



Position Paper on Employment of Persons with Disabilities

“Put simply, work is fundamental to identity. It means so much more than a paycheck; it offers purpose and the opportunity to lead a more independent, self-directed life for all people—including millions of Americans with disabilities.” (Martinez, K. NDEAM
The Value of Work. October, 2012. U.S. Department of Labor)

Of all the population groups in the United States, people with disabilities have the highest level of unemployment. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports:

- ◆ For all age groups, the employment-population ratio was much lower for persons with a disability than for those with no disability.
- ◆ About 17.8 percent of all people with a disability were employed in May, 2012, well below the employment population ratio of 63.9 percent for persons with no disability.
- ◆ In 2012, 33 percent of workers with a disability were employed part-time, compared with 19 percent of those with no disability.
- ◆ Employed persons with a disability were more likely to be self-employed than those with no disability.

In these tough economic times, it is important that people with disabilities have access to an array of person-centered opportunities that allow them to be included as productive members of their communities. As a labor pool, people with disabilities are a source of reliable workers, regardless of the nature of their disability. People with disabilities have the ability to adapt to different situations and circumstances perhaps better than any other group and have long proven themselves to be dependable employees.

As employees, people with disabilities contribute consistent work ideas and perspectives that business needs to succeed. They have fresh ideas on how to solve problems and complete assigned tasks. This reliable and determined work force can contribute to increasing the retention of employees and reducing turnover. In addition, tax incentives and technical assistance can assist with creating and expanding employment opportunity, as well as with accommodations, which are often relatively easy and inexpensive to implement.

Meaningful work at a reasonable wage will allow people with disabilities to contribute to their own expenses of daily living, reducing dependency on government programs and family support. Working in the community in a work site that includes people with and without disabilities is an important component of full community inclusion.

The CT Council on Developmental Disabilities promotes employment for all people with disabilities. It is important to note that people with disabilities have been denied basic components of employment that others have long had. We believe that employment should be:

- 1. Meaningful.** Jobs should be fulfilling and challenging, offering choices for career development and job options. Positions should include opportunities for growth, professional development and advancement. Employers should not exclude people with disabilities from consideration for advancement based on their disability.
- 2. Living Wage.** People with disabilities should receive equal pay and benefits as other workers who perform the same job. The low wage jobs that are consistently offered to people with disabilities means that they are often living in poverty at much higher rates than the rest of the labor force. Nearly 28 percent of those with disabilities ages 18 to 64 were in poverty in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Meanwhile, the poverty rate for their peers in the general population reached 12.5 percent.
- 3. Person-Centered.** People with disabilities must have better access to available job opportunities in their communities. Job seeking is a person-centered planning process. Often people with disabilities are placed in stereotypical positions—food industry, janitorial work or floral work. Persons with disabilities need access to information about employment that is compatible to their interests and skills, so that they are recruited for the job they desire. Applicants with disabilities must be included in the pool of all other eligible and qualified applicants. The employment should be in a healthy work environment, with opportunities to experience all the employee-related activities and benefits that are offered to any employee.

4. Available in the Community. Potential employers should be identified who are in their community, on bus routes and in accessible locations, and willing to use assistive technology to support employees with disabilities. Reliable transportation systems are critical to expanding employment of people with disabilities. Employers should offer reasonable accommodations.

5. Offered with Appropriate Training, Orientation and Supervision. Employers should provide clear expectations of all duties, and ensure that any support staff are also aware of these expectations. Supervision should include the identification and provision of ongoing training and support needs, which could also include assistive technology and other accommodations.

Additionally, the Council believes that we must continue to address barriers to employment that exclude people with disabilities from access to a good life with meaningful work and economic stability. This includes addressing the limited employment opportunities, increasing awareness of the value of employing people with disabilities and addressing stereotypes that limit access to an array of jobs for people with disabilities. Educational and training opportunities leading to employment should be expanded and accessible to people with disabilities.

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