

## Aligning Disability Employment Efforts with Employer Hiring Needs

>> Welcome to Disabilities at Work radio, where every week we explore issues, ideas, initiative and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators, and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disability at Work.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Hello, I'm Ray Zardetto and welcome to Disabilities at Work radio here on the Voice America Business Network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disability at Work explores the issues, idea, initiatives and innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and discusses them with the prominent members of the business, government and disability communities. Disability at Work radio is brought to you this week by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, as well as the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services and Disabilities at Work radio thanks these sponsors for their consideration.

And today on our program, we are going to look at an

initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor called the National Technical Assistance and Research Center also known as NTAR, N-T-A-R, the NTAR Leadership Center, which is housed at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. And appropriately enough, my first guest today is Kathy Krepcio, who is the Executive Director of the Heldrich Center and also the Director of NTAR. And I believe she has been since 2003, is that right, Kathy?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Good. Kathy manages the NTAR Center which is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. And so welcome, Kathy, thanks for being with us.

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Thanks, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: NTAR sounds like it's quite an undertaking, so maybe you could start by just giving us a quick overview of exactly what it is, how it got started, and what it does.

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Sure, thanks. The NTAR Leadership Center was established in September 2007, as you had said, through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. Fundamentally, its mission is to build capacity and leadership at the state and local levels, mostly to enable some kind of systems change across both workforce development and disability specific systems. The goal of the center really is to fundamentally increase the employment and

economic self-sufficiency of adults with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: It is interesting; you said that you would be look trying to enable some systems changes?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Yes.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I was wondering if you could elaborate on that a little bit. What do you to mean by that?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, you know, in most states there is a variety of different kinds of systems that help people with disabilities get employed. It is your generic workforce development system, which is usually characterized by your one stop career centers called from the time names in different states. There is a vocational rehabilitations system service providers that are out there. There are, perhaps, state and local agencies that specifically serve people with developmental disabilities or with mental health challenges. And all of those various fields or factors help people with disabilities get employed, but they are in different state or local agencies. They might be in a different county or a state. And so a lot of them have to be weaved together to try and help someone with a disability and they all represent various different federal funding streams. And so a lot of work takes place at a state level to try to navigate somebody through that system. Our center tries to bring those people together as a team and help them better coordinate a delivery of services and support so somebody can get a job and stay in

that job.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So does that mean you have to kind of navigate through some of the bureaucracies at different states and different state levels to do this?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, what we try to do is we try to work with teams from states to help them navigate themselves and coordinate themselves. And really that is at the center what we do. We are really trying to support state and local leaders to be those change agents out there to maybe navigate the bureaucracy, or change a policy, or educate some providers, or educate people with disabilities about the benefits of working as well as the supports and services they can. So we are really there to support state folks and state officials in making the kinds of changes they need to provide employment and help people become more self-sufficient.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And so you take this from a national view almost because you are going into the states, but do you have to approach each state differently? Is it different to work with, say, um, you know, Minnesota than it would be to work with Texas on this, or some other state?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Absolutely, because you know every state is unique. Every state has some strong leaders. Every state has some states where there is not strong leadership. States have different laws and policies and operations and configurations. So one state might have a great relationship between their

vocational rehabilitations system and their workforce system, and another state it might not be as strong of a relationship. So we have to look at every state that we work with in a very unique way and try to craft some technical assistance and support to them around what they need and what are the environments and the circumstances in those states.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Wow. That sounds like quite an undertaking, actually. What kind of resources do you have behind NTAR in order to do this?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, we have a grant, this grant from the federal government that allows us to do a couple of things. One is I think fundamentally we try to provide what we call "technical assistance" to the states in a variety of areas. And the way we do that is we both have members of our consortium. We have folks from our own Heldrich Center as well as the Center for Workers with Disabilities. The Elizabeth Boggs Center at the University of Medicine and Dentistry. And you will hear from some of the folks from those various fascists today that are experts in various fields. They might be an expert in workforce development, they might be an expert in benefits planning or leadership or economic development.

