Individuals With Disabilities Employment Study - 2021

Submitted to:

Berks County Workforce Development Board

Submitted by: THOMAS P. MILLER & ASSOCIATES

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KEY FINDINGS

In the spring of 2021, the Workforce Development Board of Berks County (Workforce Development Board) hired Thomas P. Miller & Associates, LLC (TPMA) to conduct a several month study on the disproportionate employment and under-employment of individuals with disabilities in Berks County, Pennsylvania and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their employment. This report documents the methodology used during this study, themes identified through an analysis of the data collected, and recommendations for action steps the Workforce Development Board could take to address three key areas: connection, education, and access to resources.

During this study, TPMA conducted best practice research, collected demographic and labor market data on Berks County, surveyed 140 individuals directly involved with the employment of people with disabilities (community-based organizations that assist individuals with disabilities with employment services, employers, individuals with disabilities, and their support team members), and interviewed 18 key stakeholders. The survey questions and interview guides can be found in Appendix A.

Four major findings emerged during the analysis of these data points. They are summarized below and are analyzed in more detail throughout this report.

Individuals with disabilities desire more variety in job opportunities | Employees of community-based organizations (CBOs) that work directly with individuals with disabilities (IWD) to help them find employment frequently discussed that job opportunities for these individuals are often limited to janitorial or retail industries. The individuals with disabilities that participated in this study, along with their support teams, expressed the same frustration, especially with how difficult it is to find a job outside of janitorial or retail that aligns with their interests and abilities. One recommendation made to the Workforce Development Board was to help address this finding is providing employers with resources and training around the use of competency-based job descriptions and skilled tasks during job interviews. Resources around both topics are provided in Appendix B.

Employers would benefit from increased access to trainings and resources around supporting the employment of individuals with disabilities | Through the survey responses and the interviews, one major finding that emerged was the need for more intentional training opportunities and resource sharing with local employers in Berks County around supporting individuals with disabilities (especially those with cognitive disabilities) during their employment. This could be in the form of a resource hub that is kept up to date with information for employers to organize and/or facilitate trainings (e.g., webinars) around specific topics. Using the best practice research and expressed needs from the interviews, it is recommended that the Workforce Development Board focus on topics around conflict management and resolution, and how wages affect Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. Resources around these topics are provided in Appendix B.

All stakeholders would like to participate in more intentional networking opportunities |Individuals with disabilities and their support team members often discussed how segregated they feel from the workforce community, and this separation creates frustration because they feel like they do not have opportunities to make their voices and needs heard. Employees from community-based organizations (CBOs) and employers all expressed similar sentiments around feeling siloed and not having the time or manpower to go out and network on their own. To remedy this, it is recommended that the Workforce Development Board create consistent and well-advertised networking opportunities among individuals with disabilities (and their support teams), CBOs, and employers. The Workforce Development Board could provide the space for these meetings, create the agenda, and facilitate the conversations among these three key stakeholder groups. Suggested topics for these meetings include the development of new job opportunities, understanding the barriers created for individuals with disabilities during job interviews, and informing everyone about the services provided to employers and individuals with disabilities by various CBOs in Berks County.

Participants reported that they do not see any long-term negative effects of COVID-19 on the employment of individuals with disabilities | The national and regional research indicates the COVID-19 pandemic should have a greater impact on IWD than on other groups, and the stakeholders interviewed did discuss some challenges that IWD faced at the start of the pandemic – such as losing jobs during lockdown and learning to wear a mask for long periods of time. However, the overwhelming consensus from the participants was they do not perceive any long-term negative effects on the employment of individuals with disabilities due to the pandemic, with several stakeholders noting that it is now easier to place individuals into jobs because of the current labor shortage.

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Method

The purpose of this study was to better understand the reasons working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or are under-employed, both from the individual's perspective and the potential employer's perspective. The study also sought to understand how COVID-19 has affected employer's willingness to hire this population and the individual's ability/desire to obtain employment. The findings of the study will provide context for the Berks County Workforce Development Board concerning the development of strategies to promote the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of individuals with disabilities. This study relied on a survey distributed through emails, virtual interviews, data analysis of census and other secondary data sources, review of programmatic documents, and best practice research.

Data Sources

Stakeholder Engagement | The original stakeholder engagement plan involved having 3 focus groups to talk with 1) employers, 2) individuals with disabilities, and 3) CBOs that serve individuals with disabilities. Given the limited number of survey respondents and registrations for the focus groups, TPMA conducted interviews. TPMA conducted 18 interviews with groups as well as individuals. The interviews included individuals with disabilities, parents of individuals with disabilities, CBO employees, and employers.

Survey | A survey was distributed to employers, individuals with disabilities, CBOs that serve individuals with disabilities, and parents, guardians, or support team members of individuals with disabilities. The survey was comprised of close-ended questions and was shared through targeted emails. The survey did not ask respondents who selected they were parents, guardians, or support team members to differentiate which of those roles applied to them, the survey analysis therefore defines that group as support team since that term can encompass parents or guardians. The survey opened on May 28, 2021, and closed September 17, 2021. There were 140 responses to the survey. There was a 69% completion rate so approximately 97 responses were complete. To engage more employers a shorter survey was developed; 7 employers completed the shortened survey which used questions from the original survey but only asked employers to indicate their industry, had the the matrix questions, asked "What challenges, if any, do you face recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities?" and left space for the employers to add additional thoughts or indicate if they were interested in engaging in further conversation. The responses of the shortened survey were incorporated into the survey analysis and were not analyzed separately. The shortened survey opened on August 26, 2021, and closed September 17, 2021.

Secondary Research and Document Review | To further understand best practices and the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with disabilities secondary research and a document review was completed. Data was compiled from several secondary sources including, but not limited to:
- Emsi
- The U.S. Census Bureau
- The U.S. Department of Labor
- The Job Accommodation Network

Data Analysis

TPMA applied a mixed-methods approach, in which multiple types of qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed, and synthesized to increase the rigor of research methods and enhance the validity of conclusions. To strengthen the accuracy and credibility of qualitative analysis findings, TPMA relied on triangulation and collaborative inquiry. By comparing findings based on different data sources and using approaches that incorporate both evidence and negative evidence, TPMA created a more robust and dynamic depiction of program needs. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended survey questions were coded and analyzed using a general inductive thematic analysis to identify categories, subcategories, and themes. This approach was selected because of its usefulness in drawing clear links between research questions or objectives and data collection results, and

because it provides a theoretical foundation for subjective meaning to be interpreted and extrapolated from discourse. Emerging themes were developed according to the analytical framework and through a review of detailed notes taken from interviews and secondary research and document review.

Quantitative data, including closed-ended survey questions, were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Survey data were exported into Excel, and Excel spreadsheets were cleaned and merged for analysis. Qualitative data from open-ended responses supplemented the themes identified in the quantitative analysis. Descriptive analysis techniques were used to analyze closed-ended survey responses, looking for trends and patterns in the data. This included frequencies (i.e., counts of responses), percentages, standard deviations, means, and cross-tabulations to determine the relationship between two variables. The protocols for the interviews and survey are included in Appendix A of this report.

Data Limitations

As with any study, limitations to the chosen methods are acknowledged and addressed to the extent possible within the design. The limitations to this report include the following, broken down by each analysis method:

Partial and Biased Findings | Qualitative and perceptual research methods offer valuable insights but are, by nature, partial and biased. To attempt to address this limitation, TPMA took advantage of an opportunity embedded in mixed-methods evaluations – the triangulation of data. Triangulating[i] results from multiple sources, such as comparing findings from surveys with interviews, creates more credible evaluation results and is considered critical to the validity and reliability of findings.

Researcher Extrapolation | Analyses conducted with an interpretive analytical framework can lead to researcher extrapolation where interpretation may go too far beyond what is present in, and supported by, data[ii]. To address this, TPMA used collaborative inquiry; through presenting findings to stakeholders for elaboration, corroboration, and modification, TPMA confirmed and updated analyses.

Missing Data | Missing data may contribute to limitations in the quantitative design (e.g., participant survey responses). In addition, if response rates for certain survey sub-groups of participants are low, survey responses may not be representative of the sub-group. Efforts were made to ensure an adequate response rate; however, survey respondents were primarily existing stakeholders, as existing listservs were extensively used to recruit survey participants. Less than adequate response rates, then, should be considered a limitation.

DATA ON INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN BERKS COUNTY[iii]

Data on Individuals with Disabilities (IWD) in Berks County is from the U.S. Census Bureau 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. It is important to note the Census Bureau will not release its standard 2020 ACS 1-year estimates because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection.

The 59,580 Individuals with Disabilities in Berks County, Pennsylvania makes up 14.1% of the population, with a little over half (54%, 32,176) of this population being female. The race and ethnicity of this population is made up mostly of those of individuals who are White alone – and Hisp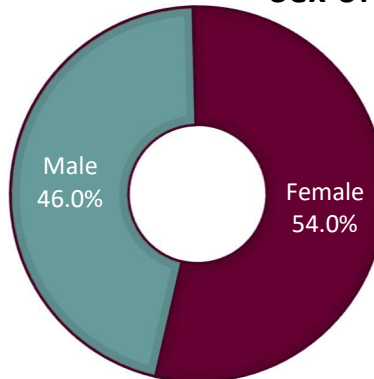anic or Latino (42.1%, 46,955) or White alone – not Hispanic or Latino (37%, 41,185), followed by Hispanic or Latino of any race (11%, 12,301). Many (34.3%, 19,910) of the individuals with disabilities in Berks fall into the 35-64 years age group, followed by those 75 years and over (22.9%, 13,270).

Berks IWD Population

Without a disability 85.9%

With a disability 14.1%

Sex of IWD in Berks

Male 46.0%

Female 54.0%
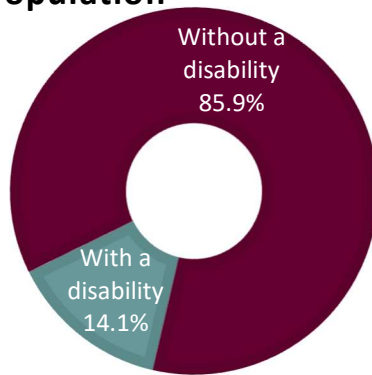
Race/Ethnicity of IWD in Berks

White alone 42.1%

Hispanic or Latino (of any race) 11.0%

White alone, not Hispanic or Latino 37.0%

Black or African American alone 3.7%

Asian alone 0.9%

Some other race alone 3.4%

Two or more races 1.8%

Age of IWD

Age group	Percentage
75 years and over	22.9%
65 to 74 years	17.2%
35 to 64 years	34.3%
18 to 34 years	13.9%
5 to 17 years	11.6%
Under 5 years	0.1%
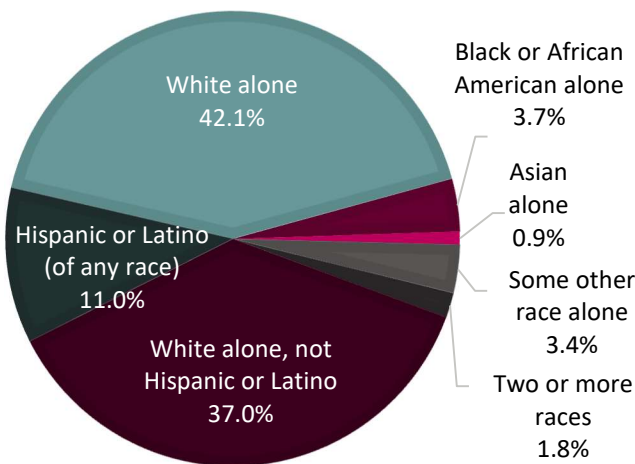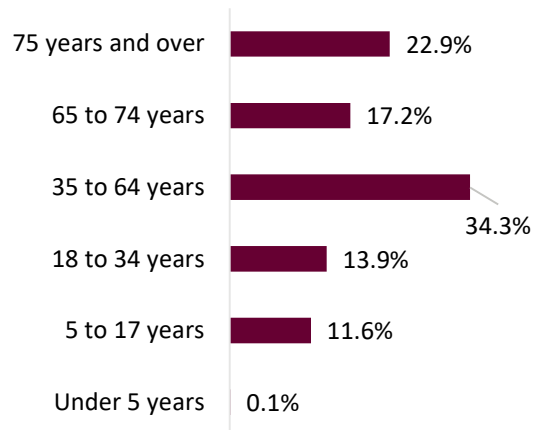
The most prominent disability among IWD in Berks is ambulatory difficulties (having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs) (27.4%, 28,825), this is followed by cognitive difficulties (because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions) (24.2%, 25,458), independent living difficulties (because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping) (19.5%, 20,516), hearing difficulties (deaf or having serious difficulty hearing) (11.3%, 11,955), self-care difficulties (having difficulty bathing or dressing) (9.8%, 10,314), and vision difficulties (blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses) (7.8%, 8,268).

