



New York's Inclusive Workforce

Executive Summary

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State and Regional Associations in full support of the vision presentation:

Cerebral Palsy Associations
of New York State



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Employment and Disability Institute



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Correctional Educational Consortium, Inc.



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Learning Disabilities
Association of New York State, Inc.



Self-Advocacy Association
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Unemployment rates in New York State have reached historic highs, and as a result these tenuous economic times have made it increasingly difficult for individuals with disabilities to achieve their employment, career, and self-sufficiency goals. However, history has demonstrated that true social change often emerges in the midst of the most challenging times. With social-systems change in mind, a group of New York State representatives from 16 different advocacy associations representing Independent Living Centers, Self Advocacy Groups and Community Rehabilitation Service providers across all disability groups with extensive programmatic and fiscal knowledge was formed. The Inclusive Workforce Workgroup began convening in April of 2010 and has worked since that time to identify recommendations to be given to all partners in New York State to assist in the growth of a workforce development system that would be characterized by funding and services that demonstrate flexibility, responsiveness and collaboration.

For a full inclusive workforce to exist in New York State individuals with disabilities who are expressing an interest to work must be supported by the provider community, the business community, as well as State and Local government. It is essential that New York State's workforce system be organized and responsive to both the business and job seeker's needs. The approach must follow this four part equation: *Individuals + Business + Providers + State and Local Government = An Inclusive Workforce.*

The Inclusive Workforce Workgroup identified key factors necessary to establish an effective employment system in New York. The system must provide seamless access to services, timely response to individuals' needs, and be inclusive to enable all individuals the opportunity to seek and gain employment. New York State must have in place effective partnerships with businesses to meet their hiring needs and the needs of job seekers for the jobs they offer. This collaboration must include resources to make it possible for individuals to obtain and retain employment. Businesses have already identified the need for diversity training, financial incentives related to hiring, on-going staff training, and to improve placement outcomes. It is imperative that the needs of the business owners be met.

Another partner identified as valuable in an inclusive workforce is the community based provider. With this partnership in place, the needs of the individuals, the needs of businesses, the needs of State and local government and the needs of the community providers can be considered simultaneously. The road to employment and self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities oftentimes is filled with a variety of barriers and challenges. The promising news however, is that our society is slowly progressing towards a point where the opportunities for people with disabilities are increasing each and every day.

It is the firm belief of The Inclusive Workforce Workgroup that individuals with disabilities must have the opportunity to earn the highest possible wages in jobs offering the most integrated setting for that person. Employment must be legal, and it must provide the individual appropriate commensurate wages for the task of the job. In each case, the employment option should respect the values and dreams of the individual. Employment for all individuals must not create additional barriers.

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The workforce development system in New York State must be person-centered, responsive, and flexible. It needs to have in place, mechanisms to provide for a quick, positive response to an individual seeking employment. Additionally, the system is to be flexible and adjustable to assist the individual as he/she advances along his/her career path. The needs of an individual when he/she enters the workforce are often different than after being employed for some time. The process needs to allow for input from the individual and his/her team. Other factors like self-direction, informed career choice, and the support of an individual's dignity of risk need to drive this process, and should be infused into the workforce development culture.

However, in order for the New York State system, supporting and supported by the four essential partners - individuals, business, providers, and government - to evolve in a positive direction, two final factors must be considered: Accountability and Funding.

True accountability in the system will occur on all levels by assuring that

1. Job seekers and businesses are satisfied;
2. Businesses are educated, engaged, and supported throughout the placement process;
3. Providers help individuals find, choose, and maintain employment which matches the person's career goals, interests, and skills; and
4. Critical data on the attainment of outcomes in the system is collected so true progress can be objectively measured.

Finally, the funding process must provide mechanisms to fund the real cost of the work provided to support employees needing assistance to gain and retain employment in a timely manner. This should be supported by the development of pre-determined payment schedules, and appropriate funding methods to support the reimbursement to any partner that is supporting a job seeker. The system in New York State must be designed so it is sustainable and takes into account all of the aforementioned factors.

This is indeed an aggressive vision for the State of New York to embrace. It is, nevertheless, a collective vision. It is for this reason that these changes cannot occur in individual communities, or pockets of government. A unified vision must be embraced so that a common set of principles and goals guide the process. It is the sincere hope of this Inclusive Workforce Workgroup, that this document will be the catalyst for change in the State of New York. This Vision will ignite the fire of all involved - individuals with disabilities, the business community, government, and the community providers - to operate differently, and to create a truly *inclusive workforce*.

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