And so we try to offer our own homegrown group of experts. But where somebody wants something specific, we have the resources within our center to contract with national experts around the country to provide the states with the kind

of targeted customized technical assistance that they want. One of the -- we also try to provide them with training based on what we think they want to know about and we do regularly talk to and poll our states about what they are interested in learning. And we will do online webinar trainings or try to connect someone in one state with a knowledgeable peer in another state.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: What kind of technical assistance do you mean when you say when you say that you offer technical assistance? Could you give me an example?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Sure. One of the things, and you will probably hear about this in the next segment, is we have been working with some of the states for about two and a half years and the three states that are in our state leaders innovation institute really are trying to make their workforce system what they call more accessible. And the way they are doing that is to not just look at the physical accessibility of their one stop career centers or their other offices, but to look at whether their communications are accessible or whether their products or services are accessible. It is a concept called universal design and so we have a group of national experts in this area working specifically with teams from each of the states to look at where they can make their services and service delivery system and their physical offices much more accessible to any job seeker, not just people with

disabilities, but other kinds of job seekers as well.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And the other part of the NTAR, I guess if one part of it is technical assistance the other part is research part, and what exactly do you do with the research end of it?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, there is a number of things we like to do on the research end. And one of the things is we really want to make sure that the research that we do is read by state policy makers and has an impact. So we have developed what we call some issue brief series. They are topical, small, less than ten page research products on a variety of topics.

You are going to hear later on today from Richard Luecking who wrote an issue brief on collaborating with employers with Elaine Kessler from the Kessler Foundation. We have done an issue brief on how to partner with your economic development agency. So those are the kinds of small products. The other kinds of products that we do is research on a much bigger scale and you are going to hear from three of our researchers who wrote a very large national study called Ready and Able, looking at the kinds the partnerships that have taken place between employers and a whole different variety of what we call intermediaries or partners, that can be a community based organization, but I won't go on about that because I know you will hear more about that from them.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Well, let me ask you one other

question to wrap of this segment, this part of the discussion, you have been working at and with NTAR since 2003, so for about seven years. To you, how far has it come since the beginning? What have been the milestones of progress as you seen them?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, it's actually just been since 2007.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Oh, sorry. I don't want to rush you too much.

>> KATHY KREPCIO: I know. I was going to say, wow, I haven't felt that old. I would say a number of milestones are -- is that what we are seeing is that states can bring together a very distinct and group of folks at the local level and really begin to try to make some process.

We have seen states that had never talked to somebody in their economic development shop before. We have seen people -- and the disability employment arena begin to better stand the workforce system. We have seen it be a catalyst for some of these very important factors really beginning to have a dialogue.

I think the second thing that we have seen is that states really want to be supported. And I think one of the things that we have been -- we see states have a stronger relationships with their peers, that they are starting to exchange information and I think in these long-term systems, what we call systems change efforts, it is critically important that leaders be supported. It is very important that they be

able to talk to their peers about things that are going on. And it is very important for them to exchange information and be exposed to the kinds of practices, successes as well as challenges that's taking place out there. And I think we have been very successful in being able to do that.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. I have been speaking with Kathy Krepcio, the Executive Director of the Heldrich Center and the Director of NTAR, the National Technical Assistance and Research Center Initiative, which houses itself at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

When we come back we will talk specifically about some of the initiatives that Kathy described at a high level for us. Programs such as the State Leaders Innovation Institute and the State Peer Leaders Network. Very interesting discussions yet to happen, so please stay with us. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work radio.

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I'm Ray Zardetto and I have been speaking with Kathy Krepcio, the Executive Director of the National Technical Assistance and Research Center also known as NTAR, and one of the initiatives that Kathy described in our first segment was a

program called the State Leaders Innovation Institute. And this is a program designed to help states respond more effectively to a business's request for help locating qualified job candidates, including candidates with disabilities.

And so now for the next few minutes we will speak with Maria Heidkamp, the Senior Project Manager for this initiative. So Maria, welcome.

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Thank you very much, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And would I be accurate in saying that the responsibility for implementing the program falls on you?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: I think you could put it that way. I'm the Director of the State Leaders Innovations Institute. It is definitely a collaborative effort.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Do you want to tell us a little bit about what the program is, what it does and in what way is it collaborative?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Okay. That sounds good. The State Leaders Innovations Institute is a systems change pilot project under the entire leadership center to try to encourage several states to make stronger connections between their disability employment policies and programs and their statewide economic development priorities.

We know that in the broader workforce development world there is a growing body of evidence that industry specific sector strategies, which are based on trying to meet employer

needs in key industries, are producing good employment outcomes for other populations with barriers to employment, including low income and low skilled individuals.