Disability Type of IWD in Berks County

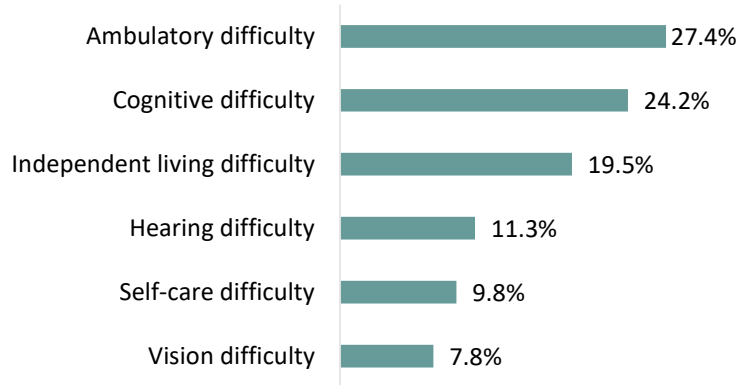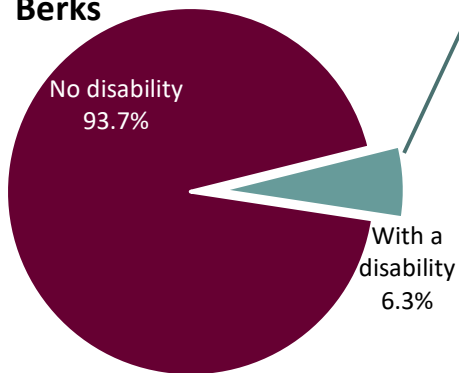|	
Ambulatory difficulty	27.4%
Cognitive difficulty	24.2%
Independent living difficulty	19.5%
Hearing difficulty	11.3%
Self-care difficulty	9.8%
Vision difficulty	7.8%

Of the civilian, noninstitutionalized, 18 to 64 years population that is employed in Berks County, 6.3% (12,234) are IWD. Almost half of individuals with disabilities employed (46.2%, 5,646) are those with cognitive difficulties. 33.9% (4,148) of these have ambulatory difficulties, 22.5% (2,750) have vision difficulties, 17.6% (2,750) have independent living difficulties, 15.6% (1,910) have hearing difficulties, and 7.1% (870) have self-care difficulties. Although these disability types are not mutually exclusive for employees.[iv]

Employment of IWD in Berks

No disability	93.7%
With a disability	6.3%

Disability Type of Employed IWD in Berks

Cognitive difficulty	46.2%
Ambulatory difficulty	33.9%
Vision difficulty	22.5%
Independent living difficulty	17.6%
Hearing difficulty	15.6%
Self-care difficulty	7.1%
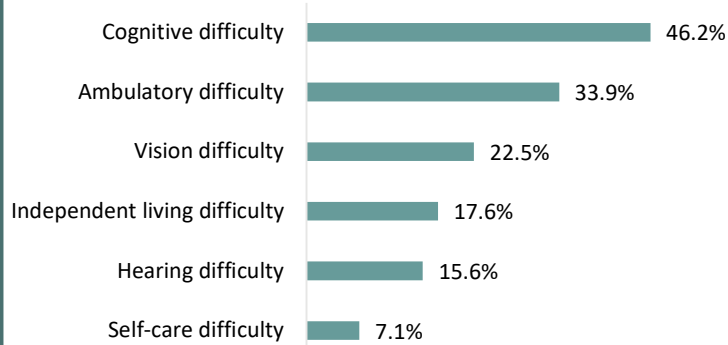
Industry of Employment of IWD in Berks County

Industry	Percentage
Retail	16.7%
Manufacturing	15.6%
Professional Services	9.7%
Medical Services	8.3%
Transportation	7.7%
Entertainment	7.7%
Education	6.6%
Construction	5.9%
Service	4.3%
Wholesale	4.0%
Social Assistance	3.7%
Finance	3.0%
Agriculture	1.8%
Administration	1.7%
Broadcasting	1.0%
Extraction (Mining)	1.0%
Utilities	0.1%
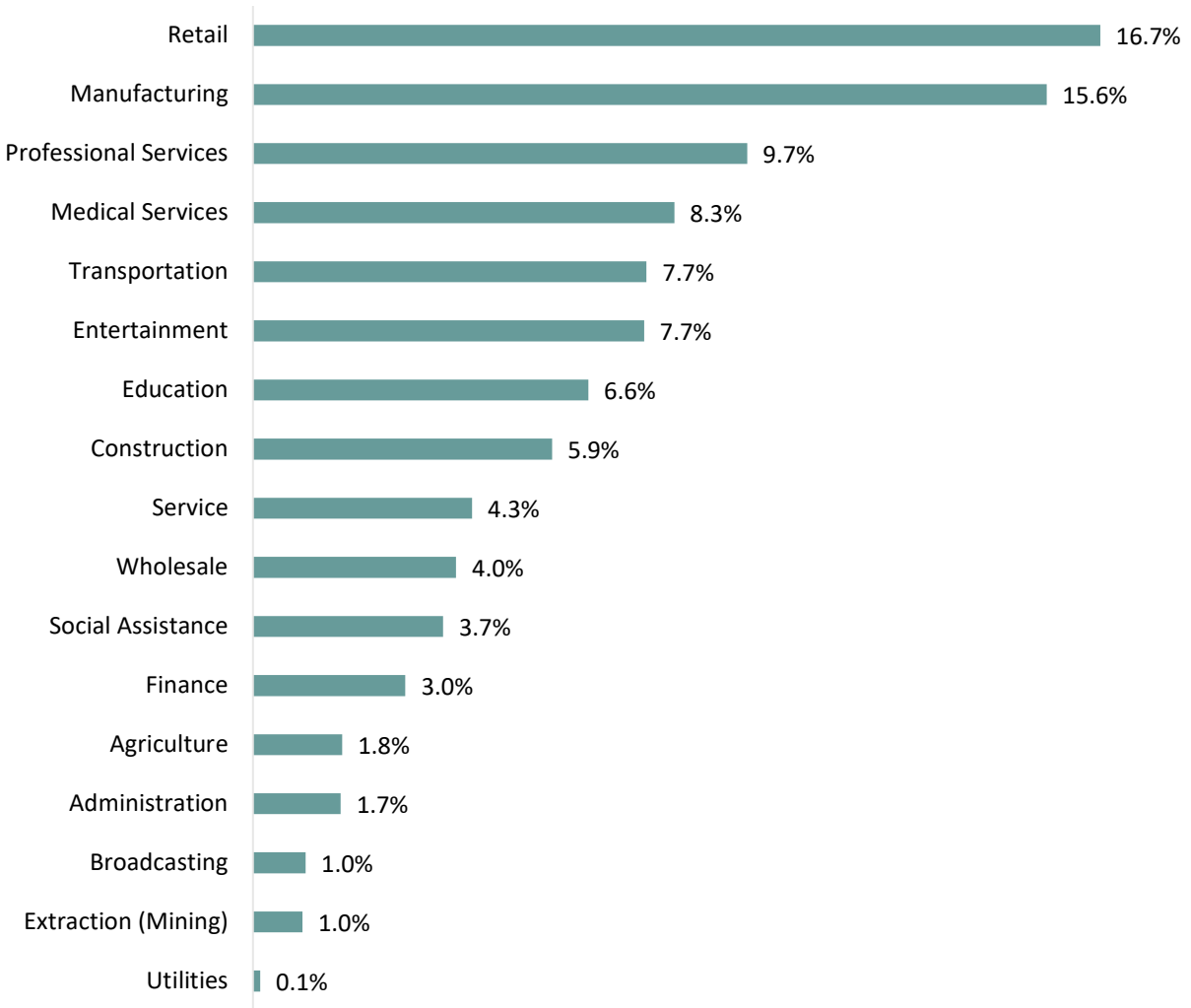
Those IWD that are employed in Berks County most frequently work in retail (16.7%), with the most prevalent jobs being within general merchandise stores, supermarkets and other grocery stores, automobile dealers, and department stores. Additionally, many individuals with disabilities employed in Berks County work in manufacturing (15.6%), including jobs in bakeries, and cement, concrete, lime, and gypsum production.[v]

In examining the educational attainment of those 18 years and up in Berks County, individuals with disabilities attain educational markers at a lower rate compared with individuals without disabilities. Attainment of a high school diploma was the most common among those both with and without a disability. However, far more individuals without disabilities (28.2%, 92,39) received a regular high school diploma compared to IWD (6.3%, 20,546). Attainment of a Bachelor's degree was the second most common educational marker for both individuals with and without disabilities, but was similarly far more common among those without disabilities (14.2%, 46,394) compared to those with disabilities (1.8%, 5,944.) Very few IWD in Berks continue on to attain a professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree (0.1%, 344) compared with those without a disability attaining a professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree (1.1%, 3,585).[vi]

Educational Attainment in Berks County

■ With a disability   ■ Without a disability

| Category	With a disability	Without a disability
Regular high school diploma	6.3%	28.2%
GED or alternative credential	0.8%	3.8%
Some college, but less than 1 year	1.0%	4.8%
1 or more years of college credit, no degree	1.4%	9.1%
Associate's degree	0.8%	7.5%
Bachelor's degree	1.8%	14.2%
Master's degree	0.6%	5.6%
Doctorate degree	0.1%	0.7%
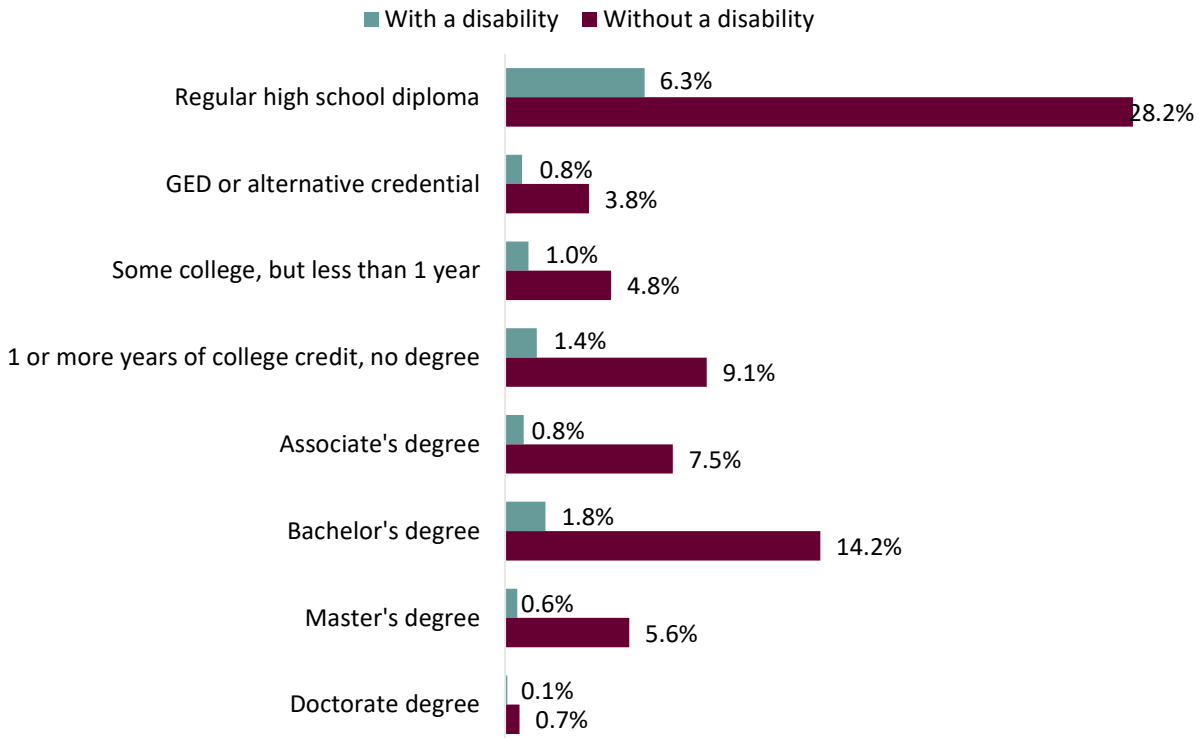
EMPLOYER SURVEY DATA

Employers made up 24.7% of survey respondents. Of the employers that responded to the survey, most (37.5%) worked in industries that were not listed including wholesale distribution, construction, nonprofit/human services, mental health services, education, and staffing services. Many (29.2%) worked in advanced manufacturing as well as some (16.7%) in healthcare.

Survey Respondent Make-up
(n = 97)
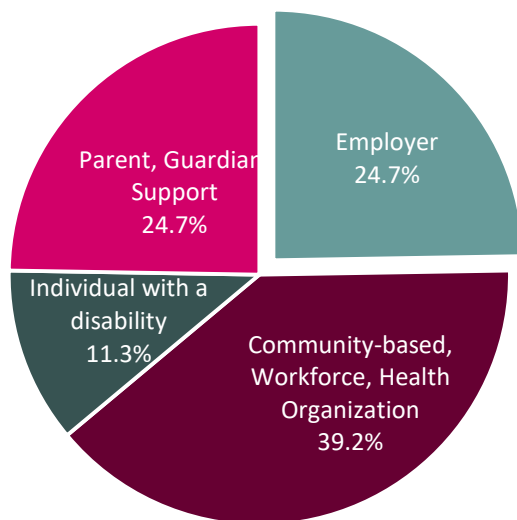
Employer Industry (n = 24)
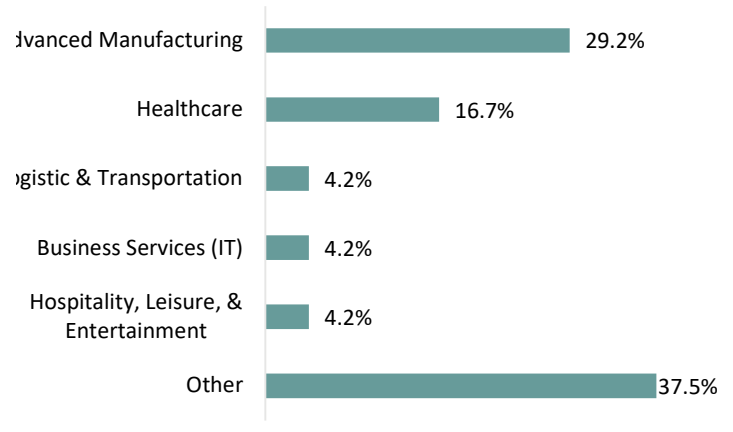
Employers were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding individuals with disabilities. Over half (54.2%) of employers that responded to the survey either agreed or strongly agreed that their organization is concerned about the cost of health care coverage. However, half (50.0%) agreed or strongly agreed they were open to hiring people with disabilities and would like more information about resources. Similarly, many (45.8%) employers believed individuals with disabilities do important work in their organization and reported having had very positive experiences in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities (43.5%).

