

Taft Community Conversation

Engaging California Communities to Increase Employment Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities March 2014

Communities
Building
Solutions
Together

Many youth and young adults with disabilities can work; be loyal, hardworking employees; and want to give back to their communities. Yet, across all age groups, people with disabilities are the least likely to be in today's workforce or employed, compared to other minorities and people without disabilities. The California Employment Consortium for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CECY) is partnering with 7 communities across California to host "Community Conversations" to build awareness of this issue. Through collaborative dialogue, community members generate fresh ideas, actions, and solutions to improve employment opportunities for youth and young adults with disabilities in their local communities.

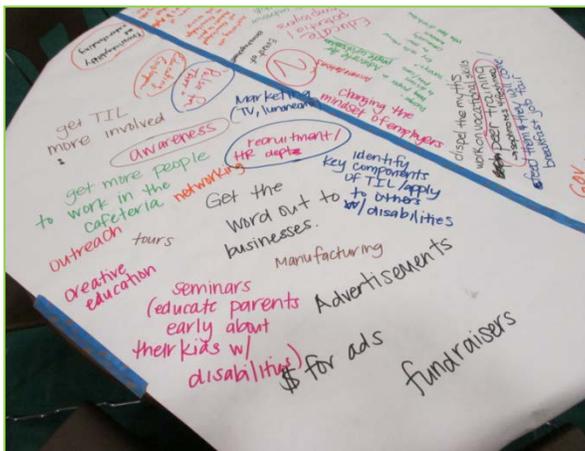


Taft's Community Conversation

was held the evening of March 26, 2014, from 5:30 to 7:30pm, at the West Side Recreation and Park District. Invitations and public service announcements were widely distributed in the community, inviting all to attend. Its 51 community participants included representatives from education, business, faith communities, service clubs, government officials, disability service providers, young adults with disabilities, and family members. The presence of 8 graduating students with developmental disabilities from Taft College's Transition to Independent Living (TIL) Program gave the discussion a feeling of urgency as the students expressed their career aspirations, desire to work, and skills they would bring to their workplace.



After check-in, participants enjoyed delicious appetizers prepared by "Chef Geoff" from the Taft College Café. The meeting began with a short film that showcased success stories by local employers who had hired TIL students. Welcoming remarks followed from Olivia Raynor, Director of the Tarjan Center and CECY; Kathy Orin, Executive Director of the Taft District Chamber of Commerce; Kevin Stone, TIL student; and Gina Semenza, CECY staff and event facilitator.



Based upon the World Café approach, the participants circulated the room every 15-20 minutes and engaged in small group discussions in response to 3 questions posed by the organizers. During each consecutive round, people were encouraged to link, connect, and build upon ideas coming from their previous table conversation.

Round 1 & 2 Questions:

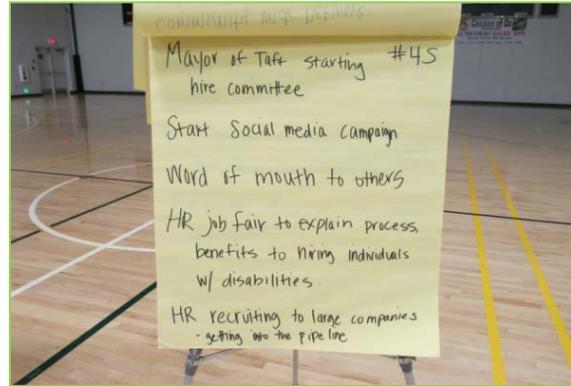
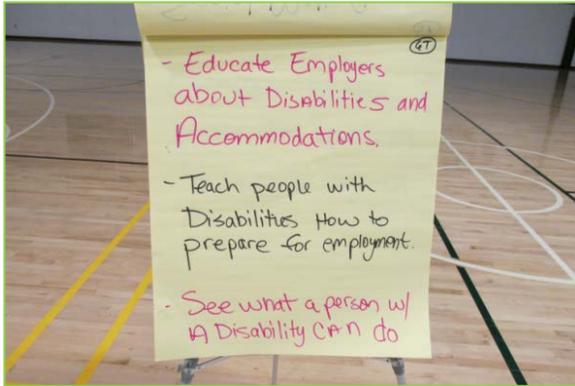
In Taft, what can we do to increase the number of people with disabilities in our community?