So as Kathy said earlier, we started with the hypothesis that making this connection to the sector strategies and priority state economic development issues would also lead to greater employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

So in April 2008, the entire Leadership Center selected the states of Connecticut, Maryland and Minnesota, after a national competition, to participate in its State Leaders Innovation Institute. The governors of these states were asked to designate high level team leaders and members representing a range of agencies involved in workforce development, economic development, and disability employment with the goal of making closer connections between these players.

The institute was designed to provide these teams of state policy makers with access to technical assistance, national experts, research and other resources to support their efforts to change the way disability employment is viewed within their workforce development systems. That is a sort of --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm curious. What were the thresholds used to determine that Connecticut, Maryland and Minnesota should be the states?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: That's a great question. We actually had a

national competition and 13 states submitted applications to participate, but we are really looking for states that had already done a lot of ground work in both disabilities employment policy issues as well as in generic workforce development and sector strategy work.

So we were looking for states that had maybe done other kinds of systems change work around workforce development and were already considered leaders among their peers. We thought that if we started with a pretty high bar that the states would have a better chance of being able to pull together their economic development, disability employment and workforce development rather than starting with a state that did not have that kind of expertise in one of those areas.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: But just to be clear, these are not the only three states actively involved in these kinds of things.

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: No. No they are not. But of the 13 that applied to the institute, they were the three that seemed the best candidates. We had a team of, I don't know, all of our partner organizations, we probably had ten or so folks who ranked all of the applications. It was a pretty challenging process.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. And so, could you give us an example just on a day-to-day kind of basis, very, you know, down in the weeds kind of a thing, of exactly you do with one of the states? Say, for instance, Maryland, what is one of the ways

that you work with the state of Maryland on something like this?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Well, as you may hear a little bit more from Eric, Maryland decided to focus its efforts on trying to make sure that people with disabilities were considered part of the talent pipeline, as we sometimes say, that they would be positioned to maybe have the training and education they need to get jobs that would result from the expansion of military basis under the basis realignment and closure commission.

So in Maryland, the team is headed by the Department of Disabilities secretary Cathy Raggio as well as by Eric Seleznow, the Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board. And the team meets periodically, we will attend those meetings. We have arranged for other experts to come in and work with them on specific topics, such as Kathy mentioned, universal design.

So right now they have a pilot project going on in five workforce areas and we have contracted with some experts to provide some technical assistance directly on the ground in that capacity. We have also done some work with Maryland in terms of looking at developing a data system to track outcomes of programs. So we work with them in a variety of ways depending on what is going on.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Right. And, well, coincidentally, since you mention Eric Seleznow, Eric is with us here today to give us a

state's perspective on this. Eric is the Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board for the state of Maryland. Welcome, Eric.

>> ERIC SELEZNOW: Thank you very much, Ray. It is a pleasure to be here.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Thank you for joining us. And you have heard Maria describe from the project level what is going on. Maybe you can turn it around for us on the state level and talk a little bit about what you guys are doing and how it's working.

>> ERIC SELEZNOW: Well, we would like to think we are experts in everything, but we are really not. I have been in the workforce development business for a long time and we are really trying to impact the outcomes of employment for people with disabilities. And it is one thing to pull a team together, it is another thing to pull a team together and have some outside experts come in and facilitate our process and that is exactly what Maria and Cathy have done, which has been really great to get that expertise to bring us all together.

You know, we have had this base realignment and closure activity going on. We have 40 to 60,000 jobs coming to Maryland over the next three or four years. And, you know, why not have the disability community actively engaged in trying to get some of those jobs before they even get here? So we are using their expertise to facilitate a number of us in the state government to facilitate that process to make sure that we have

got opportunities for folks.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm just curious, a lot of times I hear this all around the country and having discussions about people with disabilities in the workforce, you hear often that, you know, for some reason there is a hesitancy to hire people with disabilities, depending on what the job is, depending on what the employer is, there always seem to be some hesitancy and I was wondering if you see or run into that in Maryland at all.

>> ERIC SELEZNOW: Well, I think you will always run into that. I just think it is a lack of awareness by a lot of folks. Some employers are excellent about it and do outreach to the disability community. Some don't have very much experience in that area. So I mean, there is a lot of different groups that employers are leery of hiring and, again, employers are as different as anybody else. You know, I have a Board of Directors that is almost all employers and they are really committed to this issue.

So lots of employers are there, it is a matter of education and awareness and mostly it is a matter of us, folks on our side of the fence, the Workforce Development and Disabilities Services, in making sure we are doing our jobs right so we are marketing the potential successes and outcomes to employers so they are making good hiring decisions and that includes all people, including people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And Maria?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Yes?