However, many (37.5%) employers believed that the nature of the work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities and there was a lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities (33.3%). Along these lines, few employers (29.2%) reported that their organization has development and advancement opportunities for IWD.

Relatively few (20.8%) employers had workers' compensation and/or liability concerns that inhibit them from employing individuals with disabilities. Further very few reported that their organization worried about customers' responses if they hire individuals with disabilities (4.2%)

or that the actual cost of accommodating disability was a concern for their organization (4.2%). Similarly, very few employers that responded to the survey believed that individuals with disabilities were harder to retain than other employees or that that there was any discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities (4.2%). It is important to note that although the survey was distributed to employers, there was a lack of response and hesitance to take the survey, demonstrated by only 24 employer respondents total (including the seven employers who responded to the paired down survey).

Employers' Perceptions (n = 24)

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My organization is concerned about the cost of health care coverage	29.2%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	4.2%
I have worker's compensation and/or liability concerns that inhibit me from employing individuals with…	16.7%	4.2%	20.8%	29.2%	16.7%
Individuals with disabilities are doing important work in my organization	16.7%	29.2%	25.0%	4.2%	4.2%
I have had very positive experiences in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities	13.0%	30.4%	34.8%		
I am open to hiring people with disabilities and would like more information about resources	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	4.2%	
The nature of the work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities	8.3%	29.2%	12.5%	25.0%	20.8%
My organization has development and advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities	4.2%	25.0%	45.8%	16.7%	4.2%
There is a lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities	4.2%	29.2%	25.0%	29.2%	8.3%
There is discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities	4.2%		29.2%	50.0%	16.7%
Actual cost of accommodating disability is a concern for my organization	4.2%		29.2%	45.8%	8.3%
Individuals with disabilities are harder to retain than other employees	4.2%		20.8%	45.8%	8.3%
My organization worries about customers' responses if we hire individuals with disabilities	4.2%		16.7%	29.2%	50.0%

Survey data collected from individuals with disabilities, CBOs that serve individuals with disabilities, and parents, guardians, or support team members of individuals with disabilities are highlighted in respective sections throughout this report. Employer data is also discussed more thoroughly in corresponding sections.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 Community Vulnerability Index (CCVI), developed by Surgo Ventures, assessed how well communities in the United States could respond to the health, economic, and/or social consequences of COVID-19 in the absence of appropriate response and support.[vii] It combines social vulnerability characteristics, such as socioeconomic status or language barriers, with vulnerability characteristics specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, including access to healthcare and comorbidities among the population. According to the CCVI, **Berks County is more vulnerable than 66% of U.S. counties.**

An Easterseals study on the impact of COVID-19 on IWD explained that for people with disabilities, the barriers to recovery from a pandemic like COVID-19 are much more complex than for those without disabilities[viii]. If not properly addressed, the challenges they face post-pandemic could have devastating short- and long-term consequences on their quality of life and wellbeing – and a negative impact on society at large. The Easterseals study noted that individuals with disabilities were less likely to be employed than individuals without disabilities prior to the pandemic. Amidst the pandemic, they reported that individuals with disabilities have also been more likely to lose their jobs and contract COVID-19 with more negative health impacts leading to more significant healthcare expenses. These issues caused by COVID-19 in addition to the disparities already existing for individuals with disabilities, have widened the financial gap between individuals with disabilities and the general population. Further, they report that the new skills needed in the job market (e.g. technical skills) as a result of COVID-19's persistence has increased financial insecurity for individuals with disabilities.

During the Shutdown

Mental Health Issues Exacerbated by Seclusion | During the lockdowns at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more people report they were feeling lonely, depressed, and even harboring thoughts of suicide as COVID-19 cases in the United States increased.[ix] However, stakeholders reported that these feelings often exacerbated the mental health struggles experienced by people with disabilities, especially for those with mood and anxiety disorders. "I think the lockdown and shutdowns isolated individuals with disabilities and brought out this unreasonable fear of catching and/or spreading COVID-19" shared one parent. When asked how COVID-19 impacted individuals with disabilities, a parent of an individual with disabilities noted "they felt it strongly, and it created this psychological barrier that they are still dealing with." A community-based organizations (CBO) employee also discussed how the lockdown affected those with mood and anxiety disorders. "Anxiety, paranoia, and fear definitely increased. These individuals were sleeping less, worried more, and couldn't physically be with their support teams. It absolutely affected mental health."

Increased Health Risk | Often people with disabilities experience other underlying health issues, such as asthma or diabetes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities emphasized the groups at more risk for Covid-19.[x] These included:

- People who have limited mobility or who cannot avoid coming into close contact with others who may be infected, such as direct support providers and family members
- People who have trouble understanding information or practicing preventive measures, such as hand washing and social distancing
- People who may not be able to communicate symptoms of illness

Those with these vulnerable health issues were very at risk for severe (and possibly life-threatening) complications from contracting COVID-19. "If they [IWD] have medical needs beyond their disability, it put them in a vulnerable population that did not want to be out interacting with the public in a job" shared one CBO employee. Another stakeholder also talked about how the concern of contracting COVID-19 "caused most of these individuals to pause their job searches for almost a year."

Job Loss | The lockdown and shutdowns were devastating on the economy, and many employers were forced to eliminate job positions or close their business entirely. This had a significant impact on the employment of individuals with disabilities. In April 2020, Global Disability Inclusion conducted a survey of both individuals with disabilities and individuals without disabilities. The survey found "that employment insecurity is growing for all employees, but for people with disabilities it is especially acute. In total, 50% of respondents with a disability have either lost their income, shut down their business or believe they will lose their jobs within the next 90 days, as compared to less than 30% of the respondents without a disability."[xi]

The impact of job loss on IWD was also discussed during the stakeholder interviews. "When we were in the height of the pandemic," discussed one CBO employee, "70% of our customers lost their jobs or chose not to return to work. Thirty percent were classified as 'essential workers' but made the decision to not go to work for fear of the health effects of contracting the virus." Another CBO employee also noted the impact of the shutdown on the employment of individuals with disabilities. "For those working in retail – which is a large amount of our customers – they were out of work for 3-4 months before their employers started bringing people back in. However, my customers were the last group to be recalled, meaning they were out of work much longer than their coworkers."

As Things Adjusted

Sensory Issues Made Mask Wearing for Long Hours Challenging | Once companies started re-opening, employees were required to wear face masks throughout their entire shift. This proved to be difficult for individuals with disabilities with sensory intolerances – experiencing high levels of distress caused by everyday sounds and/or common tactile sensations.[xii] "Wearing a face mask involves many unpleasant sensations. On the surface, there's the scratchy texture of fabric, tight contact where the top of the mask meets the skin, and the tug of elastic on the ears… While wearing a mask is uncomfortable at best, these unpleasant sensory experiences can be intensely magnified in people with sensory intolerances."[xiii]

The CBO employees interviewed discussed how, when the individuals they serve started returning to work, they pivoted their services to help individuals with sensory intolerances prepare for long shifts of mask wearing. "We had to shift to spending time teaching our customers proper mask wearing techniques and strategies to help when they feel overwhelmed or short of breath. It was a really challenging time for all of us," shared one CBO employee. An individual with a disability also discussed the cost barrier associated with mask requirements. "Some jobs require you to buy your own masks and that's not affordable for everyone. So they choose not to work because they can't buy masks."

Current Impact

Job Availability | CBO employees that participated in the stakeholder engagement frequently mentioned that it is currently easier to find appropriate job placements for all the individuals with disabilities coming to them for job search services. "All but two of the individuals who lost their jobs in the Spring of 2020 because of the shutdown have either returned to their previous jobs or found other employment" shared one CBO employee. Another stated that "prior to COVID, it took an individual an average of 2-3 months to find a job, apply, and start. Now it takes 3-8 weeks." To support that claim, another CBO employee shared that "COVID has actually helped these individuals because staffing shortages have forced employers to be more open to favorable placements." However, one CBO employee expressed hesitation around all these quick placements. "I am really worried about what will happen once the staffing shortages decrease. My people, my placements, are going to be the first to go once the economy turns around. I'm just bracing for that impact."

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

This section discusses the themes identified during the analysis of data from the surveys, group interviews, and one-on-one interviews. This data was separated into four categories – Marketing and Recruitment, Employment Assistance, Employment Retention, and Employee Advancement. Within each category, themes were identified for individuals with disabilities and employers.

Marketing and Recruitment

Community-based organizations (CBOs), individuals with disabilities (IWD), and the support team of the individuals with disabilities (support team) that responded to the survey largely agreed regarding which employer recruitment/hiring strategies were the most and least effective. Nearly all strategies, including employers partnering with disability-related provider organizations and advocacy organizations, employers developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities, and employers establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities were rated effective or very effective by at least 50% of CBOs, support teams, and IWD. CBOs reported a greater efficacy for nearly all strategies compared with parents and individuals with disabilities.

In contrast, employers using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources, posting job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications, and posting jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM) were not rated as effective or very effective by at least 50% of all groups.

Employers partnering with disability-related provider organizations and advocacy organizations, employers developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities, and employers establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities were rated effective or very effective by the most CBOs, support teams, and IWD.

However, there was a disparity between the support teams' level of agreement with the efficacy of employers using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources for recruitment and hiring compared to individuals with disabilities and CBOs' level of agreement. While 41.7% of individuals with disabilities and 48.7% of CBOs that responded to the survey reported that using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources for recruitment was either effective or very effective, only 20.8% of the support teams that responded to the survey believed so.
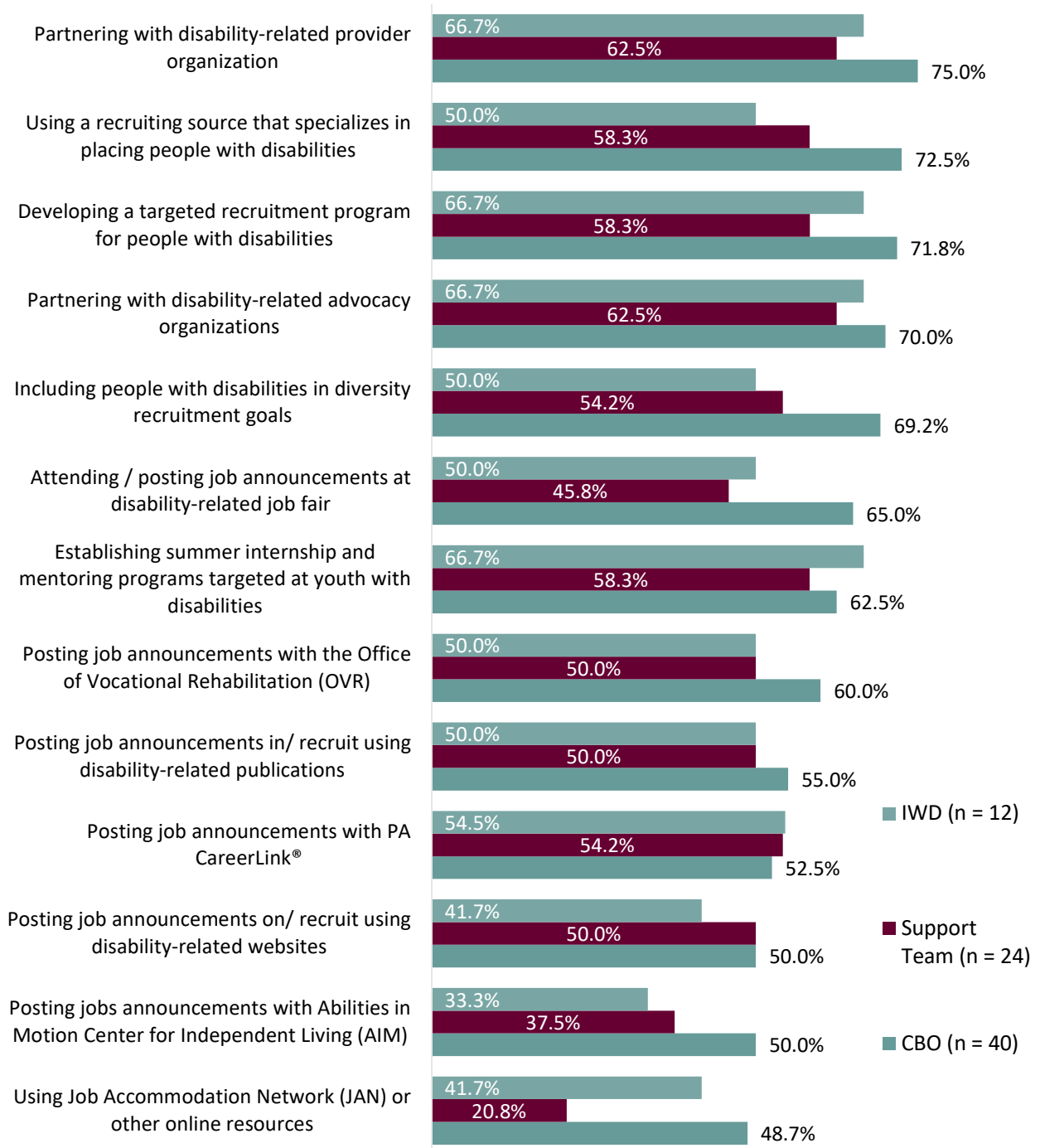
Employer Recruitment/Hiring Strategy Efficacy

Partnering with disability-related provider organization
- 66.7%
- 62.5%
- 75.0%

Using a recruiting source that specializes in placing people with disabilities
- 50.0%
- 58.3%
- 72.5%

Developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities
- 66.7%
- 58.3%
- 71.8%

Partnering with disability-related advocacy organizations
- 66.7%
- 62.5%
- 70.0%

Including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
- 50.0%
- 54.2%
- 69.2%

Attending / posting job announcements at disability-related job fair
- 50.0%
- 45.8%
- 65.0%

Establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities
- 66.7%
- 58.3%
- 62.5%

Posting job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
- 50.0%
- 50.0%
- 60.0%

Posting job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications
- 50.0%
- 50.0%
- 55.0%

Posting job announcements with PA CareerLink®
- 54.5%
- 54.2%
- 52.5%

Posting job announcements on/ recruit using disability-related websites
- 41.7%
- 50.0%
- 50.0%

Posting jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM)
- 33.3%
- 37.5%
- 50.0%

Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources
- 41.7%
- 20.8%
- 48.7%

Legend:
- IWD (n = 12)
- Support Team (n = 24)
- CBO (n = 40)

Figure 1. Percentage represents the percent of each group (IWD, Support team, CBO) that reported the strategy as being effective or very effective.