Round 3 Question:

How might we work more effectively together to make a real difference in employing people with disabilities in Taft?

Taft's Community Solutions

During the last 20 minutes of the meeting, the large group came together and identified the most important and promising ideas, strategies, resources, and next steps that came from their small group discussions. These were recorded on chart paper in front of the room.



To Increase Employment of Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities, We Can:

- **Educate employers** about hiring people with disabilities and the benefits of doing so for their business
- **Build connections** between students, young adults with disabilities, and employers
- **Build skills** to prepare youth and make them job-ready

Some Specific Ideas Discussed:

Ideas for Employers

- Share what works in hiring people with disabilities through employer-to-employer outreach
- Speak to students and adults with disabilities at TIL and the Arc
- Tell success stories in the Chamber of Commerce newsletter
- Share the TIL video with human resources staff and professionals
- Learn about tax incentives & credits for hiring people with disabilities
- Learn about accommodations and on-the-job supports
- Provide paid internships; post available positions on job boards



Ideas for Individuals with Disabilities

- Peer mentoring/counseling
- Practice writing resumes and cover letters, and perform mock interviews with local employers
- Learn about self-employment/business ownership
- Self-advocate and tell employers about your strengths, skills, and ability to work
- Find out about career opportunities

For the Community

- Establish a HIRE Committee with the support of the Mayor
- Host other public events like the Community Conversation
- Spread the word about hiring people with disabilities at service club meetings, churches, community agencies, local businesses, schools, and social media
- Get more businesses involved, including the big employers aka "big boys" (e.g., Bright House Networks, PG&E, the oil industry)
- Share transportation strategies, including Dial-A-Ride and TAT
- Involve youth and young adults with disabilities in volunteer opportunities, like Relay For Life, to further develop social networks
- Open Taft businesses and organizations for early work experience (e.g., in schools)
- Support the success of the TIL Program and its preparation of students for work