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Another one of the programs we touched on earlier in the program was the State Peer Leaders Network.

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: That's correct.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And if you could give us just a broad or a very quick overview of that, then we will bring in Joe Ashley from Virginia to talk a little bit about that. Why don't you just give us a quick overview?

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Okay. Well, when we launched the State Leaders Innovation Institute, as I said, we had 13 states that had very competitive applications, each with a signed letter from their governor, each with high level cross agency teams that had been designated. While we knew we could only take three for the institute, we wanted to build on the momentum that seemed to be underway and develop the concept for the Peer Leaders Network.

Through the network, we encourage peer to peer learning opportunities and information exchange, and the promotion of promising practices. As Cathy said, we do a lot of webinars and provide technical assistance to some of the states based on request. But we have covered topics such as people with disabilities and green jobs, customized employment, blending and braiding of resources, using labor market information and others. So right now, we have 21 states who are members of the State Peer Leaders Network, of which Virginia is one.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And so speaking of the great commonwealth of Virginia, here with us is Joe Ashley the Assistant Commissioner of Grants and Special Programs at the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services. Joe, welcome to the program.

>> JOE ASHLEY: Thank you, Ray. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Glad to have you with us. A quick question about the Department of Rehabilitative Services, can you tell us a little bit about what that is?

>> JOE ASHLEY: Well, we are one -- in our state we are what we call a general agency. That is, we have two departments that serve the VR program in Virginia, one for blind and deaf heard -- deaf blind folks, and the R is the general agency that serves the other individuals. Our mission is to really work with people with disabilities and their families to create opportunities for them to be independent and self-sustaining through employment.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And how do you align with the State Peer Leaders Network that Maria was describing?

>> JOE ASHLEY: We had the opportunity to be a part of the team that wrote the grant for Virginia that was submitted in this competition. And in that process, there were people from some places that we normally work with, the other VR agencies in the state, but we worked at a deeper level with the workforce

development folks at the state level people and people from the secretary's Office of Commerce and Trade in our state. So we had the opportunity with some employers as well to put together what we thought was a pretty good proposal and begin to talk with each other a little bit about how we could enhance our reaching out to the economic development folks.

When the opportunity came long for the Peer Leaders -- State Peer Leaders Network we could then say we want to focus on a few things and they would provide us with some technical assistance. We focused on reaching out and figuring out how economic development opportunities are created, employment opportunities are created and where the people that work in the disability system could fit into that process and enhance it.

So we thought it was worthwhile enough for us just to submit and be a part of the State Peer Leaders Network to help figure that part of the process of economic development and people with disabilities to create opportunities would work together.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Eric, back to you for a moment if I could. If an employer in your state was interested in getting more information about this or partnering up with your initiative here, what should they do?

>> ERIC SELEZNOW: Um, there is a number of access points at any state, including Maryland. They can contact the governor's workforce or your local Department of Disabilities, your local

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. So they can access as many access points from employers to take an interest. I think probably the bigger issue is that we are really talking about some sort of systems change as Cathy talked about earlier, getting the different components of state government all on the same page so we can serve people with disabilities. During that we make ourselves much more accessible to the employer.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm curious. Do you have an example of a way you have done that, at this point that you can share with us?

>> ERIC SELEZNOW: Well, you know, as part of our team that Cathy and Maria helped us assemble, there is -- I won't mention the company, but there is an aerospace company, their director of human resources is on the panel, he is connected to a lot of other companies like that and so through excellent employers like that they bring their peers to the table, they get educated, they develop some awareness and they see that all, you know, people with disabilities come up in all shapes and sizes and ability. And whether you need an integrated software specialist or designer, or you need somebody to enter data on a keyboard, you have got a lot of different options there with anybody in the community also with people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. And Joe Ashley, same question for you. Someone in Virginia is interested in learning more or getting involved, how do they contact you and your folks?

>> JOE ASHLEY: Well, we have a website for employers that

comes in through our website here with the Department of Rehabilitative Services; we have a business services page there that we can access through VADRS.org, DSA.org. You can get business services. And that really does tell them about how -- we have things we call the Commonwealth Workforce Network that has a part of our efforts now we are going into one stops with these and trying to bring all of the agencies together that do reach out and have people to go out and talk to businesses in to one location.

