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Pathways to Success, 2010

*The stories of real people
and employment*

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Table of Contents

A.	Introduction, History and Methodology	1
	Background: Connect-Ability	1
	2008: The birth of the <i>Pathways</i> project	2
	Interview tools and process	3
	2009: <i>Pathways</i> in year 2	3
	2010: <i>Pathways</i> in year 3	4
	Analysis	4
B.	Themes	4
	Employment related issues	5
	External sources providing help	6
	Barriers	8
	Attitudes	10
C.	Pathways to Success	10
D.	Conclusions and Direction for Further Research	12
	References	14
	Appendix A	15
	Appendix B	17

A. Introduction, History and Methodology

This report is the third in a series of reports that chronicle the journeys of a small number of people with disabilities in Connecticut as they seek to improve their employment situations. This four-year qualitative research study, known as “Pathways to Employment,” is a project of Connect-Ability, Connecticut’s technical assistance center designed to bring together employers and people with disabilities by removing barriers to employment.

1. Background: Connect-Ability

Funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, now known as “Connect-Ability,” was awarded to the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) in 2006. The grant is designed to enhance and support competitive employment for people with disabilities. The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Needs Assessment Final Report, published by the University of Connecticut Health Center, Center on Aging, describes the purpose of the grant:

The grant is intended to facilitate enhancements to the state Medicaid program and services, to promote linkages between Medicaid and other employment-related service agencies and to develop a comprehensive system of employment supports for people with disabilities (Robison, Gruman, Porter, Kellett & Reed, 2006, p. i).

Connect-Ability included, as one of its first components, a needs assessment survey sent out to people with disabilities throughout the state of Connecticut. Respondents included Connecticut citizens who were participating in any of the Medicaid waiver programs designated for people with disabilities, the Medicaid Buy-In program, and some individuals who were participating in the Connecticut Benefit Offset Demonstration project.¹ The survey included both quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions about their experiences, expectations and needs regarding work and personal assistance. In addition, separate surveys were sent to employers throughout the state to obtain information regarding their attitudes and practices in relation to hiring people with disabilities.

The results of the Connecticut citizen survey, in addition to providing information about living situation, ratings of overall health, transportation and neighborhoods, yielded a sequence of challenges or barriers to working as expressed in an open-ended question. The most frequently mentioned barriers or challenges faced by workers included physical health problems or physical disability; transportation; lack of personal assistance either at work or at home; intellectual or cognitive disability; emotional difficulties or mental illness; work place accommodations; training or education; assistance to find a job; lack of jobs with benefits or good pay; concerns about loss of benefits; and older age (Robison, et al., 2006).

In addition to the survey, more complex, qualitative information was derived from focus group and key informant interviews. Representing the voices of 320 stakeholders, including people with disabilities, family members, service providers, state agencies, and employers, these in-depth interviews revealed several themes. One of the predominant themes was the fact that many Connecticut residents with disabilities are still struggling to gain employment. Another

¹The Benefit Offset Demonstration Project was a pilot program sponsored by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that afforded people who were receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) the opportunity to earn more than the maximum amount usually allowed for those receiving SSDI without losing all of their cash benefits.

theme was the perception that people with disabilities are still experiencing discrimination in many employment practices.

2. 2008: The Birth of the *Pathways* Project

Results of the surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews provided significant information about the employment barriers and challenges faced by people with disabilities. The Connect-Ability team sought to enhance that information with more in-depth insight into the journeys of individuals, over time, in their struggles to find meaningful, competitive employment. The *Pathways to Success* project was initiated in early 2008 to follow a group of individuals with disabilities through periodic in-person interviews in which they share their employment stories, including their aspirations, successes and failures. This qualitative research was designed as a way of describing the personal experiences of people with disabilities in their pursuit of employment.

Initial interview participants for the *Pathways* project were recruited from the pool of callers to Connect-Ability's toll-free assistance number, which was set up to provide a common point of information for both employers and job seekers. Several hundred calls were made to the toll-free number during 2007 and 2008 as a result of Connect-Ability's wide-ranging public information campaign. The early calls came overwhelmingly from people with disabilities seeking competitive employment.