Individuals – Marketing and Recruitment

Using PA CareerLink® to Find Employment Opportunities | During interviews, employees of CBOs specializing in employment assistance for individuals with disabilities reported that they primarily use PA CareerLink® to find and connect individuals with potential job opportunities. "During our service counseling, we always connect our customers to PA CareerLink® to find jobs that are suitable to their needs, skill set, and education" shared one community-based organization employee. Another CBO employee share that the "PA CareerLink® is by far the primary way we find jobs for our customers. Actually, it's the only thing I use."

The use of PA Careerlink® was also demonstrated in the survey. Over half of individuals in CBOs (52.5%) and individuals with disabilities (54.6%) that responded to the survey reported that employers posting job announcements with PA CareerLink® was either effective or very effective.

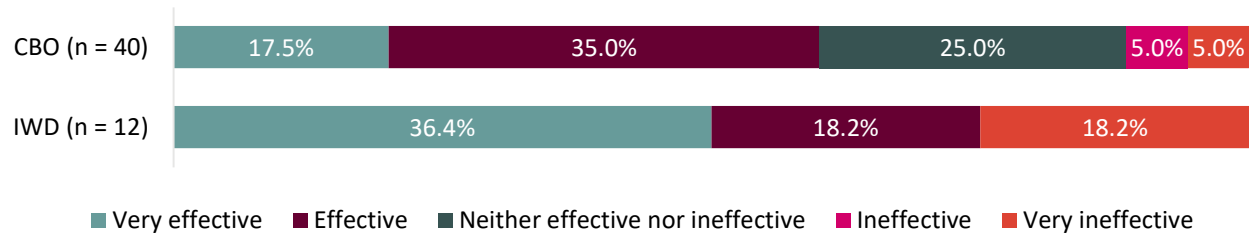### Efficacy of Employers Posting Job Announcements with PA CareerLink®

Group	Very effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Ineffective	Very ineffective
CBO (n = 40)	17.5%	35.0%	25.0%	5.0%	5.0%
IWD (n = 12)	36.4%	18.2%			18.2%

■ Very effective ■ Effective ■ Neither effective nor ineffective ■ Ineffective ■ Very ineffective

Figure 1. Percentage represents the percent of the respective groups (CBO, IWD) that reported the strategy efficacy in accordance with the legend.

Finding Information on Available Services | Parents of adults with disabilities reported during one-on-one interviews that finding information on available supportive employment services for their adult children was difficult. "Every parent of an individual with a disability has to be an advocate for their children, and that is made much harder by the fact that it's almost impossible to find information on what supportive services are available to them in Berks County" shared one parent. Another parent also spoke of how finding information to help their child was confusing. "It is a bit of a maze – and I consider myself pretty knowledgeable – to figure out where my child can go to get help… [The workforce support] system is tough to navigate. To help your child, to be a strong advocate, you have to be able to dedicate a tremendous amount of time just to finding services for them."

Parents also reported that employees within the workforce system in Berks County experience the same difficulties in finding resources and supports. "In my personal experience, I would say a lot of professionals working in the system don't understand what supports are out there and cannot direct an individual to where they should go for help. The system itself is so complex that it hinders us more than it actually helps us."

Employers- Marketing and Recruitment

Using PA CareerLink® to Post Employment Opportunities | In the survey, employers reported posting job announcements to PA CareerLink® was by far their most utilized strategy with 52.2% of employers that responded to the survey reporting their organization utilized this strategy. This was followed by posting job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) (21.7%). At least half of CBOs, individuals with disabilities, and support teams agreed that these strategies were effective or very effective.

No employers reported in the survey developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities or posting job announcements with or recruiting through Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM), disability-related websites, or at disability-related job fairs.

Another recruitment strategy employers highlighted in the survey included hiring through apprenticeship programs (e.g. Metal Apprenticeship Program).
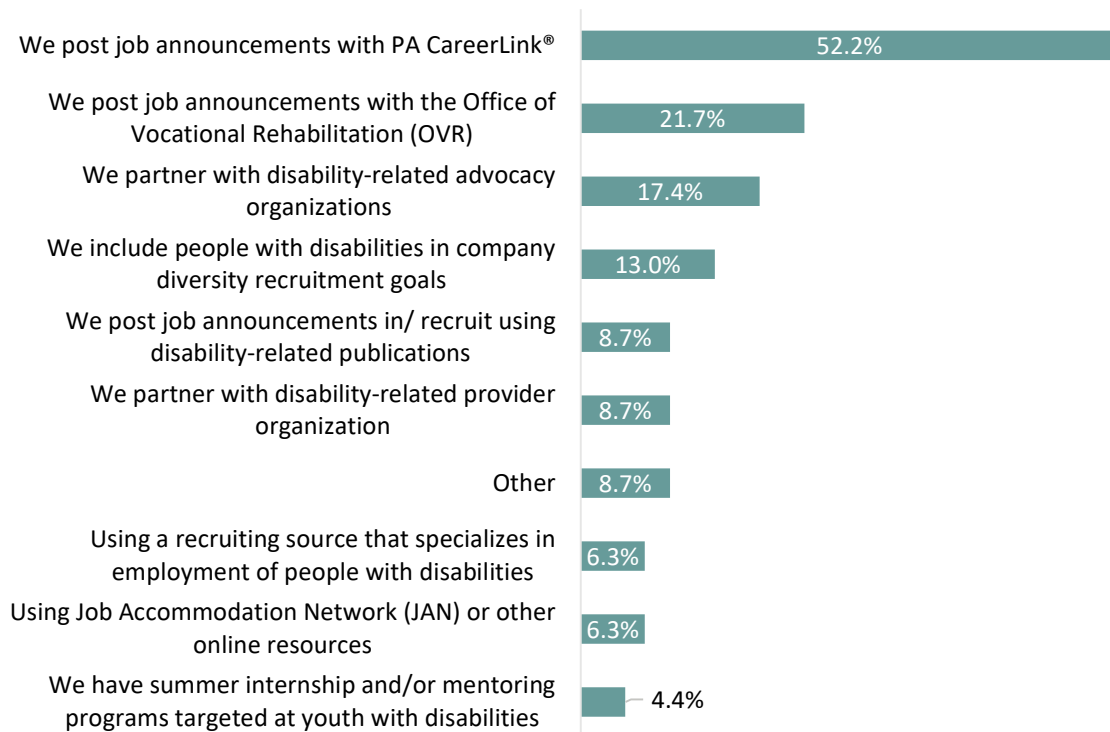
Employers' Utilization of Recruitment Strategy (n = 23)

Strategy	Percentage
We post job announcements with PA CareerLink®	52.2%
We post job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)	21.7%
We partner with disability-related advocacy organizations	17.4%
We include people with disabilities in company diversity recruitment goals	13.0%
We post job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications	8.7%
We partner with disability-related provider organization	8.7%
Other	8.7%
Using a recruiting source that specializes in employment of people with disabilities	6.3%
Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources	6.3%
We have summer internship and/or mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities	4.4%

Figure 2. Percentage represents the percent of employers reporting their organization utilizes strategy.

Perceived Difficulty in Sharing Employment Opportunities Directly with CBOs | During a one-on-one interview, a local employer discussed their experience with attempting to directly recruit individuals with disabilities for job openings. "We really have to use informal channels for recruiting individuals with disabilities. We use referral bonuses with our current employees to leverage their existing relationships. We know that the formal channels – like PA CareerLink® – are not going to let us target specialized populations of workers so we have to try these informal channels."

Another employer noted that having an organized, formal system to let organizations know of job postings would help them not feel discriminatory in their recruitment practices. "We do not want to ever come across as being discriminate in our job postings, so we do not seek out agencies to establish relationships for sharing those positions. However, if there was a formal system, or like a formal way to communicate that information with agencies, we would love to use that. That way it's not us seeking out that connection – we are just using a formal job posting process, like we do now with PA CareerLink®."

Employment Assistance

Individuals with disabilities tended to rate all four employment assistant strategies as less effective than the ratings given by CBOs and support teams.

Other than the assistance strategy of employee resource groups, CBOs rated all strategies as more effective than individuals with disabilities and support teams. While at least half of CBOs and support teams believed all employment assistance strategies were effective (except employee resource groups), half of individuals with disabilities was the *most* any strategy got in terms of efficacy. Employee resource groups were rated as fairly ineffective by all three groups, with its highest efficacy rating being from 50% of support team members.

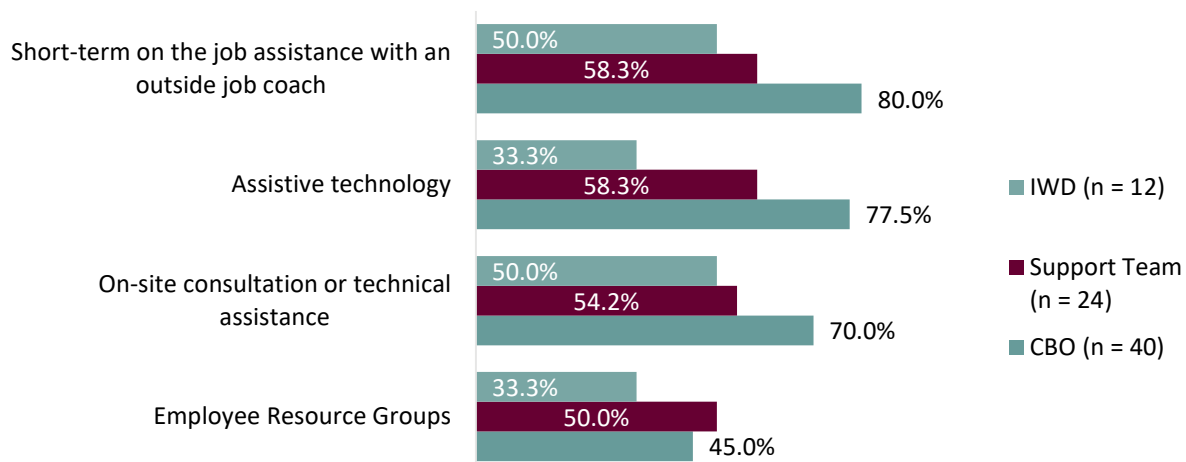### Employment Assistance Strategy Efficacy

Strategy	IWD (n = 12)	Support Team (n = 24)	CBO (n = 40)
Short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach	50.0%	58.3%	80.0%
Assistive technology	33.3%	58.3%	77.5%
On-site consultation or technical assistance	50.0%	54.2%	70.0%
Employee Resource Groups	33.3%	50.0%	45.0%

Figure 3. Percentage represents the percent of each group (IWD, Support team, CBO) that reported the strategy as being effective or very effective.

Individuals – Employment Assistance

Assistance with Job Applications | Most employees of CBOs that participated in a group or one-on-one interview discussed their organization's support services around assisting individuals with the online job application process. "Unless an individual with a disability has someone guiding them through the online application, it can be quite challenging for them just to fill out the basic information. We make sure we are there with them every step of the way to make it as easy and painless as possible" shared one CBO employee. Another spoke of their organization's focus on making the job application process as normalized as possible. "We try to create a normalized, universal experience for our job seekers with disabilities. We look at how general job seekers are applying for these jobs, what they are doing with online job applications, and we try to apply that to our service menu."

Helping Individuals with Disabilities Prepare for an Interview | One individual with a disability shared that the "support of being able to do a mock interview was really great" and that it helped her "feel less nervous because I had kind of a better idea what to expect during the real thing." Another individual spoke about how he appreciated how his job coach prepared him to answer behavioral interview questions. "When I didn't get one job because I answered the questions the wrong way, [my job coach] met with me and walked me through possible scenarios they might give and explained to me what the 'right' answer was. I thought that was so nice that she tried to help me learn from that."

Providing Support to Individuals with Disabilities During a Job Interview | A few CBOs in Berks County shared that they provide "coaching" services to individuals during job interviews. "Our job coach can even sit in with the person while on the interview. They don't say anything or help answer questions. They are there for support." The CBO employee continued "It really helps calm the individual with their anxiety if they are sitting next to someone they know and trust." During a one-on-one interview, an individual with a disability also discussed this support and how it allowed them to focus on the questions being asked sharing "without my job coach in the room with me, my nervousness and anxiety would have made it hard for me to understand what the questions were. Just having them there helped me get through it."

Limited Relationships with Local Employers is a Challenge | Most employees of CBOs discussed how a lack of relationships with local employers affects their ability to connect IWD to available jobs. "We need more direct connections with businesses. I can't find everything I need on PA CareerLink®" shared one CBO employee. Another stated that their organization requires employees to "be active community members and leverage their own healthy social capital" to develop relationships with employers, but this expectation is causing burn out. The CBO employee went on to share "there is no funding and no training in how to do this. I have to use a lot of my own personal time to build these networks. There's no way this is sustainable in the long term." Parents of IWD also discussed how the limited relationships between employers and CBOs negatively affect their adult children. "Berks County has a whole slew of agencies that are supposed to provide support to people like my child, and help them find jobs, but they are hampered by the really small number of employers willing to participate in these programs. I think it is a big struggle to find employers" one parent shared during an interview.