So a business can come into meetings they have every month and say I need six employees, here are the jobs and then the people that do the job placement can ask them more about that. So hopefully if they need six, each of us may have one qualified worker. And that is part of the answer to what you mentioned earlier about some of the issues with people with disabilities.

If we, as agencies, work with our people with disabilities to be sure we are getting qualified individuals to the employers so that when they go they are the right person and the right match up for that job, then we can create a trust and opportunities for other people later on. And that is the process we are trying to do with this Commonwealth Workforce Network strategy through the one stops now that our agency is a big part of helping staff and sponsor and keep it moving forward.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Very good. Joe and Eric, thank you very much for joining us. Maria, also, thank you very much.

>> MARIA HEIDKAMP: Thank you, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: We have to take another short break, but when we return, we are going to discuss the results of a national study about successful partnerships between employers and workforce specialists who support disabilities employment.

Very interesting results from this study. So stay tuned.

Before we go to the break, let me invite all of you listening to Disabilities at Work radio to join our team at Disabilities at Work. And also friend us at Facebook at Disabilities at Work.

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Ready and Able. That's the name or the name of an ongoing report from NTAR. It is a report about the successful partnerships between employers and workforce specialists who focus on supporting disability employment. And we brought

together now a panel of distinguished folks, all of whom have some perspective on the conclusions from this report and its implications.

So let me first introduce Ronnie Kauder; she is the Senior Practitioner in Residence at the Heldrich Center. Robert Nicholas, the senior visiting fellow at the Heldrich Center is also with us. And the third on the panel, Dan Baker, who is from the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. And this Ready and Able report as I understand is an ongoing series of research. Bob Nicholas has a report that has reached certain conclusions and maybe you could give us an overview of what those are.

>> ROBERT NICHOLAS: Well the report itself was initiated as part of the NTAR's overall objective of creating information and building new systems for expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

We started on the Ready and Able report with the assumption that we wanted to look at what works. And we were aware that many of the nation's leading companies have established disability employment initiatives. They have recognized the value of employing people with disabilities. They have accepted what we call the business case for employing business people with disabilities and actually have established initiatives to recruit people with disabilities.

The report focuses on partnerships between companies and the disability community and the generic workforce system through career centers and one stop centers. It focuses on how to coordinate resources and supports for people with disabilities in order to meet employer workforce needs. And we studied 14 profiles from around the country of projects where local entities, both in the workforce system and in the disabilities services system came together to partner in response to meet employer workforce needs. And the outcomes of these were to meet those needs and to create employers that were very satisfied with the outcomes of these partnerships.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So, Ronnie, let me ask you, Bob talked about the value there is in hiring people with disabilities. I was wondering if you could talk about that for a moment. You talk about it in terms of, I guess, a business case almost.

>> RONNIE KAUDER: Yeah, exactly. In general, we keep talking about the business case from employing people with disabilities and what we mean by that is that companies hire people with disabilities because they are a valuable resource, because they have the skills to do the job and because they are reliable.

So because of this, employers see employees with disabilities as meeting their business and workforce needs. And I'm going to quote Kevin Bradley of McDonald's who says hiring people with disabilities is not an act of charity, it is a smart move for business. And that's what we mean by the

business case.

And I would also say that there is a recent study was conducted in Illinois of the healthcare, retail and hospitality industries, and it found that people with disabilities had fewer absences, better job retention, and equal job performance to their peers without disabilities and almost three quarters of them needed no accommodation. For those who did, the average cost of accommodation was \$313, which is very modest. So --

>> RAY ZARDETTO: I'm sorry, say that again, how much was it?

>> RONNIE KAUDER: \$313.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay.

>> RONNIE KAUDER: So, when we say there is -- when we talk about the business case, what we are pretty much saying is that people with disabilities have the skills to do the jobs, are reliable employees, and don't cost any more essentially. So that is what we are saying.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So, Dan, I'm wondering if you have gotten some response from employers who see these numbers and read through the business case and the results as laid out in this report. Do you get reactions from employers, you know that range from, well, I figured as much or they are really surprised? How do they react?

>> DAN BAKER: Generally, people respond in a very positive manner. Our research folks have partnerships between employers

and workforce intermediaries specifically looking at the recruitment and training of employees with disabilities.

When we say intermediary, we are talking about public nonprofit or private organizations that assist employers in coordinating their recruitment and retraining with people with disabilities. That can be a public agency such as the state VR, voc rehab agencies, a nonprofit organization such as Jewish Vocational Service or a local chamber of commerce or even a private company such as Manpower Incorporated.