One question asked of those who had called the Connect-Ability toll-free number was designed to recruit individual callers who might be willing to participate in the *Pathways* study. During 2008, the first year of the *Pathways* study, nineteen men and women agreed to participate in an initial interview and follow-up interviews at regular six-month intervals. Since participants were chosen on the basis of their willingness to participate, the sample is not representative of those who called in; neither is it representative of people with disabilities who have a desire to work. The majority of first-year respondents were men (n=15) and the respondents represented a wide variety of disabilities including back injuries, stroke, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairments, cognitive impairments, and mental illness. In two cases, a proxy related to that person answered the questions. In another case, both the participant and his mother contributed to the interview. The ages of the 2008 group ranged from 21 to 61. Demographic information for the nineteen original interviewees is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information on the original participants

Type of disability	N (%)	Age	N (%)	Working status	N (%)	Gender	N (%)
Physical	14 (74)	21-30	3 (16)	Full time	2 (11)	Male	15 (79)
Mental	1 (5)	31-40	4 (21)	Part time	1 (5)	Female	4 (21)
Cognitive	1 (5)	41-50	7 (37)	Not working	13 (69)		
Vision	3 (16)	51-60	4 (21)	Self-employed	3 (16)		
		Over 60	1 (5)				

3. Interview tools and process

For all initial interviews, information was gathered by the researcher through a guided interview approved by the UCHC Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). The research evaluation team at UCHC received significant input into the development of the survey from members of the Connect-Ability Steering Committee. The interview assesses the current employment status of each person; satisfaction with services rendered by private and public agencies; and barriers encountered in the search for employment, such as transportation, attitudes or biases, accessibility or lack of accommodations.

At the time the participant agreed to be part of the research, a date and time were set to conduct the initial interview. In each case, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information that they were about to disclose. The interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Finally, each person agreed to follow-up interviews at six-month intervals for the duration of the study. For follow-up interviews additional questions were asked of the interviewees, based on the IRB-approved follow-up interview guide (Appendix B). These questions were designed to continue the story of the person's employment journey, specifically directed toward finding out what progress the individuals had made in finding a job, what help or support they received along the way, and what barriers they encountered.

4. 2009: Pathways in Year 2

Fourteen of the original 19 interviewees continued their participation in *Pathways* in 2009, the second year of the project. There were 31 total interviews completed during 2009: 10 first interviews of new participants, 14 second interviews, 6 third interviews, and 1 fourth interview. Five original interviewees, 3 male and 2 female, did not continue their *Pathways* participation in year two. All were unemployed at the time of the first interview; all had a physical disability; two were in their 30s, two were in their 40s, and one was in his 50s. Three either had their phone disconnected or failed to return the interviewer's calls after several attempts. One individual refused to participate in a second interview, saying she was unwilling to give any more of her time. One person was a "no show" for the interview.

The 10 new individuals added to the study in 2009 were again selected from people who called in to the Connect-Ability toll-free assistance number. As the first group had been primarily male, the researcher attempted to increase the number of females interviewed. In the 2009 group, ages ranged from 16 to the 50s, half were male and half were female, and the majority (70%) were not working. Two of the ten were aided by a parent in answering the questions.

The demographic characteristics of the individuals added to the study in 2009 are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic information on the ten new 2009 participants

Type of disability	N (%)	Age	N (%)	Working status	N (%)	Gender	N (%)
Physical	6 (60)	Under 21	1 (10)	Full time	1 (10)	Male	5 (50)
Mental	3 (30)	21-30	4 (40)	Part time	2 (20)	Female	5 (50)
Cognitive	1 (10)	31-40	1 (10)	Not working	7 (70)		
Vision		41-50		Self-employed			
		51-60	4 (40)	Attending school			

In-depth results of the first two years of the Pathways study have been compiled in research reports available from UCHC (Reed, Shugrue, Robison & Ducharme 2009; Reed, Shugrue, Robison & Ducharme, 2010).

