



Pennsylvania Statewide Strategic Planning for Employment Initiative

Executive Summary

On May 20, 2009 a group of over 70 stakeholders from across the state of Pennsylvania gathered together at the Pennsylvania Employment Conference for People with Disabilities held in Philadelphia. This group initiated the beginnings of a *Pennsylvania Vision for Employment* using the “Planning Alternative Tomorrow’s with Hope” (PATH) strategic planning process to frame the discussion. The PATH process encourages participants to visualize a future based on shared values and beliefs. It includes the identification of specific timeframes and accomplishments as well as a description of current and potential resources. Rosa and Michael McAllister from Networks for Training and Development, Inc. facilitated this half-day planning event. The May 20, 2009 gathering created an enthusiasm among participants for the possibilities of employment for all Pennsylvanians with disabilities. The synergy created was the starting point for the Statewide Strategic Planning Process.

Effective July 1, 2009 Networks for Training and Development, Inc. (Networks) was awarded a grant through the Pennsylvania Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) to continue the work started on May 20, 2009 and to gather information to develop a Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Employment for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities. Several participants from the May 20, 2009 session identified themselves as interested in continuing their involvement with a statewide Strategic Plan for Employment. Each of these participants was invited to become a member of the Project Steering Committee. Representatives from the Governor’s Cabinet and Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities (GCAPD) and the MIG Advisory Committee on Employment (ACE) were included in that invitation. The purpose of the Steering Committee was to provide suggestions and recommendations for conducting the strategic planning process, and to provide continuity to the strategic planning efforts beyond the completion of the grant on December 31, 2009. Twenty-nine (29) of the original seventy (70) agreed to participate on the Steering Committee, and represented various stakeholders and affiliations.

The Project Steering Committee met on August 7, 2009 to clarify the activities of the Committee and coalesce further. Eight (8) regions across the state of Pennsylvania were identified by the Project Steering Committee as locations to hold Focus Group meetings. Outreach to solicit participation was initiated via the Networks e-mail contact list of 1300 individuals and organizations. Steering Committee members were asked to send information and invitations to their contact lists as well. Each Focus Group meeting was held in an accessible community location. The Pittsburgh Focus Group meeting occurred as part of the statewide TASH conference and was advertised in their conference program. Outreach to include people with disabilities (with a cross disability focus) occurred via contact with several advocacy and self-advocacy organizations. The purpose of the Focus Groups was to be as inclusive and expansive as possible in providing opportunities for interested people from around the state to share their input regarding employment issues and ideas.

Networks continued facilitation and coordination of all of the activities. Facilitators worked with each of the groups to identify current and potential resources to increase and sustain employment. Accessible

materials were available to participants in large print and Braille formats, a sign-language interpreter was present at each session, and an online option was made available for those who could not be physically present or wished to add in comments after the meetings. Various other accommodations were available upon request. The compiled notes from each Focus Group were posted on the Networks website and e-mailed to each of the Focus Group participants and Steering Committee members.

Several re-occurring themes surfaced throughout the Focus Group meetings. Although there were initial concerns that regional issues would dominate the sessions that is not what actually occurred. Discussions at each of the meetings varied in terms of the passion around certain themes and flavors of suggested actions. However, the input in each of the regions demonstrated acknowledgement of similar available and potential resources as well as consistent identification of concerns and barriers to moving forward. This consistency is evidence to further support the creation of a Statewide Strategic Plan for Employment.

The major themes that surfaced throughout the sessions included:

- People who want to work should have the opportunity to work in meaningful jobs/careers that match their interests and allow them to earn a living wage.
- Funding needs to be outcome based and follow people as they move forward on their own path to success.
- People with disabilities need to have equal access to higher education.
- Policies need to reflect an expectation of employment for all Pennsylvanians.
- We need to address societal perceptions, attitudes, and stigmas that hold people with disabilities back from achieving their full potential (through the media and other ways)
- Employers need education to dispel myths and highlight potential supports
- Families, educators, professionals, paraprofessionals, support coordinators, the medical community, legislators and others need education about employment for all.
- There are some great resources available now that are underutilized (e.g. Ticket to Work)
- We need a “one-stop”, accessible, user-friendly system that increases awareness of opportunities and supports.
- Schools need to focus on abilities rather than disabilities, create transition plans and act on them, and promote employment or higher education for all upon graduation.
- We need to promote collaboration, with a cross-disability focus, to reach common goals.
- Transportation is a significant barrier to employment across the state.
- We need to stop funding placements where people do nothing.

These themes will provide direction to the Steering Committee and other stakeholders as they continue to plan and act on employment for all Pennsylvanians.