The biggest example from our research is Walgreens, which partnered with public organizations in South Carolina and Connecticut, to help recruit and navigate the disabilities service landscape. The Anderson South Carolina Distribution Center employed nearly 250 employees with disabilities in 2009. They were hired through this partnership and that was about 40 percent of all their employees. The goal for the Windsor Connecticut Distribution Center is the same.

A really fascinating example we looked at was a New Bedford, Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. That serves as an intermediary between your local service providers and more than 250 member employers, many of which are small businesses, and that led to employment for over 740 people with disabilities since 2005.

Additionally, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities worked with employers and service

providers throughout the state of Minnesota looking at ways to promote the hiring of people with disabilities in the digital imaging industry. The number of people with disabilities who are employed in that line of work has grown from 50 to 400 in just a couple of years.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Wow. I'm curious now, you talk about Walgreens, New Bedford Chamber of Commerce and some other examples and if I just add up from the numbers that you gave me, we are talking about over a thousand jobs between them. What types of jobs are we talking about here?

>> DAN BAKER: They range from everything. To high tech such as digital imaging, to working with car dealerships to maintain the lot, to working in a sausage factory in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where they have had people for over 25 years. The type of jobs absolutely sample the landscape of employment within the United States.

>> RONNIE KAUDER: Hi, this is Ronnie. I was going to add to that that one of the things we were surprised at is that many of the jobs that people are being trained for are fairly skilled jobs.

For instance, in the Minnesota Developmental Disabilities digital imaging case, people are being trained at different levels. Some people are doing scanning and preparing documents for scanning and others, once they have mastered those kinds of skills move on to different kinds of, you know,

more sophisticated computer skills that, again, are involved with transferring documents from paper to, you know, to computer based, essentially. And I think, Bob, I want to say something about the jobs at Walgreens. He was a principle researcher on that.

>> ROBERT NICHOLAS: Well, it is not only Walgreens, but I would point to a couple of the partnerships that we studied were actually partnerships that facilitated the employment, the networking between college students with disabilities and corporations and those were for professional positions.

So we looked at a range of types of -- people with types of disabilities and including college students. So, I think that is important to note. The second, as Ronnie said, is that the distribution center positions at Walgreens were skilled positions with people running computers and many of those people were people with intellectual disabilities and autism. So that was pretty amazing.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And long did it take you to do this study?

>> ROBERT NICHOLAS: We started last spring and completed the study in November. So it was approximately six months.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And about how many different organizations and or companies did you look at for the study?

>> ROBERT NICHOLAS: There were 14 different profiles, but a number of the profiles have multiple companies. Like Dan talked about, like the Bedford, Massachusetts, has over 200

companies that are actually -- that are actually employers that are involved in partnering with the local community there.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So I'm wondering if any of you found anything particularly surprising or unexpected in the results of the study.

>> ROBERT NICHOLAS: I think the thing that we as a team were really wowed by is the enthusiasm of the companies that have achieved success through these partnerships and the passion that they have for pursuing expansion of the employment of people with disabilities.

I think we have also identified, as we just mentioned, some really innovative training programs that have taught people with disabilities, have accommodated training programs for people with disabilities so that they can learn the skills for high skilled positions. And this basically broadens the range of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. And we also think that this study is a really optimistic vision of the future for the employment of people with disabilities.

>> RONNIE KAUDER: Yeah, we feel that many employers actually see people with disabilities as an untapped resource, as an underutilized resource as they move forward. And so that was another thing that was, you know, quite pronounced in speaking to the different companies on the different intermediaries that we worked with.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And we don't have a lot of time left in this

segment, but I was wondering, perhaps maybe Dan, Bob talking about innovative training programs just a couple of minutes ago and I wonder if you guys could expound on that point a little bit. What kind of innovative training programs are we talking about?

>> DAN BAKER: In our profiles, we looked at training programs that included both employers driven stuff, like at Walgreens where there is a specific training program that focused on bringing potential workers up to speed with the various skills associated with the Walgreens Distribution Center, all the way to postsecondary internships.

We also looked at high school training for students through the Pittsburgh SOS program, which also arranges internships for students with disabilities. One of the things we see is that the employer may know the job requirements, but the disabilities provider may know how to specifically work with people with disabilities, and that is why the partnership between the employer and the disabilities provider results in fantastic things happening.