5. 2010: Pathways in Year 3

During 2010, progress in both recruiting new participants and conducting new interviews with existing participants slowed considerably. Only two new participants agreed to join the study: an unemployed man in his 40s with a learning disability and a woman in her 20s with Asperger's syndrome working part time. The woman's mother completed two proxy interviews for her daughter. In addition, participants recruited in prior years completed one second interview, six third interviews, two fourth interviews, and two fifth interviews.

There are multiple reasons for the slowdown in participation, some of which may be inferred from the interviewer's conversations with previous and potential participants. Some previous participants could not be reached to set up their follow-up interviews because of disconnected numbers or lack of response. Others refused to continue participation for various reasons including discouragement about the economy in general or their own job progress in particular, or perceived lack of assistance from Connect-Ability or other sources of assistance. Despite the interviewer's clear explanation of his role as a researcher and not a service provider, some still maintained an expectation that the interviews would lead to a job, and dropped out of the study in disappointment when no job materialized. Still others had moved out of state. Recruitment of new participants may also have been hampered by discouragement and concerns about the economy. In addition, callers to the toll-free assistance line are frequently drawn by Connect-Ability advertising, which in 2008 and 2009 often featured males with physical disabilities. During 2010 the advertisements, and the callers, included a broader range of people and disabilities, including those with mental illness. Many callers with mental illness were reluctant to meet personally with an interviewer, whether in their homes or in another public place. Some women may also have been reluctant to meet with a male interviewer.

6. Analysis

All of the interview transcripts were entered into Atlas.ti.5.0. This program is designed exclusively for qualitative (open-ended responses) information. Content from each open-ended question was analyzed using standard qualitative analysis techniques (McCracken, 1988). Transcripts were analyzed line by line in order to identify and interpret each individual's responses. Major concepts or areas of interest supported by direct quotations were organized into common themes using the constant comparative technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Additional themes were included until no new topics were identified. Like statements were then explored and compared to refine each theme and ensure a fuller understanding of each.

B. Themes

The process of elucidating the themes was accomplished during the first year almost exclusively. During the second and third years of the study, themes were remarkably similar to those from the original group. While no new themes emerged, some of the original themes were emphasized in different ways by the new participants. Those main themes and their sub-categories included:

- employment related issues (including employment status, aspirations of participants, finding a job, and problems at the job caused by the disability);
- external sources providing help (including supports, positive and negative experiences, and thoughts regarding the Connect-Ability toll-free number);
- barriers (including transportation, accessibility, need for accommodations, additional training and assistive technology, benefits, and employer perceptions); and
- attitudes (such as having a positive attitude during interviews, the supportive attitudes of families, and negative attitudes).

Further insights into these themes were gained from the 2010 interviews, in which both new and existing participants echoed many thoughts heard in earlier years.

1. Employment related issues

The ad campaign to promote Connect-Ability continued during 2010, and again featured individuals with various disabilities working successfully at competitive jobs. Both newly-recruited participants indicated that viewing these ads inspired them to call the toll-free number.

Employment status

Although one new participant had a job already, she was in the process of getting an advanced degree in library science and looking forward to finding a job where she might be able to achieve a living salary. The man who was in the process of looking for a job or getting connected to agencies holds several graduate degrees despite his learning disability.

Employment aspirations

When this young man began his search, he started with fast food restaurants but was told that he was overqualified. The mother of the woman with Asperger's reported that her daughter had a history of losing jobs and that that was not conducive to her obtaining a new job. The daughter had a part-time job at a University library, but was only getting a minimum wage.

Finding a job

Both new participants were trying to work with agencies that they found through Connect-Ability. The young man with the learning disability had contacted Connect-Ability and was currently working with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) to find a job. The mother of the young woman also had thoughts about Connect-Ability and other agencies that they had worked with. Both individuals thought that the purpose of Connect-Ability was to put together people with disabilities and employers who might be willing to work with people with disabilities. This was consistent with findings from the initial interviewees. The young man said,

All they are looking for is what am I doing, but where are their resources, where are their contacts to say, "Hey, I know this guy over here – go talk to him" or "I know this business that is hiring. Something that is useful instead of just writing something down about what I am doing, makes no sense. So someone who has context where they can actually say, "Hey, here is this job – or here's this business that is hiring – are you interested in trying this?"

