Career Awareness

DiscoverAbility NJ worked to implement a collaborative model for providing improved career/disability services using New Jersey colleges and universities as pilots to improve university and job placement services and outcomes for students, including developing a dedicated internship program between Rutgers University students with disabilities and state government agencies.

- An internship program for Rutgers students with disabilities was overseen during the fall of 2011 by the Division on Disabilities at the New Jersey Department of Human Services.
- An internship program for Rutgers students with disabilities for the fall of 2012 was planned with the Division of Developmental Disabilities at the New Jersey Department of Human Services, but there was insufficient student interest.
- This internship program continues to have the interest of staff at the Office of Disability Services at Rutgers.

“College Students with Disabilities: What Factors Influence Successful Degree Completion? A Case Study”

This study was designed to explore what was working and why, both from the student’s and the college professional staff’s points of view, regarding successful college completion for students with disabilities. The intent of this preliminary research was to share a perspective on the factors that may contribute to students with disabilities’ college completion and to illuminate areas that warrant further research and study. Paula Barber, the project manager for DiscoverAbility NJ at the Heldrich Center was principal investigator.

Twenty students from Burlington County College, Mercer County Community College, Raritan Valley Community College, New Jersey City University, and Rutgers University were interviewed by Paula Barber, who is a licensed clinical social worker. For the study, college disability services professional staff identified eligible students who completed their degrees between May 2008 and May 2012 or were about to do so. The participants’ self-described disabilities included a wide range of physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities, as well as dual diagnoses. Representatives from the colleges’ disability services office participated in a roundtable discussion about the promising practices and challenges facing students with disabilities on college campuses.

Key findings included:

- Although the braiding and blending of efforts and funds did occur in the participant study sample, it happened much less frequently than expected and was attributed far less importance than other factors by both the students and the key support professionals at the colleges.
- The study participants had observable personal qualities (i.e., self-awareness, perseverance, focus, and interpersonal skills) that allowed them to pursue, develop, and maintain positive, long-term relationships with mentors, either on campus or within their natural social circle (such as family, friends, and professionals).
- Although learning about accommodations on campus was not a given or smooth process, access to accommodations was not a major issue for the successful completers.
- The participating colleges were significantly challenged in accessing information on students with disabilities (SWDs).
- Offices of Disability/Special Services are often underfunded, high-volume operations.
- SWDs and staff identified faculty training on their role in providing accommodations and in understanding how disabilities affect learning in the college classroom as in need of additional support and resources.

Recommendations included:

- Conduct more in-depth research to assess the critical success factors for SWDs with the goal of developing a core of knowledge about critical success factors for SWDs’ college completion that identifies which interventions can assist SWDs, including which factors are

more associated with the outcomes of successful SWD completers versus their less successful counterparts (non-completers).

- Conduct research on effective interventions by colleges that support critical success factors for SWDs with the goal of developing a body of knowledge that identifies effective interventions that support the development of critical success factors for SWDs, including the impact of active outreach combined with early identification of students in academic distress.
- Conduct research on the impact of college faculty and staff development on disability as a diversity issue with the goal of encouraging college efforts to include disabilities as part of faculty/staff diversity training. Understanding which college disability faculty/staff development efforts are most impactful could be critical to changing the climate on college campuses in a way that would support all members of the campus community in achieving their maximum potential.
- Conduct research that explores promising practices that assist college SWDs' transition to employment with the goal of assisting in the transition of SWDs from college to employment by examining closely the different approaches colleges are using to assist SWDs in their transition to employment.

This study appeared as a joint research report of the Heldrich Center and the Kessler Foundation. Interest in this publication also included:

- Rutgers University press release, October 2012
- *Rutgers Today* lead story, October 2012
- *Rutgers Daily Targum*, October 2012
- *Disability Scoop*, October 2012
- Interviews: *Diverse Issues in Higher Ed*, October 2012 and with Mardet Lewis, news producer of KSCN-FM News Radio in Northridge, California.
- Presented at Innovations 2012, NJ AHEAD December 2012, and to be presented June 2013 at the Postsecondary Disability Training Institute (www.pti.uconn.edu), which will be held from June 4-7, 2013 at the Boston Park Plaza.

Policy Recommendations

- During the final year of the DiscoverAbility NJ project, New Jersey became an Employment First state and joined the national State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). Nonprofit community service providers assist people with disabilities with a wide range of needs, including finding employment, and comprise a large part of the workforce in New Jersey that assists people with disabilities in finding employment. It would be productive if they were included more widely in statewide planning efforts for employing people with disabilities. An apt starting point would be for New Jersey to publically review SELN's recommendations for the state. It is important to include the perspectives and needs of community service providers into plans for implementing Employment First in New Jersey.
- The implementation of the federal Office of Corporate Compliance Program's (OFCCP) proposed 503 regulations for federal contractors and disability employment needs to be monitored closely by New Jersey. This forthcoming regulation will affect many companies in New Jersey and the state should seek ways to assist in its implementation that will encourage increased employment rates for people with disabilities as well as company productivity.

- The community service providers that have the ability to supply qualified candidates with disabilities need encouragement and resources to cooperate with each other and to ensure that a pipeline of candidates with disabilities is reaching employers wishing to hire qualified workers with disabilities. The state rehabilitation system of funding of community providers needs to create policies that would allow some flexibility in funding service providers that would allow for new initiatives to include building the capacity of frontline service providers and developing emerging leaders in disability employment in both the public and private sectors.
- It was the hope at the start of the DiscoverAbility NJ project that public and private agencies would leave their silos and work cooperatively on disability employment issues. Unfortunately, this did not happen to the extent that was necessary to create lasting and permanent change. Changes in public policy affecting disability employment in New Jersey that would support the cooperation of very diverse constituencies require strong and sustained executive level support at the highest levels. It is hoped that Governor Christie's signing of the Employment First proclamation in New Jersey will translate into overdue focus and energy expended on the employment issues challenging people with disabilities in New Jersey.

References:

Wewiorski, N., & Fabian, E. (2004). Association between demographic and diagnostic factors and employment outcomes for people with psychiatric disabilities: A synthesis of recent research. *Mental Health Services Research*, 6, 9-26.

For More Information about DiscoverAbility NJ:

Visit the DiscoverAbility NJ Web site:

- <http://www.discoverabilitynj.org>.

Read the full DiscoverAbility NJ strategic plan ~ “DiscoverAbility NJ: New Jersey’s Strategic Plan to Create a Comprehensive Employment System for People with Disabilities,” February 15, 2008 located at:

- http://www.discoverabilitynj.org/DiscoverAbility_Plan_Final.pdf

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