ePolicyWorks
Partners in Disability & Employment

Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue

October 5 – 30, 2020
Final Summary Report

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Introduction

Background

In celebration of the 75th observance of *National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)*, the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) hosted the *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue* to learn how job developers are helping people with disabilities obtain competitive integrated employment during times of increased health risks and unemployment.

The dialogue was divided into three topic areas including: 1) Addressing health risks; 2) Balancing self-determination and health; and 3) Addressing increased unemployment. Visitors to the dialogue were asked to contribute ideas on each topic, as well as to comment and vote on ideas submitted by others.

This national online dialogue provided an innovative opportunity for individuals with disabilities, family members, advocates, employment specialists, vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors, job coaches, employers, state and local government officials, and other stakeholders to play a key role in informing ODEP's efforts to ensure individuals with disabilities are able to participate fully in our economy.

During this month-long national online dialogue, 132 stakeholder participants shared 35 ideas on competitive integrated employment and posted 131 comments and 157 votes. Moving forward, ODEP will use the results of the online dialogue to inform its efforts to support individuals with disabilities obtain and retain competitive integrated employment.

Online Dialogue Topics

The *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue* included three different campaigns by topic area.

1. **Addressing health risks**
   Under this campaign, ODEP asked dialogue participants to submit suggested strategies or best practices they have used to address potential COVID-19 health risks when developing job opportunities for people with disabilities. In addition, they asked for ideas on what role and/or specific supports employment specialists, VR counselors, job coaches, and/or employers should offer.

2. **Balancing self-determination and health**
   Under this campaign, ODEP asked stakeholders to share ideas about what ideas, suggested strategies, or best practices they have used to navigate between supporting

people with disabilities' self-determination while protecting their health.

3. **Addressing increased unemployment**
   Under this campaign, ODEP asked dialogue participants to share ideas about what ideas, suggested strategies, or best practices they had to help job seekers with disabilities obtain jobs during times of increased unemployment.
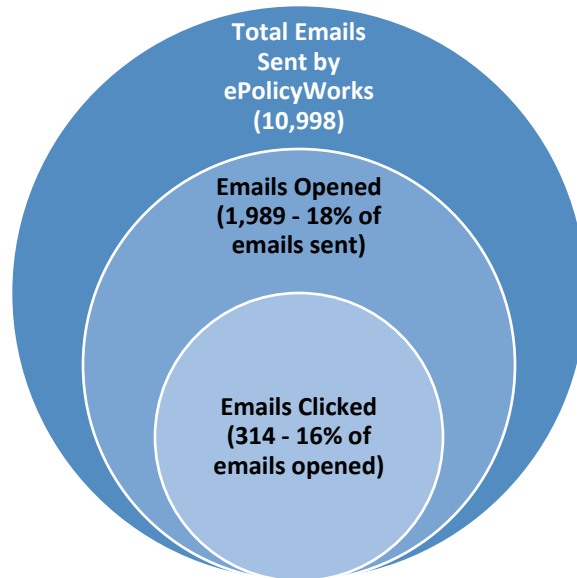
Outreach Efforts

The *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue* asked individuals with disabilities, family members, advocates, employment specialists, VR counselors, job coaches, employers, state and local government officials, and other stakeholders to share their ideas and take part in the important discussion around supporting American workers with disabilities. In order to ensure a wide range of participants, ePolicyWorks conducted numerous strategic outreach efforts, including distributing targeted eblasts and social media posts. ePolicyWorks sent eblasts to the registrants of the ePolicyWorks community, including participants of past dialogues hosted by the LEAD Center, as well as to advocacy groups, providers, and organizations that represent individuals with disabilities, state and local government officials, and other key stakeholders including representatives from Project Search sites, local ARCs, and Independent Community Living organizations across the country. ODEP promoted the dialogue to their constituents via their weekly newsletter at the launch of the dialogue and throughout the campaign and advertised the dialogue during two Employment First Communities of Practice webinars (on October 7, 2020 and October 20, 20200.

ePolicyWorks Outreach Efforts
- Email Campaigns: 6 (dialogue launch, return to the dialogue, special invitation, dialogue extended, last chance, last day)

- Number of Different Targeted Emails: 14

- Emails Delivered: 10,998

- Emails Opened: 1,989

- Total number of clicks on links in emails (excluding multiple clicks of the same link): 314

Total Emails Sent by ePolicyWorks (10,998)

Emails Opened (1,989 - 18% of emails sent)

Emails Clicked (314 - 16% of emails opened)

- Number of @ePolicyWorks impressions of online dialogue promotions: 3,109 (from 12 online dialogue promotion tweets)

- Of the 2,809 visits to the dialogue, 273 visits, or approximately 10% of the total traffic to the online dialogue, came from social media.

- Distribution of source of social media traffic to the online dialogue:

    o Facebook: 67%
    o LinkedIn: 21%
    o Twitter: 10%
    o Google Groups: 2%

Social Media Traffic to the Dialogue

Google Groups 2%

Twitter 10%

LinkedIn 21%
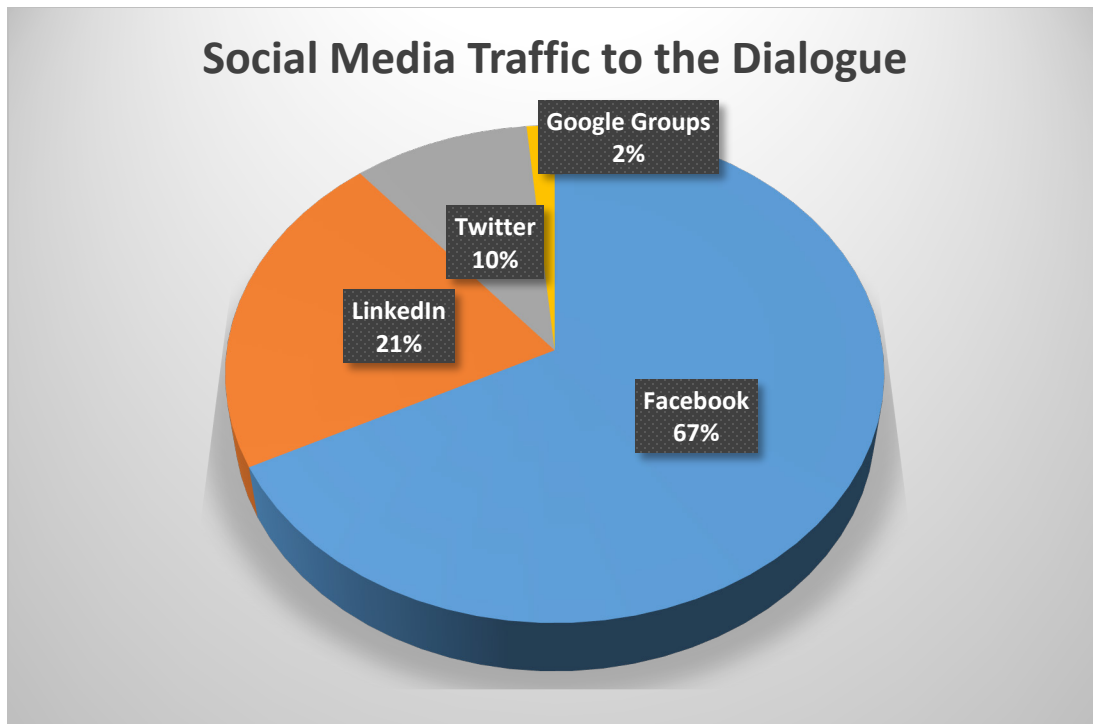
Facebook 67%

Independent Online Dialogue Promotion

Over the course of the online dialogue, many organizations promoted the online dialogue through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, emails, blogs, newsletters, and action alerts. Below is a sampling of the organizations that published details regarding the online event:

- Apprenticeship Blog
- Campaign for Disability Employment (CDE)
- JAN (Job Accommodation Network)
- The Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS) for Adult Educators
- LSUHSC Human Development Center
- Mid-Atlantic ADA Center
- PATH Project (federally funded Parent Training & Information Center in Texas)
- Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association
- Via of the Lehigh Valley
- Wisconsin APSE
- Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
- Virginia Tech

Online Dialogue Participant Summary

The *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue* opened for participation on October 5, 2020 and closed at the end of the day on October 30, 2020. Detailed below is the information on the contributions to the dialogue – ideas, comments and votes, along with the number of online dialogue visits*, registrants, participation rates, location of registrants, and profile information provided by registrants during the registration process. The number of comments includes moderator comments.

Total Contributions to the Online Dialogue

Total number of ideas in the online dialogue: 39

- Ideas in the Addressing Health Risks Campaign: 15
- Ideas in the Balancing Self-Determination and Health Campaign: 9
- Ideas in the Addressing Increased Unemployment Campaign: 15

Total number of comments in the online dialogue: 131

- Comments in the Addressing Health Risks Campaign: 40
- Comments in the Balancing Self-Determination and Health Campaign: 29
- Comments in the Addressing Increased Unemployment Campaign: 62

Total number of votes in the online dialogue: 161

- Votes in the Addressing Health Risks Campaign: 64
- Votes in the Balancing Self-Determination and Health Campaign: 32
- Votes in the Addressing Increased Unemployment Campaign: 65

Total Visits and Visitors during the Online Dialogue

Information on the visits to the online dialogue

- Total unique visits to the online dialogue: 2,809
- Total page views: 11,297
- Average pages views per visit: 2.92
- Average visit duration (minutes): 2:52
- Bounce rate (percentage of visitor who leave after viewing the first page of the online dialogue): 50.01%

Information on the visitors to the online dialogue

- Total unique visitors*: 2,796
- Average number of sessions per visitor: 1.38
- Returning visitors: 12.1%
- Total number of visitors who completed the registration: 138 (5% of unique visitors)

- Total number of registrants who participated**: 45 (33% of registrants)

*Visitors are all individuals who have viewed the online dialogue. This includes individuals who did not completed the registration process.

**"Participation" includes registering and submitting ideas, comments, or votes to the dialogue's online platform.

Self-Reported State Affiliation of the 132 Online Dialogue Registrants

State	Total Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
California	11	8.3%
New York	10	7.6%
Florida	10	7.6%
Colorado	8	6.1%
Maryland	7	5.3%
Wisconsin	7	5.3%
District of Columbia	6	4.5%
Virginia	5	3.8%
Arkansas	4	3.0%
Illinois	4	3.0%
Michigan	4	3.0%
North Carolina	4	3.0%
Iowa	4	3.0%
Washington	3	2.3%
Connecticut	3	2.3%
South Carolina	3	2.3%
Louisiana	3	2.3%
Alabama	3	2.3%
Texas	2	1.5%
Pennsylvania	2	1.5%
Massachusetts	2	1.5%
Ohio	2	1.5%
Minnesota	2	1.5%
Rhode Island	2	1.5%
Oregon	2	1.5%
Kansas	2	1.5%
Oklahoma	2	1.5%
New Hampshire	2	1.5%
Montana	2	1.5%
North Dakota	2	1.5%
Maine	2	1.5%
Georgia	1	0.8%
Missouri	1	0.8%
Nevada	1	0.8%
Alaska	1	0.8%
Idaho	1	0.8%
U.S. Territories	2	1.5%

Roles	Total Number of Participants	Percentage of Registrants (132)
Employment specialist	57	43%
Advocate	52	39%
Person with a disability	32	24%
Educator	26	20%
Job coach	24	18%
Vocational rehabilitation counselor	22	17%
Employer	15	11%
Other	50	38%