The mother of the young woman also felt that they were misled by the advertising of Connect-Ability and by BRS.

Neither BRS nor Connect-Ability has made any attempt to meet what was my initial assumption – was that the role of these agencies was to have a pool of willing and able and understanding employers and to try to match them up with disabled people. That has not been my experience with either agency.

Problems at the job because of a disability

This same mother also commented about the difficulty her daughter was having holding a job for very long. This was consistent with a theme in prior interviews where someone who doesn't initially present with a disability may land the job, but not be able to maintain it. The mother commented about the shaky work history of her daughter.

... although now that she has such a history of losing jobs, I think that most savvy employers are going to see a pattern that they don't like to see. And so I do think, you know that she has only served to make it harder on herself because of her pattern of losing jobs.

2 External sources providing help

Support and help

The young man with the learning disability had found some resources that he was able to connect with that were very helpful. He was working with a labor agency, with computers that can be used to do job searches and research. He says that the

People are very friendly in there [agency] – and you mail things out, they give you postage. They have classes for resumes and for job interviews, and do mock interviews which was very good. They counsel you very well.

Positive experiences

The parents of a young man with William's syndrome remarked about the various agencies that their son would be working with now that he is graduating from high school.

Right now they [agency] have given us a list of things to look at like Goodwill and Volunteers of America. There are four different ones he needs to set up to see about potential work. And the Disability Resource Network in Bridgeport was another one. Those are agencies that will help find work for special needs students.

A former truck driver who had worked with the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) was now going back to school also said that BESB would help pay for his education.

They [BESB] are very helpful. This process has been very slow, but they have been very helpful as far as my training has been concerned here at the house. My learning how to

deal with my environment at home ... education to learn how to deal with the new issue of being blind for just the last three or four years.

Negative experiences

In the process of trying to find employment, the young woman with Asperger's had worked with job coaches, from both from the public and private sectors. Her mother commented:

BRS brought in an on-the-job-coach, and the only person that the employer wanted to fire sooner than my daughter was the on-the-job coach. So that turned out to be very problematic, which means that we have tried public job-coaching and private job-coaching and both have failed miserably.

Unfortunately, many of the people who were involved in the first two years of interviews continued to be discouraged about their progress towards finding employment. In addition, progress in working with various agencies was described as a negative experience. One woman who completed her second interview during 2010 had this to say:

The agencies in the past were BRS, Connect-Ability. I contacted Connect-Ability, but I was more involved with BRS and the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities and Independence Unlimited. And I feel like, from all those agencies, I haven't really gotten much help. I haven't really gotten any help honestly with a job search.

One man who was completing his third interview continued to have the same feelings about finding a job. First, after working with BRS for a year and explaining how he was on pain medication because of an injury to his leg he said that BRS promised to find him a job, but that after a year of working with him, they said that because he was on pain medication he was unemployable. Still, this individual wonders why Social Security has held up his case for so long to allow him to receive SSDI.

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services – they kind of ... goofed me around for a year. They kept telling me they could get me a job and employment. Overnight I became worthless. I'm not wanted. Nobody really wants you walking around with a cane – you slip and fall, even with the cane They don't want to take that risk.

The Connect-Ability toll-free number

As with the first two groups of interviewees, these new participants also hoped that the Connect-Ability toll-free number would be their one stop for finding a job and were sometimes disappointed. The mother of the young woman with Asperger's had a suggestion for this.

So I was surprised that neither Connect-Ability nor BRS has – what I think in the past – used to be a pool of available employers from which – we've already made it over that first hurdle, yes, they are willing to work with the disabled person. ... In this particular case, I would like to suggest – here we have a willing employer [name of University]. It's a big employer, it's willing to reach out to a disabled person. And it would be nice if Connect-Ability and BRS could meet this employer half way – maybe we could succeed

in making this into a job and something that would take us out of the poverty level – into just a sustainable modest lifestyle [for my daughter].