>> RONNIE KAUDER: Yeah, another example of this is the banking industry, just to put another industry into it, the International Association of Jewish Vocational Services worked with between six and eight banks in three different cities through their affiliates, and that was specific banking and finance oriented training for people with disabilities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. So just to close out this discussion on this segment of the show, now that this report is done, is it available and can anybody who would like to see it see it on the website or do they have to order it? How would they get a hold of it?

>> RONNIE KAUDER: Well, at this point, the report is not public. We are waiting for approval from the Office of Disabilities Employment Policy. However, we have done a webinar and we prepared a Power Point with the major findings and results of the Ready and Able research and that is available on the NTAR website as well as the video or the audio recording of the webinar, and the slides are available on the entire website.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. Great. Ronnie, Dan, Robert, thank you very much for your time. Thanks for the great work on the report.

We need to take one more quick break and when we come back we have one other initiative to talk about, it is a somewhat different perspective in looking at the way workforce organizations increase the number of people with disabilities that are hired and also who are available for hiring. And this is based on another initiative generated by NTAR.

So stay with us. We will talk about this when we come back. I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work radio.

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>>RAY ZARDETTO: Welcome back to Disabilities at Work radio,

remember that Disabilities at Work radio can be heard each Wednesday the noon Eastern Time on Voice America's Business Network.

We have been discussing the work of the National Technical Assistance and Research Center or NTAR and many of its initiatives to help strengthen the partnership between employees, employers and workforce development groups which advocate employment for people with disabilities.

And now we are going to take another look at something that NTAR has been involved with. Recently, Richard Luecking who is the President of TransCen Incorporated, and a number of NTAR advisory panels coauthored an issue brief of the collaboration and coordination with employers and Mr. Luecking is here to discuss this brief with us now. So welcome, Richard.

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Thank you, Ray. Glad to be here.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Thank you for joining us. Before we get to that though, I notice that you are the President of TransCen, T-r-a-n-s-C-e-n Incorporated. That is an interesting name. What exactly is TransCen?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: The name is an abbreviation of Transition Centers. So TransCen, the idea is is that our organization, which is dedicated to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities would be the center in convening employers and service providers and job seekers themselves as they move

from school to work and into adult working arrangements.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And where is TransCen located?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Our headquarters is in Rockville, Maryland. And we have an office in San Francisco, California, and work through the country.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Great. And as a member of the advisory board here with NTAR, I guess you wrote or you helped to write, you coauthored, I believe, the issue brief on collaboration and coordination, but just for the edification of not only the audience, but also me, what exactly is an issue brief?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Well, it is a short way of presenting some information that people can digest in a very quick fashion. They can be presented with facts and information and recommendations in a very brief way without having to read a long research report.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And why one on collaboration and coordination with employers?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Well, having heard the previous speakers, it should be clear now that there has been a long standing need for employers to identify new sources of employees and also there is a long standing need for job seekers with disabilities and those organizations and entities that assist them in finding jobs to connect better with employers.

So the need here was to address how -- put a spotlight on how that works best, where does it work best and how do

organizations that represent job seekers with disabilities and workforce investment entities connect better with employers and vice versa so the needs of both are being met.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So how does it work best?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Well, first of all, let me just say that the need for each other and why they should collaborate is they both have something to gain. Of course, when they both gain, then it works best.

So there is really a growing recognition that both sides of the workforce investment equation need to work in a more purposeful and collaborative way. From the employer side of things, there is a face of impending exit of large numbers of aging workers and other demographic factors that even in the current economic climate they are going to be faced soon enough with the need to engage all segments of the perspective workforce as their workforce ages and leaves the workforce all together.

On the disabilities side of the equation, the disability employment rates continue to be much lower than they could be. And the unemployment rates of people with disabilities are far greater than the population at large. And so there is obviously a need to make better connections with those who have the jobs and those who are looking for the jobs.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And this large employment rate, I mean obviously economic factors weigh in in the economy the last

couple of years would be part of it, but is the high unemployment rate among people with disabilities, is that still part of just employers having this reluctance to look at hiring people with disabilities? Is there still some of that resistance to that?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: I think there is a lot less of that than there once was. I think these days and this is explained in our brief because we have done a review of the research of this, and employers generally express a very positive and affirmative attitude toward workers with disabilities.

And what we also know is that employers views about disabilities tend to positively change with exposure. In other words, employers who have prior contact with people with disabilities hold favorable views toward them.