Percentage of Registrants (132)
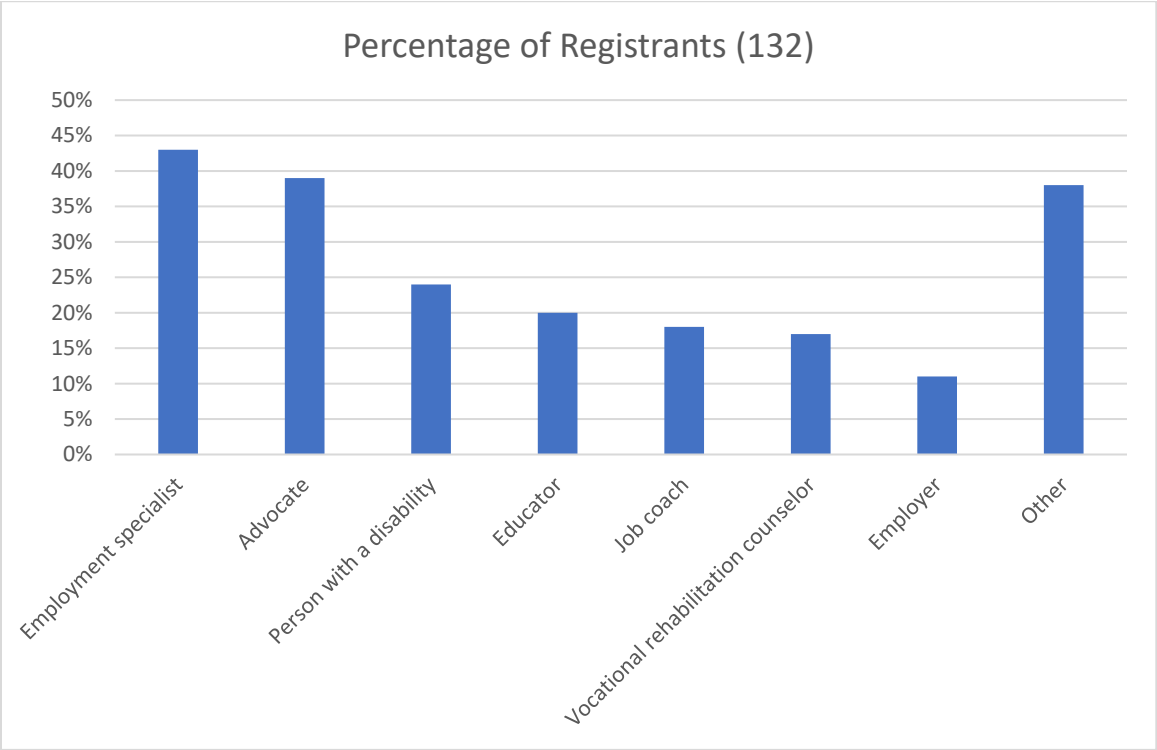
In addition to state affiliation and role, individuals were asked to share their geographical region from the following: city, rural, suburban, frontier and other. Many participants from the same state identified with different geographical regions. Below is a graph of the regions that participants identified:

Geographical Region

Frontier 0.00%
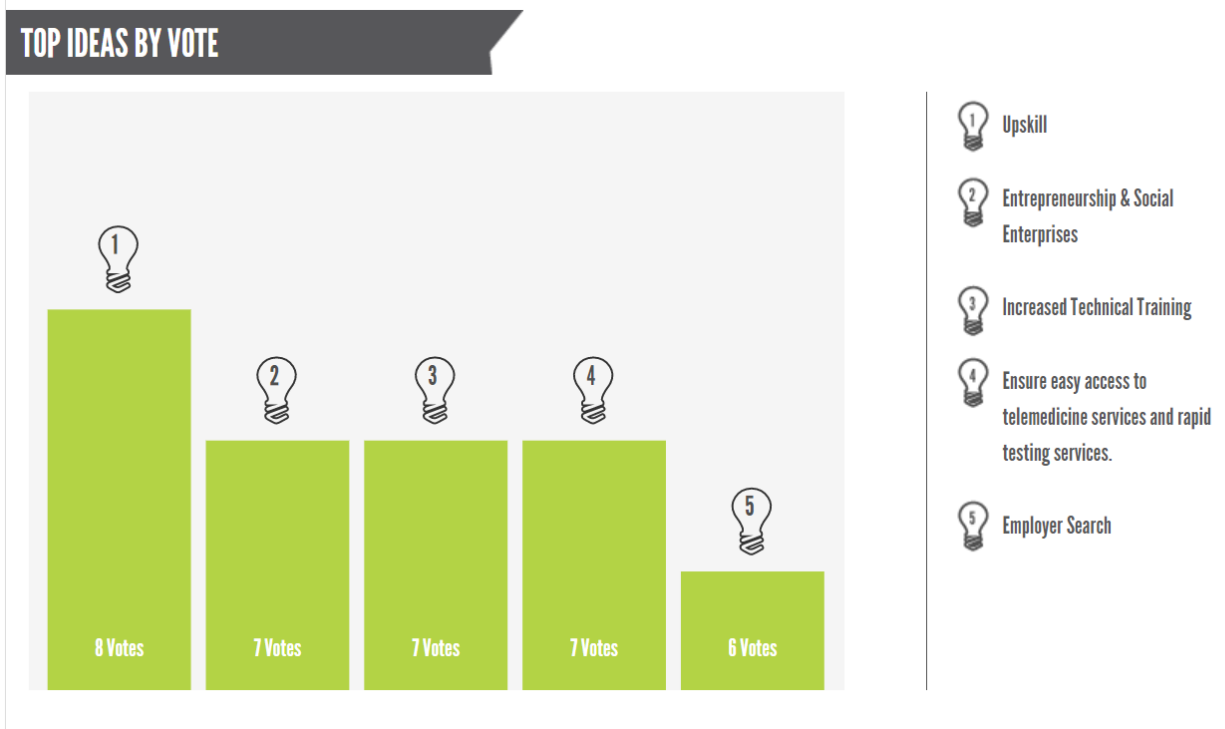Suburban 23.19%
City 38.41%
Rural 36.23%
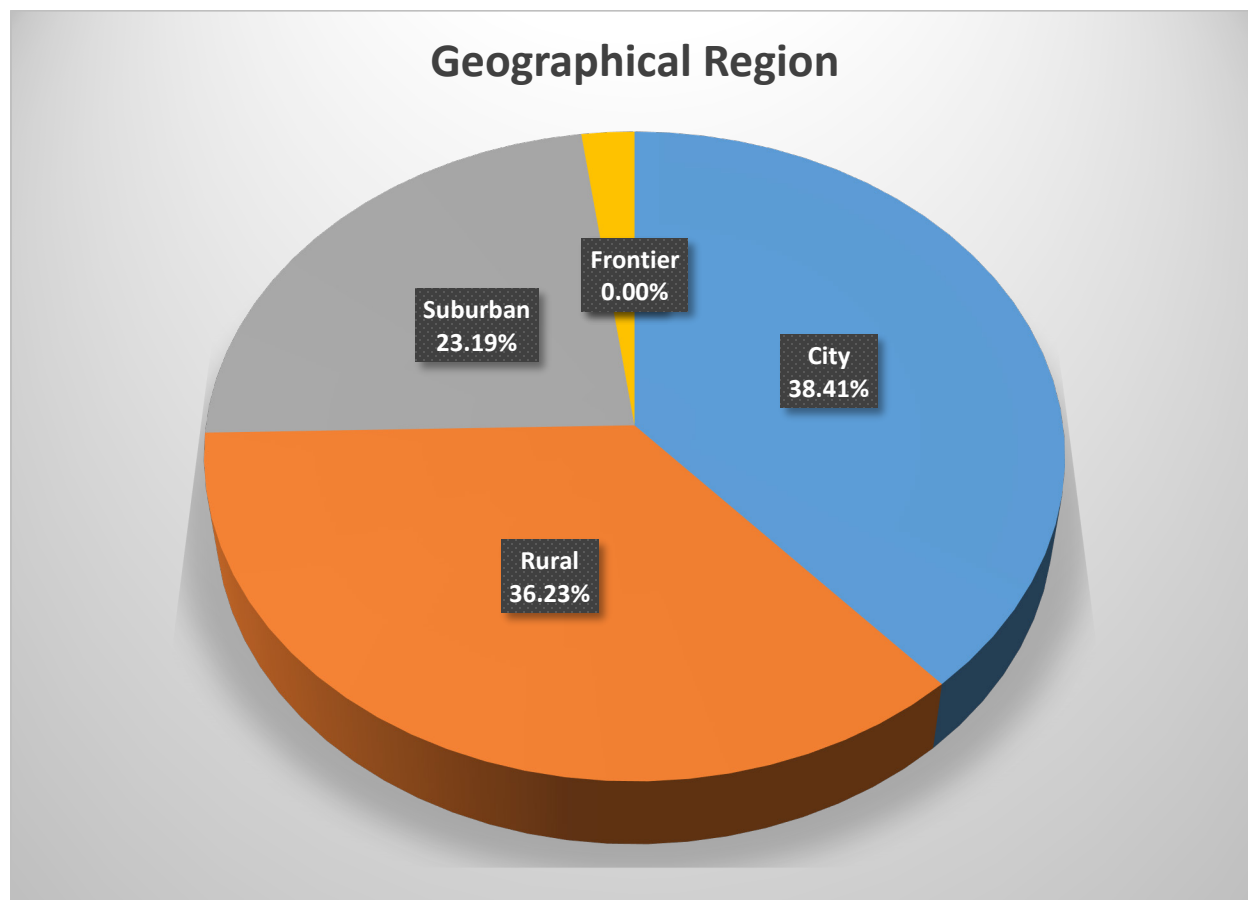
Review and Analysis of Online Dialogue Contributions