3 Barriers

Similar barriers were identified in this third year of interviews. Often barriers were related to the individual's type of disability. For the two new participants, the need for very specific accommodations was identified as a barrier.

Transportation

Transportation often poses a problem for those who do not drive. For the two new participants this was not the case, however for some of the previous participants who had encountered the problem, it continued to be a problem.

Some participants expressed the need for more public transportation in Connecticut. The man who had worked successfully with BESB stated that transportation is still a huge barrier for him even when transportation services are available.

Expense is huge in transportation, taxi service and what not, they are all very costly. Being in a rural area, bus transportation is very tight, very hard to get to. ... Especially a lot of these economical services, like MYRide only does certain areas. For me to work in the Middletown area, it would cost me \$40 to get to work, let alone trying to [get] home from here.

A man who owns his own business and is also pursuing a writing career had his own insight into transportation and accessibility. In fact, for several reasons, including lack of transportation, he had made a decision to move to a Southern city to make his life easier and continue to run his business. He had a lot of his business in New York City and other metropolitan Northeast cities which was becoming increasingly difficult to manage with his disability. He commented about the weather in the Northeast, especially regarding wintery and icy conditions which are treacherous. He believes that things in the South will be a lot easier, in a city that has its own bus system, public transit, and rapid borough system, which means that he can go out his front door and access the garage, the airport and rapid rail system.

Need for Accommodations

For the two new participants, one with Asperger's and one with a learning disability, the accommodations were somewhat similar. Most of the accommodations had to do with having an employer who has an understanding of the disability. The mother of the young woman described the accommodations that needed to come directly from the employer.

She cannot multi-task. She needs an employer who understands how to delegate one task at a time and to accomplish that without lots of noise and without lots of other tasks being piled on. So she needs a more well-informed employer who can farm out the work. And also just more supervision to make sure that she is not going off on a misunderstood tangent.

The young man with the learning disability described his need for accommodations.

In my case, or in other people's cases, probably with learning disabilities, probably would need job coaching. Also financial supervision, so that you don't get behind on things. That could be a barrier. You don't have gas, you don't have a bus ticket.

He also stated that absorbing anything that he reads would take much longer than most other individuals and that he has problems with both short and long term memory.

Benefits

Some of the livelier discussion during continuing interviews was talk about benefits that many received from Social Security. Whether employed or not, some participants felt that some of the restrictions placed on Social Security Disability Insurance recipients were unnecessarily strict and counterproductive. One woman with a learning disability expressed her anxiety over the confusing information she receives from Social Security.

It's very confusing for me. Right now I am getting Social Security Disability. When I get a tremendous amount of information in the mail and I don't understand what I am reading and if I can definitely get someone from disability services to help me understanding my mail then I would feel more confident in responding in a timely manner.

Others commented on how the system discourages people from getting out from under SSDI. One man who is working because a friend has hired him to help out, had this to say.

There really is a big gap, and the system from what I can see is kind of set up so that it actually kind of discourages people to want to get out of it and back into the workforce if they just don't want to do anything. It's too easy for them just to collect, whereas to make the effort to go out, they have to make so much more money, so that once all of the items are taken out of their pay, they end up back to where they were without doing anything.

Another participant who has completed five Pathways interviews remains unemployed. But he had similar feelings.

Just don't put so much pressure on the individual not to succeed. Give the person the – at least meet that person half way in getting to take that step forward without having to take two steps back ... Overall way that I see it – it seems to be true – the less you have, the more you get. The more you try to achieve, the less you get – as in help.

Finally, a self-employed man had another way of putting it.

If you are on welfare and you get any kind of a part time job to help you out, they don't cut back your welfare benefits – they cut off your benefits. And what little bit you are able to do, you can't survive on. So the system has to be – has to have that flexibility that humanity infused in it so that you don't punish somebody once they start to step outside of the precept system, - where you are trying to induce them back in.

