

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
Disabilities Focus Group  
November 30, 2022 1:00pm Via Zoom  
MEETING MINUTES

**Attendees**

1. Marc Schweitzer, New Jersey Department of Labor
2. Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
3. Brianna Murray, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired
4. Jasmine Whitous, Union County Office of Person with Disabilities and Special Needs
5. Kenesha Jones, Trinitas Hospital Cares Program
6. Walter Droz, Family Advocate
7. Samantha Pica, Family Resource Network
8. Adam Kubler, Arc of NJ Project Hire
9. Elizabeth Paskewich, Division of Family Services
10. Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, Inroads to Opportunity
11. Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational and Technical Schools
12. Sandra Lynch, Community Access Unlimited
13. Gail Driscoll, Josephine's Place
14. Perle Almeida, American Job Center
15. Ed Faver, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
16. Tina Lopez, Division of Social Services

**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato

**Meeting Summary**

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chairwoman, Cyndy Walsh Rintzler welcomed everyone to the meeting. All participants introduced themselves.

**Strategic Plan information:**

Meredith Barracato reviewed slides that discussed the various elements of the strategic plan.

**Disabilities Discussion:**

Throughout the meeting Meredith Barracato released a series of poll question and shared with the attendees the results.

Poll Questions:

1. Which of the following are your client's barriers to employment?
  - Disability
  - Transportation

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- Job search skills
  - Computer literacy
  - Physical, mental, medical barriers
2. Does your organization have a DEI model?
    - Yes
  3. Is there a well establish integrated service model.
    - No
  4. Do you know what career services are offered through the AJC
    - Yes and No 50/50 Split
  5. Do you think services at the AJC are accessible to people with disabilities?
    - Yes and No 50/50 Split
  6. Is there a well-established coordinated service model among partners?
    - Yes and No 50/50 split
  7. What are your clients greatest supportive service need?
    - Transportation
    - Reasonable accommodations
    - Training needs
  8. Is there a well-defined customer flow referral process?
    - No
  9. Is your organization focused on employer engagement?
    - Yes

**Discussion Questions:**

**What are some strategies used to train and support individuals with barriers to employment?**

Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, can provide anyone with vocational training, tuition, room and board transportation, in-house assistive technology trainers, blindness skills training for Adult Living Skills, nonvisual techniques, eye health, physical restoration, and work with job coaches. Her organization works with Family Resource Network and Goodwill. Business relation unit training technical assistance guidance to help businesses achieve Diversity, Equity, Inclusion goals. They do more educating and dispelling myths. They also have vocational programs.

Ed Faver, Division for Vocational Rehabilitation Services does the same as Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired except they don't do the visual

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because that is done by Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Their goal is to get competitive integrated employment.

Gwen Ryan, Union County Vo-Tech provide technical skills industry value credentials for job training purposes.

**How are career pathways strategies developed with your participants?**

- **What are your best practices?**
- **What partners are involved in the process?**
- **What can be done to improve career pathway development?**

Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired will use Occupational Information Network to develop a pathway. They want to partner with One Stop to get more support.

Samantha Pica, Family Resource Network give their clients an employment questionnaire that will help them assess the client. They want to ensure that their skills align with their goal, and then they will reach out to the funder to help them.

Sandra Lynch, Community Access Unlimited mentioned the need for apprenticeships to make it inclusive, need to integrate more with people without disabilities. They want to do more culinary programs and have clients be given Servsafe certification. They want to give students more access to assistive technology and computers.

Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational and Technical Schools, mentioned advisory boards that consist of school, parents, counselors can help and be effective for career pathways.

Gail Driscoll, Josefine's Place have tried to work one on one with their clients, offering resume writing, printed materials and value companies that they have been friendly to their clients.

**How does your organization ensure that any program service expansion considers diversity, equity, and inclusion?**

Sandra Lynch, Community Access Unlimited mission is about inclusion, they have taken people from institutions and put them in the community setting.

Tina Lopez, Union County Division of Social Services, when someone comes into social services, they use a VOYCE iPad that accesses 364 languages so they can

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communicate with people with language barriers. They have some forms in various languages based on ethnicity. They have an in person interpreter for Spanish and Creole speaking clients.