Over the course of the *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue*, participants from across the U.S. shared thought-provoking and innovative suggestions and recommendations on ways job developers could help people with disabilities obtain competitive integrated employment during times of increased health risks and unemployment. The range and depth of the ideas submitted and discussed during the online dialogue demonstrates the immense value of engaging stakeholders in collaboration efforts. Individuals with disabilities, their family members, educators, advocates, employment specialists, employers, job coaches, VR counselors, and others jointly contributed 35 ideas, 131 comments, and 157 votes to the dialogue. Based on these contributions, several themes emerged as key ideas among the stakeholders in the discussion around supporting continued competitive integrated employment opportunities.

Top Ideas by Vote

Below are the five top ideas by vote from the *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue*.

The ideas with the associated comments listed in the following section include minor typographical corrections, which have in no way impacted the substance or the intention of the revised posts.

TOP IDEAS BY VOTE

1 Upskill

2 Entrepreneurship & Social Enterprises

3 Increased Technical Training

4 Ensure easy access to telemedicine services and rapid testing services.

5 Employer Search

1 — 8 Votes
2 — 7 Votes
3 — 7 Votes
4 — 7 Votes
5 — 6 Votes

<u>Upskill</u>
Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment
8 Up Votes
Comments: 2
Followers: 3

Use this time to focus on upskilling of job seekers. Encourage professional development classes, ask job seekers to become familiar with more job search engines/sites, obtain a credential or a certificate, or go to school to position themselves for employment as more opportunities or different lines of opportunities become available.

> <u>Comment 1:</u>
>
> Abby (Moderator)
>
> I agree, I also think we should pay attention to what jobs are going away and share tools with our job seekers such as https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/visualizing-vulnerable-jobs-across-america/ that show the number of vulnerable jobs in areas across the country.
>
> https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/visualizing-vulnerable-jobs-across-america
>
> This tool shows sector-by-sector breakdowns of vulnerable workers in local economies in the United States.
>
> <u>Comment 2:</u>
>
> I agree as well! Thank you-never thought of this.

<u>Entrepreneurship & Social Enterprises</u>
Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment
7 Up Votes
Comments: 3
Followers: 3

During this time of COVID-19, many families are re-thinking traditional employment options for their adult children with special needs.

Unicorn Children's Foundation is hosting a virtual conference December 3-5 to promote special needs focused entrepreneurship and social enterprises, and we would like to spread the word to families and individuals within the special needs community. The Creative Workforce Solutions Summit will individuals and families the tools needed to start or grow a business. Successful businesses will share keys to success and needs of special needs focused businesses will be addressed. The Summit will create a community of collaboration and support, while enabling

opportunities of creative workforce solutions for individuals with special needs during this unprecedented time. Please see more information about the Creative Workforce Solutions Summit here: https://www.unicornchildrensfoundation.org/virtualconference.html.

We are also looking for partners interested in selling their handcrafted items on the Uniquely Gifted Boutique© Etsy store. The Unicorn Children's Foundation looks to provide the tools and technology resources that will bring together a marketplace of talented artisans, all looking to support the mission of providing opportunities for individuals with special needs. We welcome all entrepreneurs with unique abilities as well as entrepreneurs looking to support our mission. To learn more about the Uniquely Gifted Boutique© Etsy store, please see:
https://www.unicornchildrensfoundation.org/ugb.html

Comment 1:

Abby (Moderator)

This is great. Did the idea come before COVID or as a result of the changing labor market and concerns about health? Will there be a portion of virtual supports?

Comment 2:

Although self-employment and social enterprises have always been great topics, we did create the conference with the changing labor market and health concerns in mind. We feel that the discussion of non-traditional employment solutions will be very timely for individuals and their families.

Can you please give me examples of what you mean by virtual supports?

Comment 3:

Abby (Moderator)

I was wondering what tools would be available to assist someone virtually that is interested in self-employment and understanding the changing trends in virtual marketing.