Difficulty Tailoring Job Search to the Individual | Several parents of IWD shared their frustrations with the job search assistance their children have received at different CBOs throughout Berks County, specifically focusing on the lack of individualized job searches. "There needs to be more education and understanding about cognitive disabilities" shared one parent. "There is a wide range in abilities and interests and skills in people with these disabilities. These job coaches often just bring back boiler plate job opportunities – you cannot treat them like they are all the same." In a different interview, another parent expressed a similar sentiment. "If you know one person with a cognitive disability, you know one really individualized person. This makes finding employment with job coaches really difficult because they want to treat all these individuals with disabilities the same and find them the same opportunities." A different parent stated that their experience finding individualized job support for their adult child was like "circling a drain" and that they constantly found themselves being stopped by bureaucracy. "It just seems like I have done all this leg work in finding job postings for my child, I set up the meetings to discuss how they can help my child apply for these jobs and check in on the progress, but we are not getting anywhere."

Employers - Employment Assistance

Employer utilization of assistance strategies was fairly low compared to utilization of recruitment strategies. However, this is consistent with IWD, CBOs, and support teams beliefs in the efficacy of these assistance strategies. The most prominently utilized assistance strategy was coordinating short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach (18.8%). This strategy was also believed to be the most effective of the employer assistance strategies by IWD, CBOs, and support teams. However, on-site consultation or technical assistance, which is rated as infrequently utilized (6.3%) by employer who participated in the survey, was believed to be effective or very effective by at least half of with IWD, CBOs, and support teams.

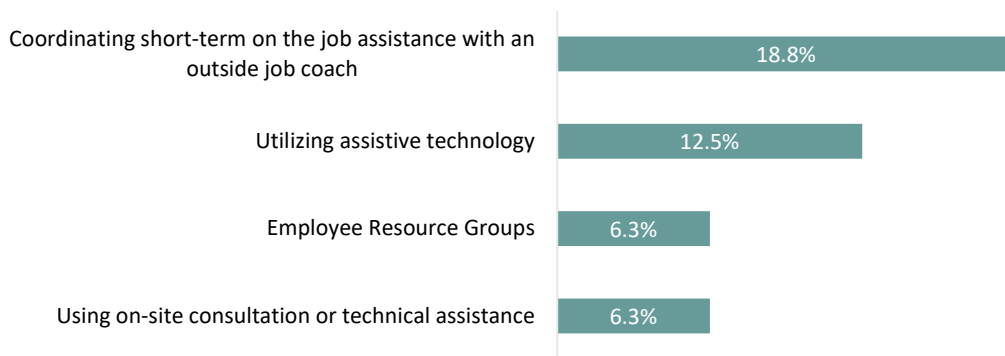## Employer Utilization of Assistance Strategy (n = 16)

Figure 4. Percentage reflects the percent of employers that reported utilization of strategy within their organization.

Creating Clear Job Descriptions Better Sets Employers and Employees Up for Success | Writing job descriptions that clearly identify the skills needed to perform the job were frequently cited by CBOs and support teams as being incredibly helpful when looking for employment. "Listing the skills someone needs to do a job successfully helps me coach someone on whether or not they might need an accommodation to perform this job, and if that accommodation is a reasonable ask. It really helps us manage expectations before we even help them apply" stated one employee of a CBO. A parent of an individual with a disability shared that they look for skill-based job postings and just skip over any post that has an education requirement. "The education requirement, like requiring a college degree for an entry level job, is a huge barrier to an individual with a disability who may have on-the-job training instead of college. They can do the work, they have the skills, but that education requirement automatically disqualifies them. So instead we look for postings that list the skills so I know my child can do the work."

Use of Behavioral Interview Questions and/or Personality Assessments Can Negatively Impact Individuals with Disabilities **|** Several employees of CBOs, IWD, and support teams shared that asking behavioral interview questions or asking an individual to complete a personality assessment during the application process are major barriers for IWD – especially those with neurotypical disorders (such as autism spectrum disorder). "My customers with autism tend to really struggle with personality questions or ethics questions – questions where it seems like an opinion, but there's actually an implied right answer" shared one CBO employee. A parent of an individual also discussed this difficulty in answering these types of interview questions. "My child will always answer these questions truthfully; they don't understand that there is one specific answer the employer wants. My child sees this as lying and that if they give the "right" answer, they are trying to beat the system. The whole process just does not make sense to them." Another parent also shared this frustration with behavioral interview questions. "My child can do this job; they have all of the skills required. Their ability to answer these types of questions does not matter for the types of jobs they are applying for – it only matters in the interview. And that is beyond frustrating."

Lack of Variety of Job Options | Parents of adult children with disabilities frequently discussed their frustration at the lack of job options available for IWD. "Food service, kitchen work, and cleanup work are really the one (only?) types of jobs that the job coaches are finding for my child" shared one parent. "They have a high mental capacity and can easily do more complex jobs than those. But that's all those employers are willing to hire for." The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in their news release *Persons With A Disability: Labor Force Characteristics — 2020* reported "In 2020, persons with a disability were more likely to work in service occupations than those with no disability (18.0 percent, compared with 15.4 percent). Workers with a disability were also more likely than those with no disability to work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (14.9 percent, compared with 12.2 percent). Persons with a disability were less likely to work in management, professional, and related occupations than those without a disability (36.1 percent, compared with 43.3 percent)."[xiv]

During the interviews, a few CBO employees spoke of ways in which they worked directly with employers to increase job options. One spoke of an employer hiring an individual to "cut up Amazon boxes" all day so other employees could take on other duties. Another shared that they

reach out to employers frequently and ask, "What work around here is not getting done that you want to get done" and see if they can hire an individual with a disability to do that job. However, both examples are heavily reliant on the work of the CBO and not the employer.

Employer Perception of Job Support Services | While there are many job support services available to IWD in Berks County, there is still a negative perception of the use of these supports among employers. "Asking to bring a job coach into an interview with an individual can be awkward because the employer believes if this person needs a job coach during the interview, they will not be able to do the work independently. That is not true at all, but it's definitely a perception we are constantly battling" shared one CBO employee. Another shared that they have lost employer relationships because of the job support services. "Once an employer sees how we are supporting the individual with the application and the interview, the employer stops wanting to work with us because they think we are trying to connect them with people who cannot be independent. It's frustrating because they don't even give us a chance to prove them wrong."

Fear of Litigation Can be a Challenge When Trying to Engage New Employers | According to several CBO employees and support teams, one challenge with finding employers willing to hire IWD is the perception that employers are fearful of potential litigation stemming from restrictive regulations around the employment of people with disabilities. "I know this is controversial," shared one parent, "but honestly I think employers are quietly afraid of being sued if they somehow accidentally violate the laws protecting people with disabilities. So they don't even want to try." During an interview, an employer hinted to this as well by sharing that "rules and regulations create barriers for us." A CBO employee explained how agencies might be playing into this fear. "Advocates and agencies become overzealous and talk about these laws as if they are cast iron. Flexibility does not have to be a terrible look. Employers need to know there is room to be flexible."

While many employers (45.9%) that responded to the survey disagree or strongly disagree with having worker's compensation and/or liability concerns inhibiting them from employing IWD, a number (20.9%) of employers do agree or strongly agree that they have these concerns.

I have worker's compensation and/or liability concerns that inhibit me from employing individuals with disabilities (n = 24)

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

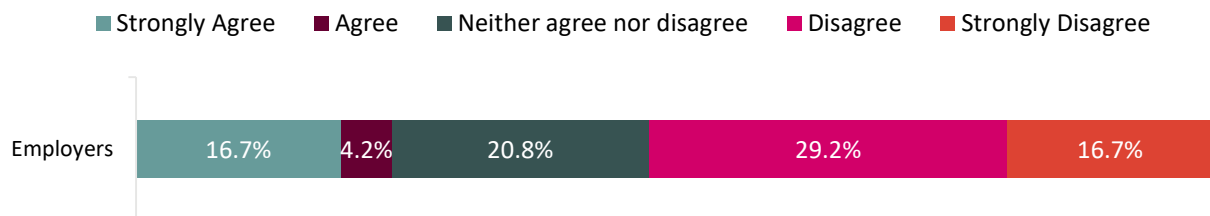| Employers | 16.7% | 4.2% | 20.8% | 29.2% | 16.7% |

Figure 5. Percentage represents employers' level of agreement with the statement in accordance with the legend.

Employment Retention

Similarly, to employer recruitment/hiring strategy efficacies, CBOs in the survey reported significantly greater efficacies for all strategies compared with support teams and IWD the outlier being employee resource groups. Further, at least half of support team respondents found all resource strategies as effective or very effective. Support teams and IWD found flexible work schedules, on-the-job training, and mentoring as the most effective strategies for retention.

Employer Retention Strategy Efficacy

On-the-Job Training — IWD: 66.7%, Support Team: 73.9%, CBO: 95.0%

Flexible work schedule — IWD: 83.3%, Support Team: 70.8%, CBO: 87.5%

Training or developing existing staff — IWD: 58.3%, Support Team: 54.2%, CBO: 80.0%

Mentoring — IWD: 63.6%, Support Team: 66.7%, CBO: 77.5%

Disability awareness training — IWD: 50.0%, Support Team: 54.2%, CBO: 76.9%

Employer tax credits and incentives — IWD: 41.7%, Support Team: 50.0%, CBO: 67.5%

Telework/Work from home — IWD: 50.0%, Support Team: 41.7%, CBO: 56.4%

Legend: IWD (n = 12); Support Team (n = 24); CBO (n = 40)

Figure 6. Percentage represents the percent of each group (IWD, Support team, CBO) that reported the strategy as being effective or very effective.

Individuals - Employment Retention

A Personal Connection with Management is an Asset When Trying to Retain Employees | Developing a personal yet professional relationship with a manager is a best practice in employment retention for any employee, but it is vital to the successful retention of an employee with a disability. "Having a personalized and trauma-informed approach to employee relationships is one of the best indications that our customer will be successful in a job" shared on CBO employee during a focus group. An individual with a disability stated that "we are all just people and we are all a little different. When my boss goes out of the way to acknowledge that, and to see that what makes me different makes me great, I really love that."

Job Coaching Was Beneficial to Individuals and Employers | On-the-job coaching services provided to IWD at the beginning of employment was cited by several parents as important in helping their adult children maintain employment. "Having someone in the room and during the training with my child is huge. They can help explain things when needed, advocate for [their learning] and taking on different skills and help them learn how to handle frustrations in the moment. I'm really thankful we have this service available to us" shared one parent. Another parent also shared that knowing the job coach "can run interference and dissolve tense situations while also teaching my child social skills makes me much more comfortable about them starting a new job".

Very few IWD (8.3%) found on-the-job training and short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach ineffective. Indeed, half (50%) of IWD found on-the-job training to be very effective and a quarter (25%) found short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach as very effective.

IWD Perception of Job Training Efficacy (n = 12)

■ Very effective ■ Effective ■ Neither effective nor ineffective ■ Ineffective ■ Very ineffective

	Very effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Ineffective
On-the-Job Training	50.0%	16.7%		8.3%
Short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach	25.0%	25.0%	8.3%	8.3%
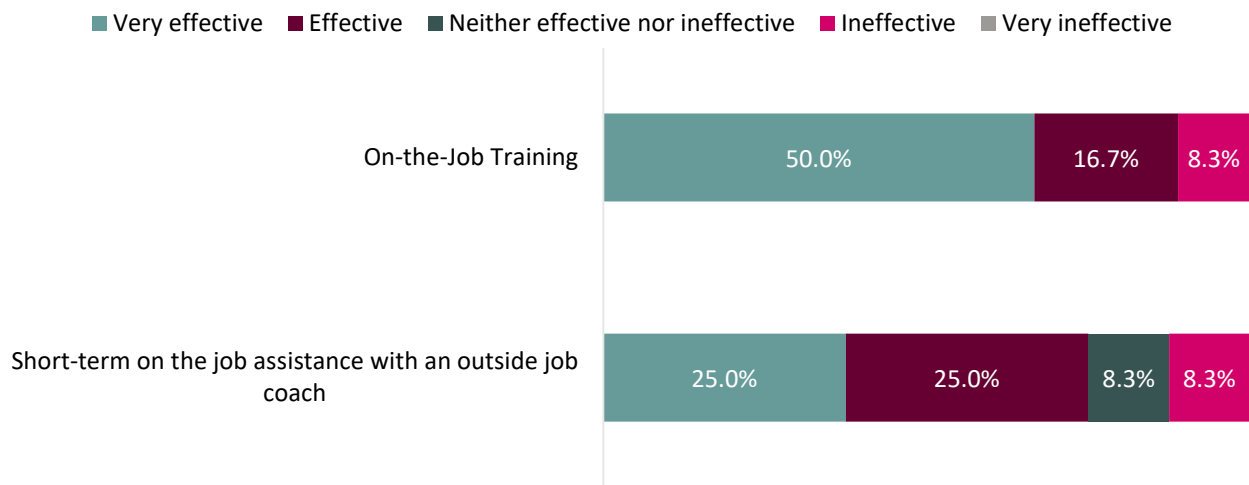
Figure 7. Percentage represents the percent of IWD that reported the respective strategy efficacy in accordance with the legend.

Tension with Coworkers, often from a Lack of Education About Disabilities, Impacts Retention| Sometimes an employer will need to make accommodations to support an individual with a disability, including limiting the hours in which they work and simplifying job tasks. These accommodations can occasionally cause tension among coworkers and can amplify the stigmas associated with disabilities. "I think some coworkers didn't like that he wasn't scheduled as many hours as them, so they started treating him badly, making rude remarks" remarked one parent as they described why their child quit a job at a grocery store. Another parent shared what they heard from other parents of adult children with disabilities. "From stories I have heard, a lack of education [about disabilities] among coworkers means they see this one employee being treated differently, and they see it as unfair. This leads to bullying."