4 Attitudes

There was less conversation about attitudes during the 2010 interviews than in prior years. New participants had little to say on the subject of either their own or their families' attitudes toward employment and the job search. However, some of the original participants related examples of how attitude, whether positive or negative, can affect ones' sense of well-being and job search success. To one participant who was successful as a self employed entrepreneur, it became evident that having a positive attitude towards oneself and one's abilities was key to achieving success. He stated:

The one big thing which has been key for everything is taking action. Rather than sitting being paralyzed in fear or being overwhelmed – it's just taking that step. ... And I really think that what you, if you just put out the vibrations ...if you just visualize where you want to be, it kind of opens up – if it's not just opening, if it doesn't bring positivistic forces, I'm not going to argue that aspect. But if you start thinking a certain way, you start recognizing signals, and you just pick up on them. ... the more versatility I can have in my career, the more options I'll have to do any number of things. ... The more options, the less locked into anything you can be, the more fluid you can be to any circumstance that comes your way.

By contrast, another participant displayed significant frustration about his experiences during the job search and pessimism about his chances of finding work.

So you've got the medical insurances against you, you've got the Social Security against you, you've got state programs that don't help you – it's like they're against you, it's like you've got the whole freaking world against you and you can't do anything. You can't fight back. So what am I supposed to do? I go to people I've been going on the internet to find things. Workman's compensation is a big joke. They say you can't be fired but yet what happens when you get hurt and you're going to end up being disabled the rest of your life? What's the first thing they do? They fire you. I actually had the guy call me up here. ... listen to this, this is paper going into the basket, not happening and then I had to get a lawyer and if you're broke and out of work how do you get a lawyer?

C. Pathways to Success

Despite the discouraging news from many Pathways participants, some individuals were making progress toward the goal of satisfying employment. Their journeys may be instructive for others.

Donald²

Donald, a man with epilepsy, had had success in landing a variety of jobs, but ran into difficulties when he had a seizure at the job. Either the boss was unwilling to accept any liability if anything were to happen to Donald, or the co-workers became upset at having to witness the seizures. Everyone was unwilling to have Donald continue. Then it occurred to Donald that a "work-at-home business has been the friendliest to me." By the third interview, he was continuing to work towards establishing this home business in marketing nutrition products. He said that the epilepsy was getting more difficult and that he needs someone to drive him everywhere.

² Actual names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Two other cases also described in the 2009 Pathways report continue to be successful.

Carl

At the time of his first interview, Carl had his own business, but was just managing to keep it afloat, and was in the process of looking for another position. Because he had a family, his business needed to do more than just stay afloat, and he was looking for the security of working for an established business.

By the time of the third *Pathways* interview, 15 months after the first, Carl had obtained a part time job. He described how he worked with an agency hired by BESB that does coaching for people with disabilities. He was given the chance to work 30 hours as an evaluation for a job in telemarketing. He excelled during this evaluation period and the company hired him, at first part time. Carl continued to excel in his job and soon became the top salesman in the telemarketing department.

By the fourth interview, Carl indicated that his employer was giving him as many as 35 hours per week, and that they had committed to offer him a full-time position in the beginning of 2010 running the telemarketing department. Carl was very proud of how it all worked out. Having an employer who was willing to give him a chance was the key.

By his fifth interview, Carl was still working successfully at the company and one of the biggest new successes since his last interview was that he finally had his own desk. But he says about his job,

But the best part of my work is that it is a job that I go to every day.

Carl did mention that transportation may possibly become a barrier. Being legally blind does pose a problem with transportation. However Carl lives close enough to his work that he can walk. He does worry about what will happen with his job down the road. For example, if the company needs to relocate to a bigger campus, it would necessitate a different route to work that might be more difficult for him.