Increased Technical Training
Topic 1: Addressing Health Risks
7 Up Votes
Comments: 5
Followers: 5

I have been working with several job seekers who are motivated to work, but have had to put their job searches on hold due to the health risks of working in the community. Some have

strong technical skills and are exploring opportunities to work remotely; however, some have minimal technical skills and/or the ability to pay for internet services. I think there is a great need for training that prepares individuals for remote employment. This will not only address current barriers to employment, but it will provide new opportunities for individuals to enter the workforce in the future. A comprehensive, virtual training program that covers the technical skills necessary to compete in the remote job market could be an extremely valuable resource for many.

<u>Comment 1:</u>

Abby (Moderator)

I think one thing COVID has pointed out is that we need to assist people having the skills and supports to work remotely. I love the idea of a virtual training program that covers the technical skills but I also think we need to figure out how to close the digital divide that so many people experience. How does your state support funding for computers or internet services when a person does not have an individual plan for employment?

<u>Comment 2:</u>

Jackie (Moderator)

Thanks for sharing this great idea! It would be great to have more opportunities for remote work that doesn't require a lot of technical skills. What kind of jobs could be developed?

<u>Comment 3:</u>

Abby (Moderator)

I think you are right there is a need for remote jobs that do not require a lot of technical skills. I know some customer service positions and phone banks are having employees work remotely. I think we need to think in terms of tasks within a given industry in order to develop a new type of job. Basically, what tasks that are done remotely would improve the employer's bottom line? I also wonder if more thought needs to be given to self-employment.

I love the idea of supplying the equipment as a reasonable accommodation. But I wonder if sometimes it may not even be a reasonable accommodation, I know when my husband's college went to remote learning professors were provided with the additional equipment they needed to teach. So, if a business is moving to remote work wouldn't it be their responsibility or at least in their best interest to provide the necessary equipment?

<u>Comment 4:</u>

Yes, I would think that the employer would provide the equipment as a given so that the individual can do the job correctly especially if the employer is using specific software applications. But for those cases that the employer does not provide temporary equipment access to the new employee, the disabled individual can possibly ask for the equipment and be listed as a request under reasonable accommodation, as a possible means to obtain the equipment. Don't know if the employer would go for this approach, but it wouldn't hurt to try.

Comment 5:

I think that this is on target. The issue that I have with those who want to work a remote job, is that they don't have the right or current equipment to do the job. They don't have the money to upgrade what they currently have.

The other concern in remote jobs that they specialize in what equipment they need and also, if disabled it would be wonderful if the potential employer provides the equipment on a temporary basis for the remote position. This would be great if those employers who have contracts with the government that receives a monetary incentive to hire disabled individuals to provide the equipment as a part of reasonable accommodation, in addition, to providing new employee training remotely to teach the skills he/she would be using on the remote job.

Ensure easy access to telemedicine services and rapid testing services.
Topic 1: Addressing Health Risks
7 Up Votes
Comments: 1
Followers: 2

Ensure easy access to telemedicine services for employees at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. With everything going virtual, employers need to ensure that their employees with and without disabilities can readily access telemedicine services. This is especially the case if people are regularly risking exposure to the virus.

Easy access to rapid COVID-19 testing needs to be prioritized for essential workers and within that category, workers with elevated risks of deadly consequences for this disease. In other countries, ready, easy access to rapid testing for COVID-19 has been critical to returning life back to something close to pre-pandemic normal. The U.S. is not there yet but when it gets closer to having rapid testing capacity, there needs to be a risk assessment among essential workers.

Comment 1:

Abby (Moderator)

A risk assessment would be a great asset to people with and without disabilities in choosing the safest course.

Employer Search

Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment

6 Up Votes

Comments: 5

Followers: 2

I have joined bi-weekly virtual Chamber meetings to network with local employers. It is helpful to make connections with decision-makers who are not familiar with Vocational Rehabilitation. I also use Labor Market Information to identify industries that are hiring.

Comment 1:

Jackie (Moderator)

That's great! Did you attend chamber meetings prior to COVID? I can imagine that the virtual platform makes it a bit easier to attend.

Comment 2:

Yes, the teleconferencing is much more practical. I also have participated in one-on-one virtual meetings with chamber members.

Comment 3:

Great. I also have found teleconferencing to be very practical and a great networking opportunity.

Comment 4:

Abby (Moderator)

Do you think the virtual chamber meetings will continue after COVID? How does networking occur in the virtual meetings?
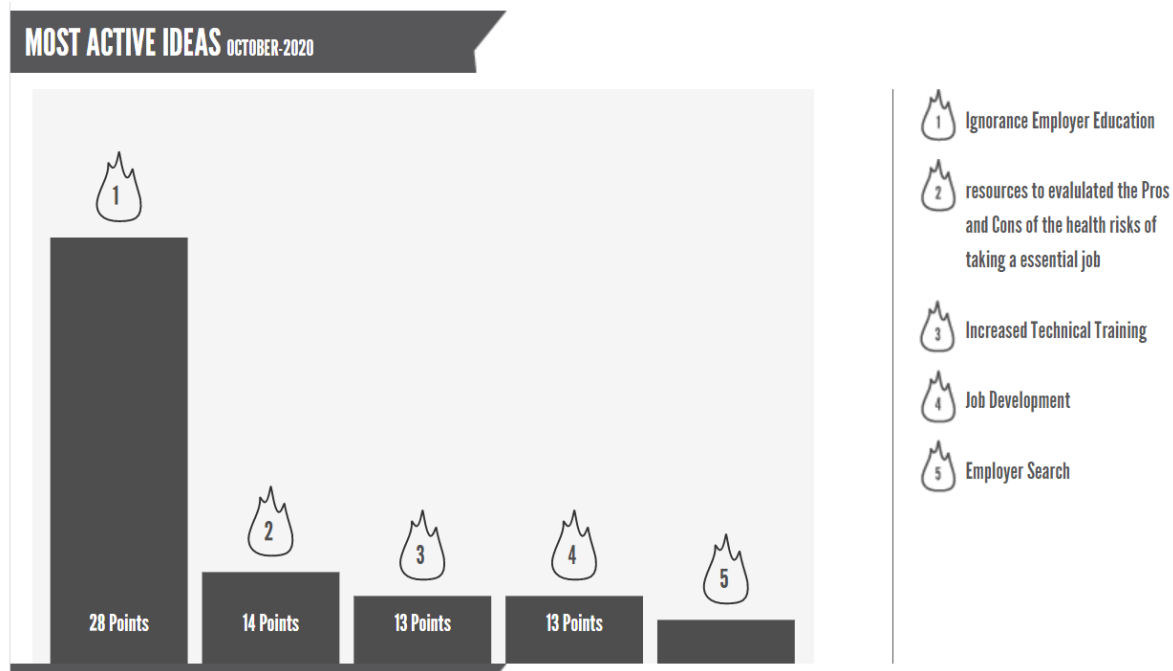
Comment 5:

I would like to ask a question? Are the meetings with the Chamber of Commerce opening or providing job opportunities for your candidates? Curious about your results.