Medical Concerns Can Make It Difficult to Maintain Employment | Missing work due to illness, hospitalizations, or mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, etc.) was the most frequently cited barrier to employment retention for IWD during the stakeholder engagement. One individual shared that "my frequent hospitalizations made me miss so much work and I just kept getting so sick that eventually I just had to quit." A CBO employee also shared how depressive episodes have affected the employment of some individuals with which they work stating "when they first get the job, something happens in their life outside of work that triggers their depression. They can't make it into work and they literally don't have the energy to call their boss and tell them they aren't coming in."

Individuals with Disabilities Often Rely on Public Transportation | In a report the *Travel Patterns of American Adults with Disabilities*, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics found that nationally "people age 18 to 64 with disabilities use local transit (buses, subways, and commuter rail) for a higher share of trips than people without disabilities—4.3 percent versus 2.7 percent for workers and 5.9 versus 3.3 percent for non-workers"[xv] It is common for IWD to need to rely on public transportation for work and the Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority (BARTA) is the bus system in Berks County that is most heavily used by these individuals. This reliance on public transportation presents several challenges to employment retention, including not being able to work schedules that fall beyond the hours of the bus route. "One of the biggest hurdles [to maintaining employment] is when employers require people to work after the bus route stops running" shared one CBO employee. "It means that if that person goes into work, they will be stranded with no way to go home. So they don't go in, and get fired." Another CBO employee shared that "with the way routes are set up, it will take someone one and a half hours to get to their job, whereas it's a five-minute drive in a car. Most employers don't realize that".

Employers- Employment Retention

Employers responding to the survey utilize telework/work from home options the most out of the strategies with 37.5% of employers reporting their organization utilizes this strategy. This was followed by mentoring (31.3%), training existing staff (31.3%), and on the job training (31.3%). A similar number of employers (31.3%) reported utilizing other strategies, including utilizing local resources.

Mentoring, on the job training, and training existing staff were among the highest rated in terms of efficacy for CBOs, IWD, and support teams of IWD. At least half of IWD and CBOs reported telework/work from home options as effective or very effective and the support teams of IWD were not too far behind (41.7%). However, flexible work hours was rated among the most effective retention strategy for CBOs (87.5%), IWD (83.3%), and support teams of IWD (70.8%), but was not reportedly utilized by employers at the same rate.
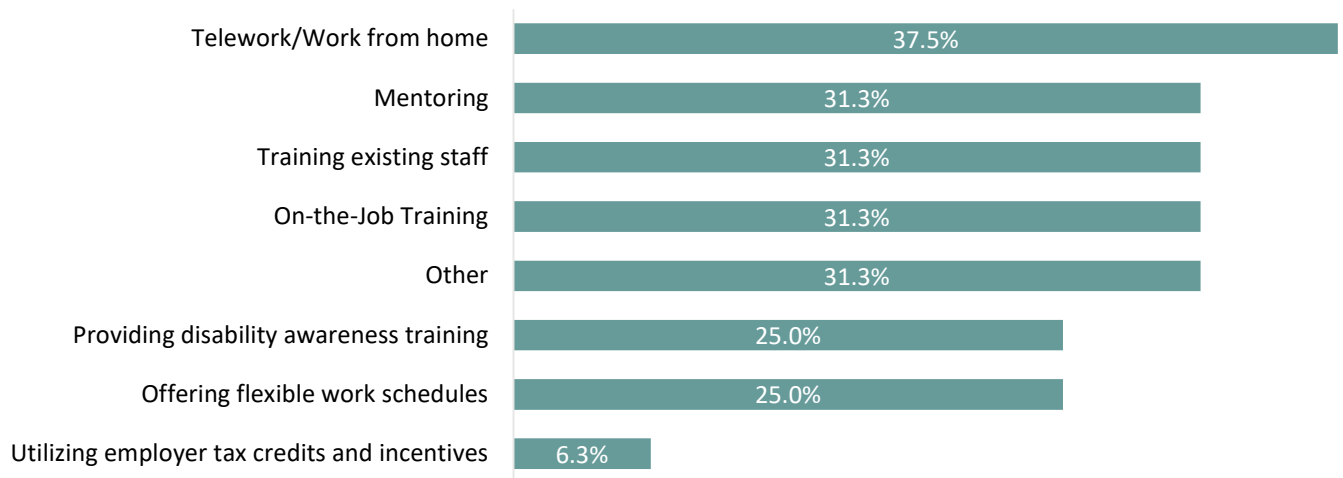
Employer Utilization of Retention Strategy (n = 16)

Strategy	Percentage
Telework/Work from home	37.5%
Mentoring	31.3%
Training existing staff	31.3%
On-the-Job Training	31.3%
Other	31.3%
Providing disability awareness training	25.0%
Offering flexible work schedules	25.0%
Utilizing employer tax credits and incentives	6.3%

Figure 8. Percentage represents the percent of employers reporting their organization utilizes strategy.

Employers Who Understand and Offer Accommodations Help Individuals with Disabilities Maintain Their Job | The willingness of an employer to offer and use accommodations to help employees with disabilities successfully complete their job tasks was frequently lauded by the IWD interviewed. One individual shared that one of the reasons why they stay with their current job is due to the accommodations offered by their employer. "I have more flexibility with things like having to take frequent bathroom breaks because of GI issues and if I have low blood sugar I can run and grab and drink or a bite to eat and it's fine". Another individual also mentioned the flexibility of bathroom breaks as a helpful accommodation. "During my interview, I expressed a need for ample bathroom breaks while working and they said that would be fine. It was a huge relief for me to hear that."

Over half (54.1%) of the employers that responded to the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with their organization being concerned with the cost of disability accommodation. As essential as these accommodations are for IWD in the workplace, it is important for employers to not only be unconcerned with the cost of accommodating disability, but they must seek to implement these accommodations.

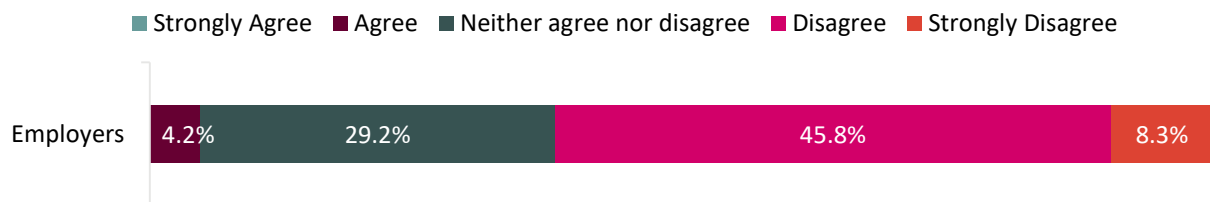## Actual cost of accommodating disability is a concern for my organization (n = 24)

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Employers	4.2%	29.2%	45.8%	8.3%

Figure 9. Percentage represents employers' level of agreement with the statement in accordance with the legend.

Clear Expectations from Management Helps Retain Employees | Most of the IWD and the parents interviewed stressed the importance of managers explicitly stating clear expectations for performance and behavior. "My child does really well when clearly directed. If they know exactly what is expected of them, there is hardly ever an issue" shared one parent. An individual interviewed shared that when a manager "makes it clear what the expectations are as early as possible" it helps with their anxiety. Another parent explained how one manager has made all the difference for her adult child. "Their current manager is wonderful. They give very specific, short instructions and always stay consistent. My child has thrived in that job because of that manager."

There Can Be Stigmas Surrounding the Employment of Individuals with Disabilities | Dealing with the negative effects of the stigma surrounding the employment of IWD was a common topic discussed by CBO employees, IWD, and their support teams. One CBO employee shared that they have seen firsthand how this stigma prevents employers from engaging with their services. "Some employers have expressed to me their worry that an individual with a disability will be a major investment of resources and they aren't able to do that. That's the stigma – this belief that IWD cannot be independent workers". Another CBO employee discussed the need for educating employers on disabilities. "There are many different disabilities and such a variety of skill level and independence. So many employers equate a disability to low functioning and they let that stigma prevent them participating in our services."

As CBOs, support teams, and IWD express being impacted by stigma, employers that responded to the survey report little stigma surrounding IWD in their organization. Over three-quarters (79.2%) of employers reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their organization worries about customers' responses if they hire IWD. Similarly, the majority (66.7%) of employers reported that there is little discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities within their organization. However, compared with these statements, employers were more likely to agree or strongly agree (37.5%) that the nature of the work in their organization is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities. Perhaps not perceived as such by employers, the "belief that IWD cannot be independent workers" is a stigma, as the CBO employee indicated.

Stigma Surrounding IWD (n = 24)

■ Strongly Agree   ■ Agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly Disagree

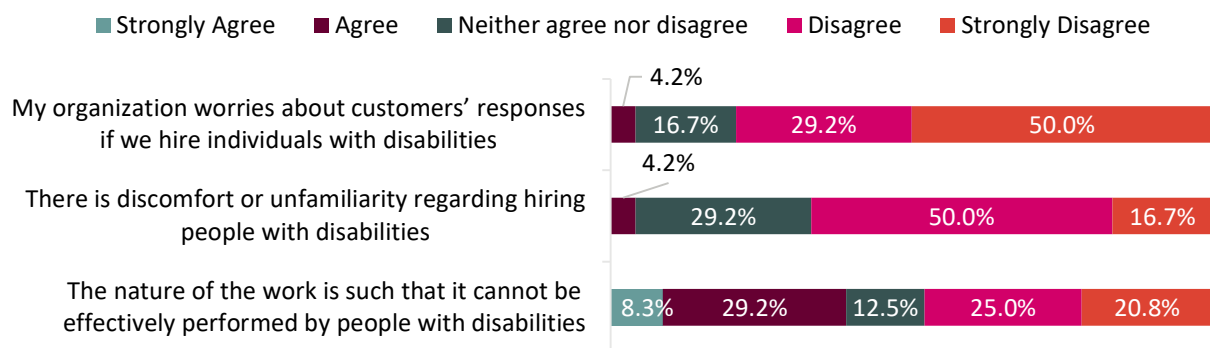| Statement					
My organization worries about customers' responses if we hire individuals with disabilities	4.2%	16.7%		29.2%	50.0%
There is discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities	4.2%		29.2%	50.0%	16.7%
The nature of the work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities	8.3%	29.2%	12.5%	25.0%	20.8%

Figure 10. Percentage represents employers' level of agreement with the respective statements in accordance with the legend.

Conflict Management / Conflict Resolution |Learning how to effectively manage conflict with an individual with a disability often requires a different approach than traditional conflict management, including an understanding of how disabilities might affect behavior, reactions, and understanding during heated moments. "We try to make sure our managers understand mental health disorders and how it changes how people might respond during high stress situations. But we had to develop this ourselves, with many hours of research and planning. I don't know of any resources already out there for us" stated one employer. A CBO employee also discussed the need for this kind of training for employers. "If a manager learns how to appropriately respond to stress, including de-escalation techniques, their employees with disabilities are going to feel safer and wanted".

Employment Advancement

While a quarter (25%) of employers that responded to the survey agreed that their organization has development and advancement opportunities for IWD, almost half (45.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed. This is likely a reflection of the belief that IWD are "afforded the same advancement opportunities as any other employees in the organization," as was reported by one survey respondent and echoed by several others.

My organization has development and advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities (n = 24)

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

	4.2%				4.2%
Employers		25.0%	45.8%	16.7%	
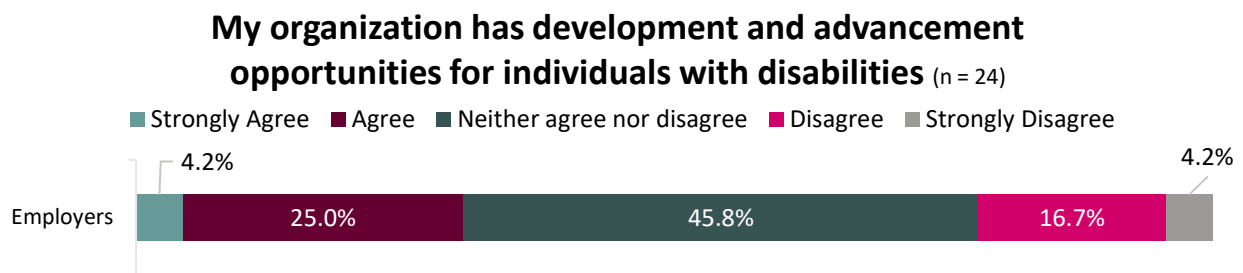
Figure 11. Percentage represents employers' level of agreement with the statement in accordance with the legend.

Individuals - Employment Advancement

Willingness to Learn New Skills Aid in the Advancement of Employees |Individuals with disabilities and their support teams interviewed shared they or their loved ones want to be challenged at work by learning how to perform new job skills. "They are lots of opportunities for advancement based on what new skills they can learn" shared one CBO employee. Another employer shared that all employees, no matter what can advance within the company. "It's an expectation that all our employees continue to grow and advance, and we have a real focus on professional development. And that applies to all employees, no matter what."

There is Not Always a Desire for Advancement |The most common barrier to advancement shared by the stakeholders was the lack of desire to take on a different job position. "One guy that has worked with the same company for 11 years and has done the same job the whole time," shared one CBO employee. "He is happy in that position". One individual shared that they are also satisfied with their current role. "I know what to do and I'm good at it. I might try to learn some other jobs so I don't get bored, but I don't want to be anyone's boss." No stakeholder discussed seeing a need for more advancement opportunities for IWD.