Harry

Harry also owns his own business. At the time of his first *Pathways* interview, he was working with architects and interior designers and contractors of high-end residential homes. He was finding it difficult to go to construction sites because of his disability and wondered whether he would be able to continue. At the second interview, he had decided to stay with his business because conditions had changed due to the failing economy. Now, instead of working through architects and interior designers, he was able to pursue different avenues and have access to homeowners directly. He was pursuing the business through a different avenue, developing a website and brochures to deal directly with the consumer. He did not receive help from any agency and largely attributes his success and evolution to his own energy and initiative.

On the third interview, Harry was again evolving. He had had his business for a very long time, but had let it languish several years ago in order to take care of his elderly parents. Harry had begun writing a book about his caregiving experience.

He indicated that the original thought of writing this book about his experience as a caregiver has actually generated ideas for four other books.

At the fifth interview, there were more changes for Harry. He had decided to make the move to a Southern city and continue working with his business of shades and blinds. The move from the Northeast was designed to simplify his life and he has always felt very comfortable networking and “plugging into situations.”

I'm able to find a flow and a network to fit into a groove. And while I did do very well in the Northeast, I can do that well or better in the South.

He also talks about this Southern city as being more accessible.

The majority, a vast number of the buildings have been built since the handicapped accessible laws have been in place. And so there are more doors that are push-button – and because you don't have to deal with the ice and snow and everything, there are fewer steps. Here almost all doors have at least one step up, if not three or four, because of the blowing snow.

One of the most encouraging aspects of Harry's story is his very positive attitude, which is particularly important in the midst of a struggling economy. Feeling confident about oneself, having positive feelings and projecting this confidence to a potential employer all play a part in succeeding, in Harry's experience. Being self-employed solves the problem of finding a boss who is flexible and understanding of your disability and how to work around it. However, not everyone can be successful in a self-employed business. It takes a certain amount of optimism and confidence, which Harry conveys.

... to sit in the good old self pity puddle for a while does a ton of healing – as long as you get out of it. And take that action and take yourself out of that victim mode.

When people see someone with a handicap, they instantly go into an uncomfortable mode. ... And we as a society need to be comfortable with them, so that they can feel comfortable coming out into society. The point is that a handicapped person ... you will find do not want to be segregated from society. The majority of them do want to feel like they are productive ... it can be a healing experience to make them productive and into the mainstream, to encourage them toward that direction.

D. Conclusions and Direction for Further Research

All of the individuals involved in this project have in common a strong desire to work, but each has encountered different hurdles along the way, and many described multiple barriers encountered in their search for appropriate employment. Many of the original participants continue to search for employment with no success. And several have been pursuing employment on their own, without assistance from any of the agencies designed to help them. Many *Pathways* participants found that their disabilities interfered with their ability to obtain or maintain a job. Difficulties encountered in the process of finding or keeping a job were often attributed at least in part to the person's disability, but mainly it was others' reactions to the disability that continues to be a hindrance to the person's success. Being self-employed eliminates the necessity of having an employer make certain accommodations; however not everyone is capable of having their own business. Two of the success stories mentioned are about individuals who were striving toward or had already created their own businesses, working out of their homes.

Transportation continues to be one of the largest barriers to employment for many of the participants.

During the past year, the *Pathways* project added two new participants, thereby increasing the diversity of the sample, representing a broader spectrum of individuals who have different disabilities, and a greater representation of various demographics. The project will continue to track all willing participants with periodic interviews to follow the progress of their job search, recording, at an individual level, how supports and resources play a part in helping people connect to jobs.

One theme of this year's report that was also heard in earlier years is disappointment with the role of Connect-Ability. For those who were not able to get connected to work, and even those who did receive assistance from various agencies, many mentioned Connect-Ability's inability to connect people directly with employers. Even one success story, Carl, had this to offer.

And I guess one of my problems in life ... is I take things literally and then I'll get disappointed. So it was even in the slogan, "CONNECT – get connected with people – helps the disabled get connected with employers". Anyway, that's what I wanted. I wanted some sort of bit of information about employers who were disabled friendly ...I had been offered a job, position and then declined after I revealed my disability – more than once.

There appears to be a disconnect between the expectations of many individuals that Connect-Ability will serve as a direct link to job opportunities and the reality of Connect-Ability as a "navigator" helping individuals to overcome barriers to employment.