Most Active Ideas

Below are the most active ideas from the *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue*. Most active is determined based on the idea's total number of views, comments, votes, and followers over the course of the dialogue.

Two of the most active ideas, **Increased Technical Training**, and **Employer Search** were also the top ideas by vote. See the Top Ideas by Vote section for a full description, including comments. Below are the three other top trending ideas.

The ideas and associated comments listed in the following section include minor typographical corrections, which have in no way impacted the substance or the intention of the revised posts.

MOST ACTIVE IDEAS OCTOBER-2020

1				
	2	3	4	5
28 Points	14 Points	13 Points	13 Points	

1 Ignorance Employer Education
2 resources to evaluated the Pros and Cons of the health risks of taking a essential job
3 Increased Technical Training
4 Job Development
5 Employer Search

Ignorance Employer Education
Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment
6 Up Votes
Comments: 22
Followers: 4

I am an Employment Specialist at Social Vocational Services (supporting Oakland CA, Concord CA, & Antioch CA), a doctorate student at the University of San Francisco, studying Disabilities studies, with a focus on inclusive culture in both the academic and professional settings, and a researcher at heart. I love my job, but I can be in love with this job if there could be added support for the employer training. Here's why. The Social Model of Disabilities suggests that people who are disabled do not see themselves a disabled; it is society that imposes the labeling

of human ability, based on historical social conditioning to the true nature of human ability. It is hard to imagine a world where misconceptions of human ability are not always viewed as incompetence, even by employers.

The Problem:

Employers and organizations that provide vocational support to people with disabilities have a fundamental responsibility to create and implement systems and policies that reflect the missions and core values of their organizations; and that also reflects in their hiring and talent acquisition practices. The root problem here is employers' ignorance of the disability culture which poses greater challenges to employing more people with disabilities. Employers are just not educated, yet we run on ideologies that they are. And so, we place clients in hostile environments which they cannot navigate. We never assess the employer's climate. We never assess the education of employers.

I recognize that access to job opportunities for people with disabilities and people with a different cognitive process are still challenging today for multiple reasons. Job candidates with disabilities are discriminated against by employers based on false ideologies pertaining to human ability. One would assume that employers stand on a different platform of inclusion. However, that is not always the reality for people with disabilities in the workplace. As people, we are conditioned by our environments, and our environments shape our understandings and, ultimately, our inherent beliefs; those people include employers

Recommendation:

Administering Disability Inclusion Training to prospective employers about the DO's and the DONT's of disability work culture should be added to the roles of Employment Specialist. Or assign a designated person to conduct this training to prospective employers. I have come up with a disability inclusion "Customized Employment" training I am currently using that has been relatively effective for me. I can share it if you need it. Teaching employers and site managers who oversee the work of disabled people about how they can humanize their work experiences and create an inclusive and non-segregating space for them is essential in increasing employment for people with disabilities. Unfortunately, current culture and practice place people with disabilities in a work environment that are hostile and indifferent to their existence in the world.

Customized Employment: "Customized Employment is a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate or employee and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on identifying the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate or employee through a process of discovery. Customized Employment also identifies the business needs of an employer. Together, these create a match resulting in a customized position"

Thank you

Comment 1:

Jackie (Moderator)

Thanks for sharing! What do you specifically talk about in the disability inclusion training for employers? Have you added any information into it that is specific to COVID health risks? Many people with disabilities are at higher risk of contracting COVID and experiencing worse outcomes from the virus. I wonder if there's opportunity to include that. Thank you!

Comment 2:

I am the ED of an organization that provides both customized employment supports for people with I/DD and runs a capacity building project aimed at educating local employers about the employing people with disabilities - the benefits, myths, etc. This project is in response to our state (IL) adopting an Employment First policy. We've still struggled to fully engage employers and have definitely experienced the issue that many of you bring up - that as human service professionals we often don't understand the needs of businesses, and vice versa. We've had an ongoing debate about if we should use an approach that emphasizes community support for inclusive hiring practices or a more monetary based emphasis that underscores how being a flexible employer and creating customized jobs can benefit the productively of the business.

I would be very excited to see the training that you are using and to hear about if it has helped to address these issues. The issues that you bring up in your comment, and likely your research seem very much aligned with the dialogs we're having in our community!

Comment 3:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks for your comments. I think you bring up an important point in light of COVID. What are organizations doing to truly understand what businesses are facing with COVID? Has anyone set up a mentoring program with businesses, or a short internship for staff with the business to learn the issues or another approach that assists you to gain more information?

Comment 4:

Amazing! As an I/O Psychologist and consultant in this realm, company culture is the foundation, and you are spot on! Would love to view your Customized Employment training. :)

Comment 5:

Abby (Moderator)

Thank you for your comments. I think our current climate calls for Customized Employment. Prior to COVID large companies were already doing customized Employment for their valued employees, they just called it job sculpting or look at David Smith and Susan Cantrell's book Workforce of One. I think COVID is forcing most employers large and small to rethink how they do business. Customized Employment is certainly part of an effective solution. I am happy to talk to you about Customized Employment training offline.

Comment 6:

Abby (Moderator)

Thank you for your comments. There are many groups in connection with the business community focusing on educating employers on the importance and benefits of inclusion. SHRM for example has excellent information and training. But I am not aware of any focus on COVID and employing PWD. I was wondering how your or anyone's thoughts on how COVID has impacted Employers' concerns or biases on hiring individuals with disabilities.

Comment 7:

Hi Amy, from my experience, it is not that employers are even giving it a thought. Which in my opinion is the problem? PWDs are not thought of with regards to COVID at all in my experience from the employer's side sans those special employers who truly want to hire from our Community. Without organizations dealing with disability employment continuing to bring it into the forefront, our Community would be an afterthought. Federal Contractors continue their hiring initiatives because of the OFCCP guidelines otherwise it would be a "Free for all" but I haven't noticed any change from COVID/PreCOVID except for the months of March and April and they started hiring again in May.