Employers - Employment Advancement

Employer Perception of Equal Opportunities for Advancement and Growth | Each employer interviewed and most CBO employees shared that they believed IWD had the same opportunities to advance within a company as any other employee. "It's part of our culture," shared one employer. "We have programs and trainings in place to help you develop those skills if you want". A CBO employee stated that every employer they work with has opportunities for advancement. "The opportunities are there, for sure. It's up to the employee to take advantage of it and most of our customers don't want to. That's their choice – the opportunity is definitely there".

A Narrow View of Advancement can Create Challenges when Looking to Advance Individuals with Disabilities | While there appears to be many opportunities for advancement within companies in Berks County, the term "advancement" seems to be synonymous with "management" or "leadership". This narrow view of advancement might be one of the reasons why IWD do not want to participate in programs designed to assist with advancement. For example, when asked about opportunities for advancement within their company, one employer stated, "We have a lot. We do a leadership training program that's very successful". Almost every employer interviewed share similar thoughts when discussing advancement. Parents of individuals shared their frustration with this mindset. "I was really proud of my child when they asked if they could take on more responsibility and learn how to work the concession stand and take tickets. That's a huge step for them. But that's not considered advancement".

Lack of Understanding How Wage Increases Affects Income Benefits | "Fear of losing SSDI and SSI [Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income] benefits is one of the most significant barriers to employment and is widespread among people with disabilities and their families. Not only is income assurance that the program provides important, but the added reality of eligibility for Medicaid coverage for Social Security recipients is a major incentive for maintaining Social Security eligibility status by limiting or avoiding work all together."[xvi]The fear of losing benefits is also major barrier preventing IWD from advancing within a company as it impacts how the addition of more hours and/or the increase in wages would affect any government benefits received by the individual. "It's hard to get employers to understand that a person will turn down a raise at work because they know it will drop their monthly SSI payment, and the raise isn't enough to make up the difference" shared one CBO employee. Another discussed how important it is for employers to understand this issue. "Employers need to be educated on this topic so they can finally realize that giving X employee 15 hours on the schedule is actually really hurting them and could force them to call off."

AARP's Social Security Resource Center: Disability Benefits website provides insights around the earnings cliff and the question 'Can I work part time on Social Security disability?' stating "Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payments will stop if you are engaged in what Social Security calls 'substantial gainful activity.' SGA, as it's known, is defined in 2021 as earning more than $1,310 a month (or $2,190 if you are blind). If your income exceeds those caps, you cannot collect disability benefits, unless you are taking part in one of Social Security's "work incentives" — programs and trial periods aimed at helping SSDI recipients transition back into the workforce without sacrificing their benefits."[xvii]

RECOMMENDATIONS

When discussing the needs of employers and individuals with disabilities (IWD) as well as ways to create a more effective or efficient workforce system that would better serve IWD, three key themes emerged: Connection, Education, and Access to Resources. Below are recommendations of action steps for the Workforce Development Board of Berks County that align with these three themes. These recommendations are based on best practice research as well as common suggestions that came forth from the stakeholder engagement process.

Recommendation #1: The Workforce Development Board could help provide opportunities for networking and connection between employers, community-based organizations, individuals with disabilities, and their support teams.

Consistent and clear communication between community-based organizations (CBOs), employers, and IWD could help all stakeholders better meet their needs. Employers could better understand the supports and benefits of employing IWD. CBOs could better meet their clients, both IWD and employers needs by developing more and stronger partnerships. IWD and their support teams could have additional avenues to understand and access resources. Some options for ways in which the WDB could help facilitate communication and advance connection are listed below.

- **Develop consistent and well-advertised networking opportunities between CBOs, IWD, their support teams, and employers**. These meetings should have clear agendas and allow for discussions around understanding support services, job openings, appropriate accommodations, identifying a variety of job openings, etc. These conversations could also discuss the need for more variety in job openings for IWD help understand what those needs are. Employers can discuss what kind of workers they need, and parents and individuals can talk about what types of jobs they are looking for or what skills they have.

- **Facilitate consistent community forums between CBOs and IWD and their support teams.** Intentionally seek out and market these sessions towards local family advocacy groups. Conversations should be equally divided between making individuals and their support teams aware of services within Berks County and allowing individuals and their support teams to express concerns and needs.

- **Facilitate networking opportunities between employers and provide support that is responsive to where employers are in their journey to hire, retain, and advance IWD.** This could help employers workshop ways to provide advancement opportunities to employees that do not involve leadership skills or people management or help develop job descriptions.

Recommendation #2: The Workforce Development Board could provide and/or organize trainings, additional education, and resources for local employers to better support the hiring, retaining, and advancement of individuals with disabilities.

Based on stakeholder feedback from the interviews and survey the following trainings and education opportunities could benefit employers in Berks County.

- **Provide trainings, webinars and/or resources around understanding SSI and SSDI benefits and how wages affect them.** These resources should be tailored to employers to help them understand how to support any employee who receives SSI or SSDI benefits, as well as helping employers direct their employees to benefits counseling programs in the area (e.g., Ticket to Work).

- **Help employers build skills around conflict management and resolution** by providing trainings, webinars, and resources specifically centered on supporting and managing individuals with cognitive disabilities, including neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g., autism spectrum disorder), mood disorders (e.g., bipolar disorder), and anxiety disorders (e.g., generalized anxiety disorder).

- **Educate employers around how behavioral interview questions and personality assessments can create barriers for IWD.** This should be a mix of webinars, information sessions, and documents. Employers need to be able to access this information at any time.

- **Promote the incorporation of "simulated tasks" into the interview process.** This would include opportunities for the interviewee to demonstrate their ability to perform the tasks related to the job opening. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) permits simulated tasks during interviews if they are uniformly given to all applicants[xviii].

- **Organize and/or facilitate workshops or resources around developing competency-based job descriptions.** "Such job descriptions link work functions to the competencies needed to successfully perform them. Integrating these competencies into job descriptions can help ensure the recruitment and retention of individuals whose skills are well-matched to the needs of positions".[xix] The use of competency-based job descriptions could help IWD and their support teams find more variety of job openings that are better aligned with their abilities and interests.

- **Develop and/or share a resource list for both IWD and employers to help navigate the workforce system** and provide support for frequently asked questions and areas of concern or confusion. This resource should be consistently updated and easy to access. Appendix B has a list of resources that may have some helpful links and was developed from the interactions with interviewees.

APPENDIX A- SURVEY AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Survey

<u>**ABOUT**</u>

Berks County Workforce Development Board is seeking to understand why working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or underemployed. To achieve this endeavor, the Board has contracted with Thomas P. Miller & Associates, LLC (TPMA) to survey employers, community partners, and individuals who can shed light on hiring trends.

We ask that you participate in this 10-minute survey to share your experiences, thoughts, and understanding around barriers and experiences in the job search process and employment of individuals with disabilities. Your feedback and insights are critical to helping the Workforce Development Board develop strategies to promote the recruitment, hiring, advancement, and retention of individuals with disabilities.

This survey is voluntary and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You can stop taking the survey at any time. **Your responses are completely anonymous and individual responses will only be reported in aggregate.** No identifying (company or personal) information will be tied to specific response.

By clicking "Next" below, you are consenting for TPMA to use your feedback to help inform the study. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Joely Pope, TPMA Project Consultant, at jpope@tpma-inc.com.

Thank you for your participation!

1. Which of the following best describe you? (Please select all that apply) (Instructions: Please note if you select more than one you may be asked additional questions and the survey may take slightly longer than 10 minutes)
    a. I am an employer
    b. I work for a community-based, workforce, or health organization that serves individuals with disabilities
    c. I am an individual with a disability
    d. I am parent, guardian, or support team member of an individual with a disability

<u>Employer (branch logic)</u>

1. What industry best describes your organization? (drop down)
    a. Advanced Manufacturing
    b. Logistic & Transportation
    c. Healthcare
    d. Business Services (IT)
    e. Agriculture
    f. Energy
    g. Hospitality, Leisure & Entertainment

       h.   other (please specify)·

2. How many employees do you have?
3. How many employees in your company have a disability?
    a.   We do not track that information
    b.   Yes
    c.   I do not know / unsure
    d.   Prefer not to answer

4. (If yes,) Enter number of employees with disabilities
5. How is this information tracked?(ie. using federal compliance questions, etc)
6. In the past 12 months has your company hired any people with disabilities?
7. In what ways, if any, do you recruit job applicants who have disabilities (select all that apply)?
    a.   We include people with disabilities in company diversity recruitment goals
    b.   We partner with disability-related advocacy organizations
    c.   We partner with disability-related provider organizations
    d.   We post job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications
    e.   We post jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM)
    f.   We post job announcements on/ recruit on disability-related websites
    g.   We attend / post job announcements at disability-related job fairs
    h.   We have summer internship and/or mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities
    i.   We post job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
    j.   We post job announcements with PA CareerLink®
    k.   We do not actively recruit individuals with disabilities
    l.   Other (please specify)

8. Using the matrix (strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, unsure) please respond to each statement about employing individuals with disabilities
    a.   My organization is concerned about the cost of health care coverage
    b.   The nature of the work is such that it cannot be effectively performed by people with disabilities
    c.   individuals with disabilities are doing important work in my organization
    d.   I have worker's compensation and/or liability concerns that inhibit me from employing individuals with disabilities
    e.   There is a lack of knowledge or information about people with disabilities
    f.   My organization worries about customers' responses if we hire individuals with disabilities
    g.   My organization has development and advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities
    h.   individuals with disabilities are harder to retain than other employees

       i.   Actual cost of accommodating disability is a concern for my organization
       j.   There is discomfort or unfamiliarity regarding hiring people with disabilities
       k.   I am open to hiring people with disabilities and would like more information about resources
       l.   I have had very positive experiences in hiring and retaining workers with disabilities

9.   Please explain responses above (write in)

10. What challenges, if any, do you face recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities? (write in)

11. In what ways, if any, has COVID-19 impacted or exacerbate any of these challenges? (write in)

12. Have you used any of the following strategies to reduce barriers to hiring and retaining people with disabilities into your company?
     a.   Using a recruiting source that specializes in employment of people with disabilities
     b.   Developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities
     c.   Coordinating short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach
     d.   Training existing staff
     e.   Using on-site consultation or technical assistance
     f.   Mentoring
     g.   Providing disability awareness training
     h.   Utilizing assistive technology
     i.   Offering flexible work schedules
     j.   Utilizing employer tax credits and incentives
     k.   Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources
     l.   Telework/Work from home
     m. Employee Resource Groups
     n.   On-the-Job Training
     o.   Other (please specify)

13. What strategies have worked best for your company? Why? (write in)
14. Has COVID-19 changed your strategies on recruiting and retention?
     a.   Yes
     b.   No
15. (If yes) In what ways has COVID-19 changed your strategies?
16. What development and advancement opportunities if any, do you provide for employees with disabilities? (write in)
17. Additional thoughts?
18. Would you be willing to engage further in a conversation on this topic?
     a.   Yes (if yes collect email and name)
     b.   no

Community based or health org (branch logic)

1. What best describes your organization?
    a. We are a disability advocacy organization
    b. We are a health organization
    c. We are a center for independent living
    d. We are a nonprofit that serves individuals with disabilities
    e. We are a workforce organization
    f. Other (please specify)

2. How do you serve individuals with disabilities? (write in)

3. What types of disabilities do the individuals you primarily work with have? (select all that apply)

    1. Physical disability: People with this type of disability may have difficulties with movement or mobility. They may use assisted devices such as wheelchairs or walkers. (Cerebral Palsy, Paralysis, Amputation)

    2. Sensory disability: People with this type of disability may have difficulty hearing or seeing, or both. Individuals with visual impairments may use Braille, canes, or large print to assist them. People who are hard of hearing or deaf may use hearing aids or cochlear implants. (Hard of Hearing, Deaf, Blind)

    3. Cognitive disability: People with this type of disability may have difficulty learning, communicating, and remembering information. They may also have trouble with problem-solving, paying attention, or understanding reading, math, or visual information. They may use daily planners, more time on tests, or quiet areas to study. (Learning Disabilities, ADHD, Autism, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities)

    4. Psychiatric and Emotional disability: People with these types of disabilities may have difficulty with emotions and behaviors. Often these individuals are diagnosed with Depressive Disorder, Drug Addiction, Anxiety Disorder, Psychotic Disorder, and/or Mood Disorder. People with this type of disability may use medications, coping skills, or counseling.

    5. Health-related disability: People with this type of disability might have a physical condition that affects their overall health. They may have limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, rheumatic fever, asthma, hemophilia, and leukemia.