**How does Union County strengthen integrated service models for cross-training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, and other coordination efforts utilized to support service integration across required One-Stop partners?**

No Comment. Further discussions are needed at the next committee meeting. Meredith Barracato shared information on the USDOL guidance about blending, braiding, and sequential order of funding.

**How can partners work to integrate new ideas and approaches to barrier resolution, including, but not limited to, digital equity and education?**

Ed Faver, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, his team has point person in the bursar office at various educational institutions.

Gail Driscoll, Josephine's Place has connections with the local colleges and universities.

**How can the partners facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system for individuals with disabilities?**

Samantha Pica, Family Resource Network, her organization can find out what services are available at the American Job Center but not for her clients or family members.

Walter Droz, Salvation Army, mentioned many families do not know how to get services or could not get access for services but he hopes more people will highlight these services.

**What can the American Job Center (One Stop Center) do to ensure access to the following;**

- **Use of technology, including virtual and adaptive technologies, to support access**
- **Physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities**
- **Specialized programs and services**
- **Materials for individuals with disabilities and those with other barriers**

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Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired mentioned the goal for their program is to ensure the American Job Centers are accessible and all consumers who walk into the One Stop can receive services that are accommodating.

**Please describe how the client's voice is and will be included in local efforts.**

Ed Faver, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, issues satisfaction surveys.

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, Inroads to Opportunity, mentioned the State Rehabilitation Council issues surveys but the response rate is really low and they are not able to determine what they can enhance or address. Need to find other ways to capturing clients voice especially for those who leave the program.

Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired include a feedback satisfaction survey and focus groups but not too many participate.

**How can Union County expand access to supportive services for individuals with disabilities?**

Sandra Lynch, Community Access Unlimited, many people don't know how to access supportive services.

Tina Lopez, Division of Social Service, there are many homebound individuals and we should do outreach to those people who are not able to get access to digital tools. Need to offer them services where they are since everything is done online some people don't know how to access those items.

**What are some lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, what actions have been taken, and how/whether they will be maintained?**

Amanda Gerson, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, they were able to maintain most of their services virtually, realized more things can be done virtually, a lot of people prefer virtual services and there are still people who fear Covid. Keeping the option for virtual instruction is important moving forward. If it is the consumers choice to do virtual then they will continue to do it. A lot of vendors were still offering services in person. Individuals had the technology to work remotely.

Gail Driscoll, Josephine's Place, they didn't have the ability to work remotely and June of 2020 they did summer hours and more small scale personal one on one. In person services were spread out. They lost a lot of staff and couldn't offer

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certain things such as computer training. Women didn't have capabilities in their own home due to lack of technology.

Adam Kuber, Arc of New Jersey, mentioned his organization learned a lot of positive things because a lot of participants were rising to the occasion because they were able to enhance services. Supplement services such as give people a quick video call before an interview to make sure the client was ready. His program never really shut down, they were meeting with people outside instead of inside. Staff learned to be more flexible and more creative. Force people to do things with technology that they resisted in the past.

**How can we expand the implementation of a variety of work-based learning opportunities and programs, including Incumbent Worker Training, On-the-Job Training, Transitional Jobs, Pre-Apprenticeship, and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities?**

Perle Almeida, American Job Center has been providing employers more information and now refer clients to the business team on how to expand work base learning trainings.

Adam Kuber, Arc of New Jersey, there are a lot of problems setting up trial work experience. Due to the fact that many staff have resigned they do not have access to higher ups. All of the managers left and it is hard to develop a pipeline of employers to hire people. They have lost almost all their trial work experience. They have to start at square one.

Walter Droz, Salvation Army, they had clients doing work experience and then they had to educate their other employees on working with someone with a disability. Example of this was a client who didn't want to wear shoes and they had to help their other staff understand why the client didn't want to wear shoes.

Ed Faver, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, attended manager's meeting and found that counselor work is no longer success by statistics but success by quality. Their rehabilitative rate has been dropped by 33%. Their staff will probably have to do more ground level work and focus on employers.

Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide on the next steps in the strategic plan process. Meeting was adjourned.