Non-Federal Contractor hiring is down as far as we can tell from our site.

Comment 8:

YESSS...more employer education. If employers understand the benefits of "Customized Employment" and could ascertain the multiple ways they can utilize our services through this pandemic, we all could be beneficiaries of this process.

Comment 9:

Good point. What are some strategies to better educate employers?

Comment 10:

Our organization disABLEDperson, Inc. with our partnership with CSAVR on the Talent Acquisition Portal has virtual job fair functionality. We are in the process of creating

video job fairs and video resumes. We will have a trial run in the next month or so. With regard to training, we are offering training in Microsoft products through the Microsoft Imagine Academy to the state Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation as a free public service.

Comment 11:

I love this...thank you.

Comment 12:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks for your comments. Does anyone have any ideas on how to bring this important issue to the forefront of employers' thoughts? It seems that the disability community has a lot of tools that could assist employers from the knowledge of AT to improving the workflow by realigning tasks, to creative problem-solving. How are people connecting the dots for employers so they understand how your expertise can be a useful asset to them meeting their bottom line during COVID?

Comment 13:

Abby (Moderator)

Your partnership with Talent Acquisition Portal and its virtual job fair function sounds amazing. There is such a digital divide it is really good news that you are offering training through the Microsoft Imagine Academy. How can people find out more about the Talent Portal and training?

Comment 14:

Jackie (Moderator)

Thanks for sharing! What do you specifically talk about in the disability inclusion training for employers? Have you added any information into it that is specific to COVID health risks? Many people with disabilities are at higher risk of contracting COVID and experiencing worse outcomes from the virus. I wonder if there's opportunity to include that. Thank you!

Comment 15:

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Comment 16:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks for your comments. I think you bring up an important in light of COVID. What are organizations doing to truly understand what businesses are facing with COVID? Has anyone set up a mentoring program with businesses, or a short internship for staff with the business to learn the issues or another approach that assists you to gain more information?

Comment 17:

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Comment 18:

Abby (Moderator)

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Comment 19:

Our organization has been dealing with disability employment since 2002. The employment of people with disabilities has always been a challenge. During the time of this pandemic, it has become more challenging. There is a couple of reasons for it.

1) Fear! There is a large group of PWD who are immune compromised. Many in our Community do not want to leave their homes. That greatly reduces the job pool for them. Traveling on public transportation is no longer an option for many in our

Community to travel to work. This is hard to combat. Fear is not easily tamed. That leads us to reason #2

2) So many jobs have become remote. Working from home has always been a preference for many that we work with. Now that there is a new normal and so many people are working remotely. The competition for remote work has skyrocketed. I'm not just talking about the remote work that occurred as a consequence of the pandemic but jobs that were remote prior to the pandemic.

A major challenge that we face is preparing our Community for video hiring events and video resumes not to mentions for some teaching them to navigate the Internet. Another issue here is dealing with closed captioning, creating live events. There is a technology issue not only for our Community but for job developers as well. In my opinion, DOL should give grants to 501(c)(3) organizations who are attempting to combat this.

3) Crossing educational and experience barriers. There are so many people that are unemployed at the moment that highly educated and skilled individuals whether disabled or not are taking any job they can find thus making it more difficult to find work for people in our Community who have minimal education and skills. Given this, we are also working on offering marketable job skills to those in our Community who are in need. Of course, this needs to be virtual as well. Again, empowering 501(c)(3) organizations with grants to update marketable job skills will help tremendously.

Comment 20:

Abby (Moderator)

Mike, thank you for your comment. I do believe there is a need to rethink funding and how we support virtual efforts and training. Does anyone have examples of how they have tackled the very real issue of high competition for remote jobs? How are people addressing the complex issue around fear?

Comment 21:

Yes, as well as educating employers on "Customized Employment" and the various ways they can support job development and training for people with disabilities in the workplace tremendously.

Comment 22:

Abby (Moderator)

Thank you for your comments. There are many groups in connection with the business community focusing on educating employers on the importance and benefits of inclusion. SHRM for example has excellent information and training. But I am not aware of any focus on COVID and employing PWD. I was wondering how your or anyone's

thoughts on how COVID has impacted Employers' concerns or biases on hiring individuals with disabilities.

Resources to evaluate the Pros and Cons of the health risks of taking an essential job

Topic 1: Addressing Health Risks

6 Up Votes

Comments: 8

Followers: 4

Submitted by Abby (Moderator)

Many people with disabilities work essential jobs, use public transportation to get to their job, or have underlying conditions. These factors increase the risk of exposure to COVID. How are you helping job seekers navigate the decision of accepting a job or to continue to work the job?

Comment 1:

ODEP Moderator 33

I wonder which resources (in addition to the more obvious ones) workers have found themselves turning to again and again when weighing the prospective health risks of essential jobs.

Comment 2:

Since each person's situation is unique, our recommendation through the pandemic is to have a conversation with their primary care provider regarding their risk. We then plan based on the health care provider's recommendation.

Comment 3:

ODEP Moderator 33

That makes sense. Thanks for sharing your approach.

Comment 4:

That is a great way to go about it.

Comment 5:

Abby (Moderator)

How receptive have you found job seekers to allow you to have conversations with their primary care provider? Who pays for those conversations? Has anyone created a tool for job seekers to have their own conversations with their primary care provider?

Comment 6:

I vote "NO!" to having a job seeker to allow anyone talk directly to their PCP. Unless the job seeker is unable to proactively process the information from their PCP then a family member or someone authorized to share private information can share information collected for a specific question or recommendation. There are strict privacy laws encompassing medical information and how it is shared.

Comment 7:

ODEP Moderator 33

That is a very good point. The job seeker MUST be included in conversations with PCPs and they MUST know beforehand what will be discussed. (Of course, they must also be given the option to bow out.) Every individual and every workplace is different with regard with to their comfort levels with regard to what is shared.

Comment 8:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks for your comment. Has anyone created a tool on what are the issues a job seeker should consider when talking to their doctor about COVID risk?

Job Development
Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment
5 Up Votes
Comments: 8
Followers: 2

During the pandemic, I have been working with my local chamber of commerce for job development. I have attended many virtual events through Zoom which allows me to speak to a large group of businesses at once. Through this networking, I have been able to connect with more businesses and organizations. While it does not always open the door to employment, it gets our foot in the crack! Would love to hear what other organizations are doing.

