

Connecting Individuals With Disabilities With Meaningful Employment

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

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The overall unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is 10.1% (U.S. Dept. of Labor, Feb. 2022), and according to a report from the President's Committee for People With Intellectual Disabilities (2004), individuals with severe disabilities, such as an intellectual disability or autism, the unemployment rate fluctuates between 80-90%. It is clear that individuals with disabilities are facing a number of challenges and barriers to gaining meaningful employment. Though vocational service providers and others focus their efforts in improving employment outcomes, partners are needed in the community to make a real difference. Faith communities are natural partners in these efforts.

How a Faith Community Can Help Make Connections

There are a number of ways, both formally and informally, that a faith community and its members can assist in connecting individuals with disabilities with meaningful employment.

You've heard the saying, "It's who you know." On average, individual faith communities have 186 attendees. Many of these people are employers themselves or are connected to employers that have the potential to hire people with disabilities. To help make these connections:

- Hire people with disabilities.
- Host networking sessions or job fairs.
- Partner with nonprofits or businesses in the neighborhood that are looking for employees or volunteers. While paid employment is ideal, sometimes volunteering can lead to a paid position. It can certainly boost a resume.
- What identified needs in the community could the person provide? Could meeting those needs turn into a small business or create employment-related references?
- Talk with potential employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Employers report that their employees with disabilities model characteristics they want in all of their employees. Loyalty, gratefulness, dependability, and dedication are among the terms used to describe their employees with disabilities.

How a Faith Community Can Support Jobseekers With Disabilities

- Hire people with disabilities.
 - Offer career counseling and assessment.
 - Assist the person in identifying his or her strengths and challenges. Help to match interests with career options.
 - Offer support groups or career ministries.
 - Assist in creating resumes and cover letters.
 - Offer job training classes.
 - Offer computer access for online job searches.
 - Assist in filling out job applications.
 - Offer transportation to and from interviews.
 - Offer job shadowing/mentoring opportunities.
 - Offer support, encouragement, advice, and prayer.
- Searching for a job is stressful. There may also be financial or psychological stressors at play. Talk with the jobseeker and offer support.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, vkc.vumc.org

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website includes a directory of more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county, topic of interest, and other filters. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, TNPathfinder.org

TennesseeWorks

A statewide partnership of agencies and organizations with one goal: to increase the number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are employed in the state. Its website serves as a hub for information related to employment of people with disabilities. tennesseeworks.org

Transition Tennessee

Resources to prepare transition-age youth with disabilities for life after high school. transitiontn.org

Content for this tip sheet was based on: Carter, E. W. (2011). After the benediction: Walking alongside people with significant disabilities and their families in faith and life. *Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health*, 15, 395-413.

Other Resources

- **Empower Tennessee*** A Center for Independent Living providing information and referral, peer support, advocacy, skills training, transition services, employment readiness, benefits counseling, ADA consultations, and Braille transcription to people with disabilities. empowertennessee.org/about-us/
- **Disability Rights Tennessee*** is an agency advocating for the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities to ensure they have an equal opportunity to be productive and respected members of society. disabilityrightstn.org
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** is a source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace. askjan.org/index.html
- **My Next Move** is an online tool that provides job seekers with information on occupations, local job openings, and training opportunities. Users can search for jobs with a “bright outlook” in growing industries, jobs that are part of the “green” economy, and jobs with Registered Apprenticeship programs. www.mynextmove.org/
- **Social Security’s Ticket to Work** is a program that offers people with disabilities an opportunity to achieve greater independence by providing choices in employment services. The Ticket is a free voluntary program. choosework.ssa.gov
- **Vocational Rehabilitation*** provides a variety of individualized services to persons with disabilities in preparation for their employment in the competitive labor market. tn.gov/humanservices/ds/vocational-rehabilitation.html
- **The Arc Tennessee*** advocates for the rights and full participation of all people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. thearcctn.org

*Similar agencies present in each state.