The responses of those who have shared and will continue to share their journey will give the Connect-Ability team a greater understanding of how to improve the system. With information regarding individual difficulties, the findings will be used to inform not only state agency policy, but also potential employers, so that job seekers with disabilities may be successful in accomplishing their employment goals.

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Appendix A

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: INITIAL INTERVIEW

The stories of real people and employment

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

E-mail Address:

.....

Thank you for agreeing to share the story of your job search with us. Your participation and the information you will share will help many people with disabilities become valuable, contributing members of the Connecticut workforce.

I have a few questions that will help us more completely understand how to support you and other people like you.

- 1) What is your work situation at this moment?**

- 2) Are you employed? If yes, where? For how long?**

- 3) Tell me what your experience was searching for and obtaining your current or most recent job.**

- 4) If you are not employed, have you received help in finding a job?
From whom?

If no, why?

Are you finding this help useful?

What kind of a job do you want?**

- 5) Are you satisfied with your current job or are you satisfied with your progress toward finding another job? (if yes or no, why?)**

.....

Please describe in more detail your journey toward a career/job of your choice.

- a) What have been (were) the helpful/supportive elements of your job search (people/agencies/services/organizations)?**

What have been (were) the barriers you encountered along the way?

***Transportation?**

***Applying, interviewing, being hired, being promoted?**

***Attitudes----your own, of the employer, your family, your school or employment counselor, other?**

***Accessibility and Accommodations?**

***Understanding your benefits?**

- b) What supports, services and accommodations will help (were helpful) in your job search?**

- c) Are there any other comments or suggestions you wish to make to fill out your story?**

Thank You for taking the time to speak with me. Your story and experiences will help so many more people with disabilities who are seeking satisfying employment.

I will be getting back to you in 6 months to continue the story. Thank You.

Appendix B

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW

The stories of real people and employment

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

.....
Thank you for agreeing to share the story of your job search with us. Your participation and the information you will share will help many people with disabilities become valuable, contributing members of the Connecticut workforce.

I have a few questions that will help us more completely understand how to support you and other people like you.

- 6) What is your work situation at this moment?**
 - a) Do you still have your job? (go to 5)**
 - b) Did you get a job since I interviewed you last (6 months ago)? (go to 2)**
 - c) Are you still unemployed? (go to 4)**
- 7) Are you employed? If yes, where? For how long?**
- 8) Tell me what your experience was searching for and obtaining your current or most recent job.**

(go to 5)
- 9) If you are not employed, have you received help in finding a job?**

From whom?

If no, why?

Are you finding this help useful?

What kind of a job do you want?

(go to 5)
- 10) Are you satisfied with your current job or are you satisfied with your progress toward finding another job? (if yes or no, why?)**

Ask all – specifically about the past 6 months
.....

Please describe in more detail your journey toward a career/job of your choice.

- d) What have been (were) the helpful/supportive elements of your job search (people/agencies/services/organizations)?

For those who are currently unemployed and looking for work ask specifically about the past 6 months

What people or agencies or services or organizations did you utilize in your job search over the past 6 months?

- e) What have been (were) the barriers you encountered along the way?

*Transportation?

For those not currently working, ask about transportation over the past 6 months as a barrier to finding work.

*Applying, interviewing, being hired, being promoted?

Ask all – specifically regarding the past 6 months

*Attitudes----your own, of the employer, your family, your school or employment counselor, other?

Ask all – specifically regarding the past 6 months

*Accessibility and Accommodations?

Ask all – specifically regarding the past 6 months

*Understanding your benefits?

Ask all – specifically regarding the past 6 months

- f) What supports, services and accommodations will help (were helpful) in your job search?

Over the past 6 months which supports or accommodations were helpful in your job search.

- g) Are there any other comments or suggestions you wish to make to fill out your story?

.....

Thank You for taking the time to speak with me. Your story and experiences will help so many more people with disabilities who are seeking satisfying employment.

I will be getting back to you in 6 months to continue the story. Thank You.