Comment 1:

Abby (Moderator)

Did you find that virtual events allowed you to access more companies? And perhaps some that you would not have in normal times? Thank you for your comment.

Comment 2:

It does give me the opportunity to speak to so many more potential employers and all at once. If there is one positive take away from all of this, being able to network in this manner is certainly one positive outcome. I keep a master list of contacts in the community and networking this way has allowed me to expand my potential employer pool. I am hopeful this networking will continue even after the pandemic.

Comment 3:

Abby (Moderator)

That is great. I was thinking it would be a way to build useful contacts and expand connections. I too hope it continues. Anyone else finding the virtual events useful?

Comment 4:

Abby (Moderator)

That is wonderful. I hope so too. How are others using virtual platforms for employer outreach?

Comment 5:

When it comes to funding we should incentivize VOC REHAB, Medicaid and states to develop ways to pay for this and get BIG TECH Companies to invest billions in closing the digital divide with low income, disabled, seniors and other disenfranchised groups.   We also must force TECH COMPANIES to make websites accessible

Let's create a TAX Credit for tech access for disabled or a disabled worker credit that can allow us to deduct the cost of technology, and other disability expenses

Comment 6:

Ben (Moderator)

These are good ideas to think about. Thanks for sharing them.

Comment 7:

Use this crisis as a way to get businesses to look at how they can do office jobs more efficiently by job carving a specific tasks to a person's strengths, Teleworking should be part of the NEW NORMAL even when this is NO longer an active pandemic. Working from home saves time and $ on travel, and office space.

Comment 8:

Ben (Moderator)

I agree. Teleworking has allowed me to do my current internship.

Most Popular Ideas

Below are the two most popular ideas from each of the *Job Developing for People with Disabilities during Times of Increased Unemployment Online Dialogue's* three topic areas. Most popular is determined based on the idea's total number up votes, comments, and followers at the conclusion of the dialogue.

The ideas and associated comments listed in the following section include minor typographical corrections, which have in no way impacted the substance or the intention of the revised posts.

Most Popular Ideas from Topic 1: Addressing Health Risks

1. **Increased Technical Training** *(the full description of this idea can be found under [Top Ideas by Vote](#))*
   7 Up Votes
   Comments: 5
   Followers: 5

2. **Ensure easy access to telemedicine services and rapid testing services** *(the full description of this idea can be found under [Top Ideas by Vote](#))*
   7 Up Votes
   Comments: 1
   Followers: 2

Most Popular Ideas from Topic 2: Balancing Self-Determination and Health

1. **Including health risk assessment as part of the job search plan**
   5 Up Votes
   Comments: 5
   Followers: 1

   I have heard from some Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programs that they are including health risk assessment as part of the job search planning. Along with looking at the client's level of COVID risk, employment specialists are also paying attention to COVID safety practices of employers during job development and sharing that information with their clients. I'm curious to hear how providers are navigating this!

   > Comment 1:
   >
   > We have actually performed proper technique training to maintain safety for those of our clients that have returned to their places of employment. I have also explored other options for those who are wanting to work but not able or willing to go back out. With the way things have been the online business is expanding and working from home still provides an income and is gainful employment.

Comment 2:

Jackie (Moderator)

Thanks for sharing! I love that you are providing that kind of safety coaching and helping people explore work from home options. Have you had any instances where there was disagreement about someone's plan because of safety reasons? How are those disagreements getting worked out?

Comment 3:

ODEP Moderator 33

I also am interested in hearing about any disagreements. I assume that when/if they occur, it is the employer encouraging the worker to be more cautious, but perhaps I am wrong and it is sometime the employer "pushing" the employee/prospective employee beyond his/her comfort zone.

Comment 4:

Actually, I haven't had any issues so far, fingers crossed. One of the companies provides PPE to their employees, so that is a plus. The clients are just so excited to be back out into the community that I haven't had any compliance issues

Comment 5:

Ben (Moderator)

That is great that your clients are excited to be back in the community.

2. **Knowing It's OK to Say No-Self Advocacy**
   2 Up Votes
   Comments: 5
   Followers: 3

Normally we are encouraging our individuals to work their hardest and try new things. We are their best advocates to get the job that they want to suit their interests. In the last several months some of that has changed. Prior to pandemic we most likely encouraged our individuals to stick with a job through thick and thin. Now we have found ourselves saying it's ok to stop working if it feels too risky. To our individuals that may sound strange. We need to help people to see that sometimes the risk is greater than the reward and there will be another chance later, but health and safety is most important.

Now teaching self-advocacy skills is more important than ever. If an individual does not feel safe in the work environment, we can help them to take a look at why and decide if there is something their employer can do to help them to feel safe. We can help the individual to ask for whatever that is. By being able to self-advocate the individual gains a great deal of pride and confidence that they will have forever.

Comment 1:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks for your comment. Teaching self-advocacy and supporting people in saying no is critical. I am wondering have most people added teaching self-advocacy to their services and are funders paying for that service?

Comment 2:

Thanks for the insight. I agree that the potential employee should ask about this at the time of the interview. Or ask what is provided to the potential employee to keep him/her safe while being at work. If they don't provide any type of supportive information regarding how he/she can protect himself/herself, then I would ask could I, as the potential employee, use protection on the job site? If both answers are no, I personally would not take the position. However, it is the individual's decision and we, as an agency do not support those who take this chance without some type of protection whether the employer does not provide it or the person himself/herself does not take action to protect themselves. If this situation occurs, we have the individual sign a disclosure if they choose to take the job.

Comment 3:

Abby (Moderator)

Have many people chosen employment with no protection?

Comment 4:

I had one person who wasn't worried about it and his job was towing cars for a towing company. His response was that he would be in the tow truck by himself and the customer would either have someone pick the person up to follow him to the destination. Other than him, I definitely encouraged individuals to try applying for remote jobs first. Thank you for your inquiry and I hope that I answered your question.

Comment 5:

Abby (Moderator)

Thanks, Sandy. I don't know if his logic is correct, but it certainly makes sense.

Most Popular Ideas from Topic 3: Addressing Increased Unemployment

1. **Upskill** *(the full description of this idea can be found under [Top Ideas by Vote](#))*
   8 Up Votes
   Comments: 2
   Followers: 3

2. **Entrepreneurship & Social Enterprises** *(the full description of this idea can be found under [Top Ideas by Vote](#))*
   7 Up Votes
   Comments: 3
   Followers: 3