Taft Voices about their Community Conversation

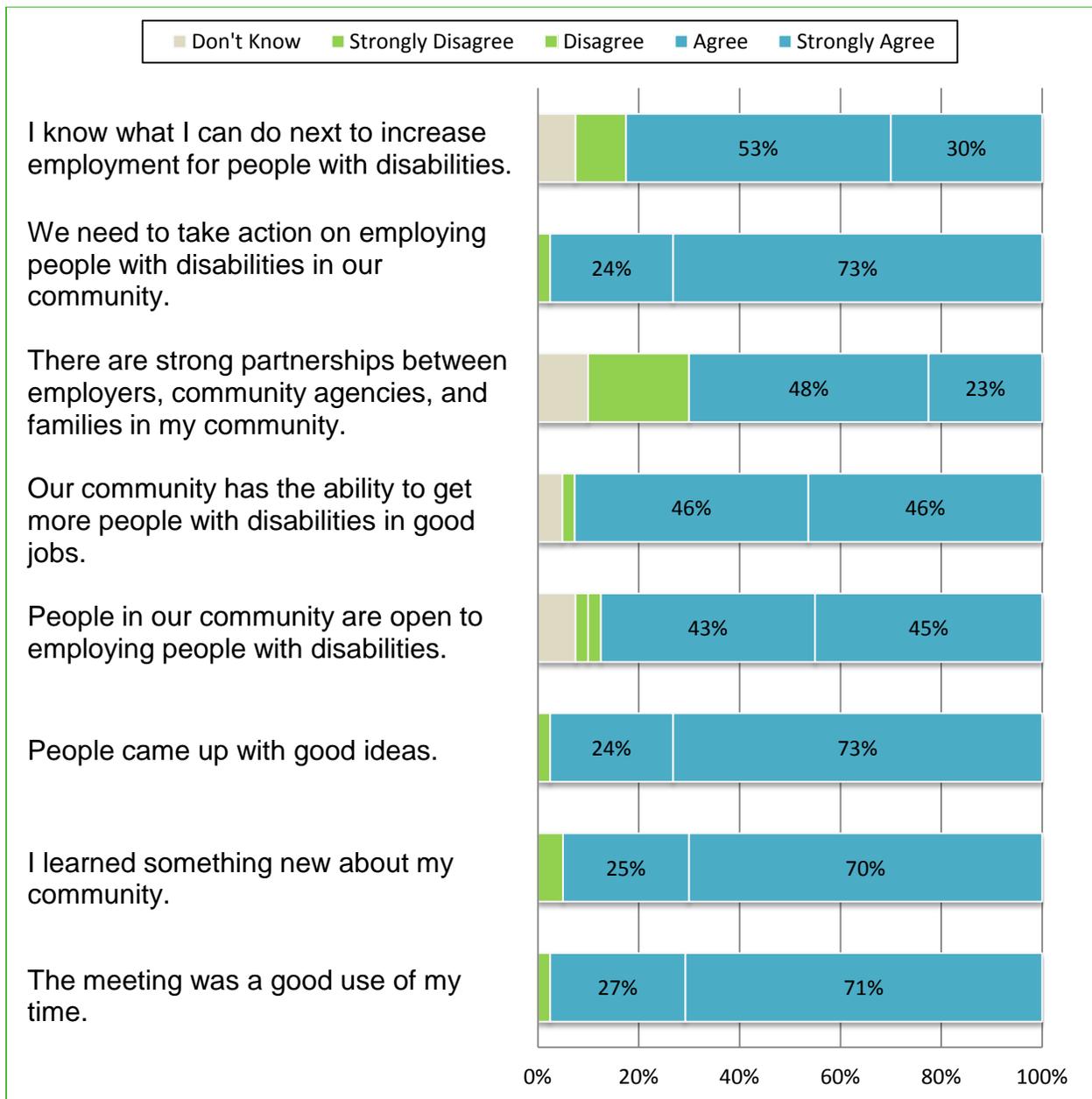
"I saw people here that I did not expect to see ... personal invitations work!" (President, Taft College)

***"I did not realize how committed Taft is to this topic and the desire to connect."
(Executive Director, Taft District Chamber of Commerce)***

***"Everyone in the whole world should have opportunities to do what they are capable of doing."
(Taft College Student, TIL Program)***

Taft's Response to the Conversation

Prior to leaving, the participants completed a feedback survey to evaluate the impact of the event, and a follow-up form to express interest in being involved in future activities. Half of the attendees expressed interest in participating in follow-up activities such as being part of a team that implements next steps, helping youth and young adults with disabilities develop job skills, or speaking to and educating businesses about the value of employing people with disabilities.



Taft Community Planning Committee

The following people brought their enthusiasm, talents, interests, and skills to the planning process:

- **Susan Wells** and **John Dodson**, TIL program, Taft College (Committee Co-Chairs)
SWells@taftcollege.edu
JDodson@taftcollege.edu
- **Lonn Boyer**, Human Resources Director, City of Taft
- **Geoff Dunham**, Food Service Director/Taft College Café Chef
- **Joe Fuller**, Employer
- **Ray Hatch**, Former Taft Mayor
- **Ed Herrera**, Employer
- **Sandy Koenig**, Westside Community Resource Center
- **Chelle Koerner**, Director of Special Services, Taft Union High School District
- **Dr. Kathy Orin**, Director, Taft District Chamber of Commerce
- **Susan Vaughan**, Taft College

ABOUT CECY | The **California Employment Consortium for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CECY)** is a collaboration of 23 state agencies, centers, and organizations; families; and self-advocates with responsibilities for the education, rehabilitation, employment, and support of youth with disabilities.

Our mission is to strengthen state policies and practices to increase the number of youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in integrated competitive employment.

CECY is a 5-year (2011-2016) Project of National Significance under a Partnerships in Employment Systems Change grant (#90DN0284) by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The Tarjan Center at UCLA, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), provides the administrative leadership for CECY. For more information, please contact Tarjan

Center and CECY Director Olivia Raynor at oraynor@mednet.ucla.edu or (310) 794-1141.

tarjancenter.org/cecy