So the issue is not so much they have an unfavorable view or are hesitant, the issue is more how do they find the workers they need in their workplaces and where do they go to find them rather than any kind of inherent resistance.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Why do you think the unemployment rates have remained so high in that community though?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: Well, I think for reasons that I just said, the ability to connect with employers on the workforce investment side has needed some improvement. And the employers have had to learn more about what disabilities is all about and how they can get help.

So I think that, though, in our brief we highlight the examples of collaboration that have really been successful on both sides of that equation. And what we find out is that employers often point to the importance of competent professionals and organizations representing job seekers as the reason they would consider bringing people into the workplace.

So one issue is how can we better train and prepare and organize workforce professionals to make presentations to employers and find out about what employers need. And then on the other side of the equation how do we help employers to find those workforce organizations that represent job seekers with disabilities. I think we are seeing more and more of that.

There is a recruitment initiative. The previous speakers mentioned some key companies that are already into this and have taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, on their own. They are doing this with the necessary and important help of disability experts and disability employment organizations.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: So it is not a question of attitude?

Employers do want to do this, it's just more of a question of how do they do it if they are looking for information on that.

>> RICHARD LUECKING: That is absolutely correct.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Okay. So if any particular company in a particular state wants to look at how to do this, what are the first steps they need to take? What would you suggest they do

first?

>> RICHARD LUECKING: I think there are two important things. One is they can contact the workforce investment organizations in their communities. Usually they are called career centers or workforce centers. Where there are also a state rehabilitation professional located, agencies like represented by Joe Ashley who spoke previously.

The other thing is that there is a whole new initiative for employers to talk to each other because the message from employer to employer is often better received and often better understood. And so one of the national linkages that we talked in our brief is through the United States Business Leadership Network or the USBLN, and that is a network of employers.

There is, I think, 34 chapters or 54 chapters throughout the United States, and representing thousands of employers and this is -- the purpose of the BLN is to increase awareness among employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities.

And so if employers can connect with their local BLN affiliate, they will be able to find from those local employers who they work with best to find locating, recruiting, and hiring individuals with disabilities in their communities.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. I have been speaking with Richard Luecking, President of TransCen Incorporated and a member of NTAR's advisory panel. And I'd like to bring in for the last

minute of the show here Kathy Krepcio, the Executive Director of the Heldrich Center at Rutgers University and the Director of NTAR. Kathy?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Thanks, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Before you have a chance to talk about your website and anything, just one last question for you in your position, what's next for NTAR? What's the next big thing?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well, one of the things we want to continue to do is talk about the successes that are happening in our states and be able to continue stronger peer linkages between the states, support them a little bit more, we are hoping next year to conduct more research along the lines of what Richard is talking about, trying to look at the workforce delivery system and the workforce professionals to try to get them to have stronger capacity. So there is a lot of exciting research things and more technical assistance and more support for our leadership.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: And if people anywhere wanted to find out more about this or just about NTAR in general?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Well there is a number of ways people can keep connected with us and get our research products. One is they can visit our website at [www.NTARcenter](http://www.NTARcenter.org), all one word, .org.

We are also very active on Twitter. We put a lot of information out through Twitter. So please feel free to follow

us on Twitter. We just type in NTAR. We also have a Facebook page where we also put out information. So just type in NTAR Leadership Center on Facebook.

And we also have a LinkedIn group, if people are on LinkedIn, you can type in NTAR Leadership Center and I have a group, we talk about different discussions and information. We always advertise our products.

Then, finally, if you go on our website you can sign up for our monthly e-news letter. Every month we feature what is going on in one of our states, we profile a promising leader. We put on the information there about our research products and we talk about also other information that is going on nationally.

One of the things I just like to say is that we are also one of four U.S. Department of Labor Technical Assistance Centers. So also on our website is links to the Youth Technical Assistance Center, the Employer Technical Assistance Center, and a 25 year long-standing job accommodation network or JAN. All of those links can be found on our website.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Alright. So in other words you are just very busy?

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Yes. And we like to -- we like to put information out for folks and we like to hear back from them.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: Thank you, Kathy.

>> KATHY KREPCIO: Thank you very much, Ray.

>> RAY ZARDETTO: In fact, I want to thank all my guests today. And also again to thank this week's sponsors, the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services.

Next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time we will be back with another show exploring ideas, innovations and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. Until then, I'm Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work radio.

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