4. What is the biggest challenge individuals with disabilities face when applying for jobs? (write in)

5. Please rate how effective you think the following employer recruiting strategies are (very effective – not effective, unsure) Instructions: Once you respond to the statement the

next statement will appear. You can also use the arrows to navigate through the questions.
   a. Including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
   b. Partnering with disability-related advocacy organizations
   c. Partnering with disability-related provider organization
   d. Posting job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications
   e. Posting jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM)
   f. Posting job announcements on/ recruit using disability-related websites
   g. Attending / posting job announcements at disability-related job fair
   h. Establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities
   i. Posting job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
   j. Posting job announcements with PA CareerLink®

6. Are there other strategies you have used or have seen employers use that are effective in recruiting employees with disabilities? (Write in)

7. Please rate how effective you believe the following strategies to be in reducing barriers to hiring and retaining people with disabilities (very effective – not effective, unsure)
   a. Using a recruiting source that specializes in placing people with disabilities
   b. Developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities
   c. Short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach
   d. Training or developing existing staff
   e. On-site consultation or technical assistance
   f. Mentoring
   g. Disability awareness training
   h. Assistive technology
   i. Flexible work schedule
   j. Employer tax credits and incentives
   k. Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources
   l. Telework/Work from home
   m. Employee Resource Groups
   n. On-the-Job Training

8. Are there other ways to reduce barriers? (Write in)
9. How has the pandemic impacted individuals with disabilities?
10. Additional thoughts?
11. Would you be willing to engage further in a conversation on this topic?
   a. Yes (if yes collect email and name)
   b. no

Individual (branch logic)

1. What is your age
   a. 18-25
   b. 26-40
   c. 41-54
   d. 55+
   e. Prefer not to answer

2. Are you deaf, or do you have serious difficulty hearing?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

3. Are you blind, or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

4. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

5. Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

6. Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

7. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Prefer not to answer

8. Are you currently employed?
   a. Yes

        b.   No

9.   (If Yes) How did you connect with your current job (saw job online, was connected through an organization, knew someone who worked there, etc.) (write in)

10. (if Yes) What challenges, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic had on your employment? (Write in)
11. (if yes) What development and advancement opportunities, if any, does your employer provide?
12. (If no) Has the COVID-19 pandemic created any challenges for you in retaining or finding employment? (write in)
13. What do you wish employers knew about when it comes to hiring individuals with disabilities? (write in)
14. Please rate how effective you think the following employer recruiting strategies are (very effective – not effective, unsure)
      a.   Employers including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
      b.   Employers partnering with disability-related advocacy organizations
      c.   Employers partnering with disability-related provider organization
      d.   Employers posting job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications
      e.   Employer posting jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM)
      f.   Employers posting job announcements on/ recruit using disability-related websites
      g.   Employers attending / posting job announcements at disability-related job fair
      h.   Employers establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities
      i.   Employers posting job announcements with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
      j.   Employers posting job announcements with PA CareerLink®

12. How effective are the following strategies in hiring and retaining people with disabilities? (very effective – not effective, unsure)
      a.   Using a recruiting source that specializes in placing people with disabilities
      b.   Developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities
      c.   Short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach
      d.   Training or developing existing staff
      e.   On-site consultation or technical assistance
      f.   Mentoring
      g.   Disability awareness training
      h.   Assistive technology
      i.   Flexible work schedule
      j.   Employer tax credits and incentives
      k.   Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources
      l.   Telework/Work from home

m. Employee Resource Groups
n. On-the-Job Training
o. Other (please specify)

13. Are there other strategies or ways to reduce barriers? (write in)
14. Additional thoughts?
15. Would you be willing to engage further in a conversation on this topic?
    a. Yes (if yes collect email and name)
    b. no

Parent, Guardian or Support Team Member (branch logic)

1. Please select the disability or disabilities of the individual you are the parent, guardian, or part of the support team for (Mark all that apply)
    a. Hearing difficulty [deaf or having serious difficulty hearing (DEAR).]
    b. Vision difficult [blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses (DEYE).]
    c. Cognitive difficulty [Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions (DREM).]
    d. Ambulatory difficulty [Having serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs (DPHY).]
    e. Self-care difficulty [Having difficulty bathing or dressing (DDRS).]
    f. Independent living difficulty [Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, having difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping (DOUT).]
    g. Prefer not to answer

2. What is their age?
    a. 18-25
    b. 26-40
    c. 41-54
    d. 55+
    e. Prefer not to answer

3. Are they currently employed?
    a. Yes
    b. No

4. (If Yes) How did they connect with their current job? (saw job at online, was connected through an organization, knew someone who worked there, etc.) (write in)

5. (if Yes) What challenges, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic had on their employment?
6. (if yes) What development opportunities, if any, does their employer provide?

7. (If no) Has the COVID-19 pandemic created any challenges for them in retaining or finding employment?
8. What do you wish employers knew about when it comes to hiring individuals with disabilities?
9. Please rate how effective you think the following employer recruiting strategies are (very effective – not effective, unsure)
    a. Employers including people with disabilities in diversity recruitment goals
    b. Employers partnering with disability-related advocacy organizations
    c. Employers partnering with disability-related provider organization
    d. Employers posting job announcements in/ recruit using disability-related publications
    e. Employer posting jobs announcements with Abilities in Motion Center for Independent Living (AIM)
    f. Employers posting job announcements on/ recruit using disability-related websites
    g. Employers attending / posting job announcements at disability-related job fair
    h. Employers establishing summer internship and mentoring programs targeted at youth with disabilities
    i. Employers posting job announcements with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
    j. Employers posting job announcements with PA CareerLink®

10. How effective are the following strategies are in hiring and retaining people with disabilities (very effective – not effective, unsure)
    a. Using a recruiting source that specializes in placing people with disabilities
    b. Developing a targeted recruitment program for people with disabilities
    c. Short-term on the job assistance with an outside job coach
    d. Training or developing existing staff
    e. On-site consultation or technical assistance
    f.   Mentoring
    g. Disability awareness training
    h.   Assistive technology
    i.   Flexible work schedule
    j.   Employer tax credits and incentives
    k. Using Job Accommodation Network (JAN) or other online resources
    l. Telework/Work from home
    m. Employee Resource Groups
    n. On-the-Job Training
    o. Other (please specify)

11. Are there other ways to reduce barriers? (write in)
12. Additional thoughts?
13. If you are willing to engage further in a conversation on this topic please leave your name and email.

Community Organization Interview Guide

Welcome

Good afternoon! I am Nioka Clark and with me today is Joely Pope. We are from Thomas P. Miller and Associates, and we have been hired by Berks County Workforce Development Board to help them understand why working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or underemployed, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their employment.

As part of this process, they would like us to speak with all of you today to hear your thoughts and experiences and capture your feedback around how this population of workers can be supported.

__ASK permission to record__ The feedback you provide today will be kept anonymous. It will only be included in the aggregate data report we will write, and we will not include any identifiers around direct quotes we use. Therefore, your honest feedback is extremely important.

Introduction

Before we jump in with the questions, I would like each of you to introduce yourselves. Please tell us your name and the organization you represent.

Finding Employment

1. How does your organization support people with disabilities with finding employment?

2. What supports, programs or services have worked well?

3. What are people with disabilities looking for (positive or negative) in a job posting?

4. In your experience, do employers specifically recruit individuals with disabilities?
    a. __YES ->__ What strategies do they use? What is (or is not) effective? Why? Is your organization part of this process? How (or why not)?
    b. __NO ->__ Why not? What suggestions do you have around ways to recruit these individuals?

Applying for Employment

5. What are some of the biggest barriers people with disabilities face when applying for jobs? What ways (if any) has COVID impacted these barriers?

    a. What work is already being done to help reduce or remove some of these barriers?

    b. What is still needed (or needs more focus or funding)?

   c. How can employers be more accommodating?

6. What barriers, if any, do people with individuals face when it comes to interviewing for jobs?

   a. What work is already being done to help reduce or remove some of these barriers?

   b. What is still needed (or needs more focus or funding)?

Maintaining Employment

7. What are some situations that would make it challenging for a person with disabilities to keep a job?
   a. What ways if any is this being addresses

   b. Follow up prompt on if covid specific or general

8. What barriers, if any, exist around the promotion and advancement within a company of people with disabilities?
   a. Are there any programs that are helping alleviate this barrier?

   b. What is working well?

   c. What is still needed (or needs more focus or funding)?

Impact of COVID-19

9. What existing and new challenges has COVID-19 brought front and center for people with disabilities?

Other Topics

10. How do you currently collaborate and share information among agencies and organizations? What opportunities exist for further collaboration?

11. What are the top issues your local area should address to provide a more inclusive system for training, job placements and other supportive services?

12. What ideas do you have for making the workforce development system more effective or efficient for people with disabilities in the future?

13. Is there anything you would like to share with us that we did not ask?

Employer Interview Guide

Welcome

Good afternoon! I am Nioka Clark from Thomas P. Miller and Associates, and I have been hired by Berks County Workforce Development Board to help them understand why working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or underemployed, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their employment.

As part of this process, they would like us to talk to you today to hear your thoughts and experiences and capture your feedback around how this population of workers can be supported.

The feedback you provide today will be kept anonymous. It will only be included in the aggregate data report we will write, and we will not include any identifiers around direct quotes we use. Therefore, your honest feedback is extremely important.

Introduction

Before we jump in with the questions, tell me a little bit about your business.
Finding Employment

1. Does your organization recruit individuals with disabilities?

    a. **YES ->** What strategies do you use? What is (or is not) effective? Why?

    b. **NO ->** Why not? What supports would make you more likely to start actively recruiting these individuals?

2. What protocols/processes do you have in place to ensure your job postings are inclusive as possible (e.g., accessible to screen readers, reading level, clean formatting, etc.)?
    a. If not protocols/processes, gauge their interest (scale 1-10).
    What supports would they need?
Applying for Employment

3. What accommodations does your business provide to individuals with disabilities for participating in job interviews (e.g., virtual or phone option, text-to-speech for answers, making space for a wheelchair, etc.)?

    a. If no accommodations – gauge interest in offering accommodations (scale 1-10).
    What supports would you need?
Maintaining Employment

4. What are some situations that would make it challenging for a person with disabilities to keep a job?
    a. What ways if any is this being addresses

    b. Follow up prompt on if covid specific or general

5. How does your organization train and develop individuals with disabilities to advance within your company?

    a. What is working well?

    b. What supports do you need to continue (or start) this development?

Impact of COVID-19

6. What existing and new challenges has COVID-19 brought front and center for people with disabilities?

Other Topics

7. What are the top issues your local area should address to provide a more inclusive system for training, job placements and other supportive services?

8. What ideas, if any, do you have for making the workforce development system more effective or efficient for people with disabilities in the future?

9. Is there anything you would like to share with us that we did not ask?

Individuals and Support Team Interview Guide

Welcome

Good afternoon! I am Nioka Clark and with me today is Joely Pope. We are from Thomas P. Miller and Associates, and we have been hired by Berks County Workforce Development Board to help them understand why working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or underemployed, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their employment.

As part of this process, they would like us to speak with you today to hear your thoughts and experiences and capture your feedback around how this population of workers can be supported.

The feedback you provide today will be kept anonymous. It will only be included in the aggregate data report we will write, and we will not include any identifiers around direct quotes we use. Therefore, your honest feedback is extremely important.

Introduction

Before we jump in with the questions, please tell me more about yourself.

Finding Employment

1. What are some organizations in your area that support people with disabilities with finding employment?

2. What supports, programs or services offered by these organizations work well?

3. What are people with disabilities looking for (positive or negative) in a job posting?

4. In your experience, do employers specifically recruit individuals with disabilities?
   a. **YES ->** What strategies do they use? What is (or is not) effective? Why?
   b. **NO ->** Why not? What suggestions do you have around ways to recruit these individuals?

Applying for Employment

5. What are some of the biggest barriers you have faced when applying for jobs? What ways (if any) has COVID impacted these barriers?

   a. What work is already being done to help reduce or remove some of these barriers?

   b. What is working well?

   c. What is still needed?

   d. How can employers be more accommodating?

6. What barriers have you faced when it comes to interviewing for jobs?

a.   What work is already being done to help reduce or remove some of these barriers?

e.   What is working well?

f.   What is still needed?

g.   How can employers be more accommodating?

Maintaining Employment

7.   What are some situations that would make it challenging for a person with disabilities to keep a job?
   a.   What ways if any is this being addressed?

   b.   Follow up prompt on if covid specific or general

8.   What barriers exist around the promotion and advancement within a company of people with disabilities?
   a.   Are there any programs that are helping alleviate this barrier?

   b.   What is working well?

   c.   What is still needed (or needs more focus or funding)?

Impact of COVID-19

9.   What existing and new challenges has COVID-19 brought front and center for you?

Other Topics

10. How can businesses and organizations in your area be more inclusive in workforce training, job placements and other supportive services?
   a.   Is there a program or opportunity you wished existed but doesn't?

11. What ideas do you have for making the workforce development system more effective or efficient for people with disabilities in the future?

12. Is there anything you would like to share with us that we did not ask?

APPENDIX B – RESOURCE LIST

Competency-Based Job Descriptions
Competency-Based Job Descriptions from Northwestern University
https://www.northwestern.edu/hr/for-managers/hiring/hiring-process/open-a-position/competency-based-job.html

Competency-Based Job Descriptions from the Public Health Foundation
http://www.phf.org/resourcestools/pages/competency_based_job_descriptions.aspx

Competency-Based Job Description Administrative Guide by Rutgers University
https://uhr.rutgers.edu/docs/comptency-based-job-desc-admin-guide

Conflict Management / Conflict Resolution
Conflict Management Resource Collection from the Kansas Technical Assistance System Network https://www.ksdetasn.org/atbs/conflict-management

Supporting People with Cognitive Disabilities in Decision Making: Processes and Dilemmas from the Living with Disability Research Centre
https://www.asid.asn.au/files/639_46_m_whiteside_c_bigby_j_douglas.pdf

Interviewing Individuals with Disabilities Best Practices
Interviewing Persons with Disabilities from University of Mary Washington
https://adminfinance.umw.edu/hr/employment-opportunities/best-practices/diversity-and-insclusiveness/interviewing-persons-with-disabilities/

Focus on Ability: Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities from the U.S. Department of Labor
https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/fact-sheets/focus-on-ability-interviewing-applicants-with-disabilities

Guidelines for Interviewing People with Disabilities from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities https://www.aaidd.org/docs/default-source/sis-docs/sisguidelinesforinterviewing.pdf?sfvrsn=6ea53f4f_2

Social Security Insurance Benefits
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Eligibility Requirements from the Social Security Administration https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-eligibility-ussi.htm

How Work Affects Your Benefits from the Social Security Administration
https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10069.pdf

Working While Disabled: How We Can Help from the Social Security Administration
https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10095.pdf

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https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACSPUMS1Y2019&title=Educational%20Attainment%20in%20Berks&cv=DIS&rv=SCHL,ucgid&wt=PWGTP&g=7950000US4202701,4202702,4202703

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