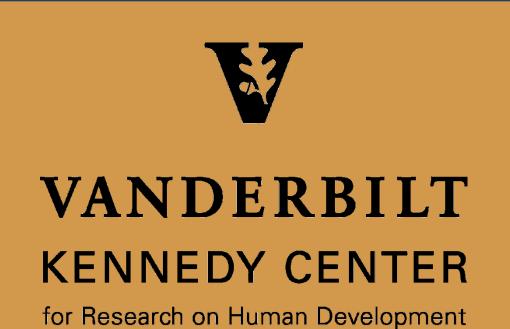


Engaging Communities to Improve Employment Outcomes for Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Jennifer L. Bumble, Erik W. Carter, & Elise D. McMillan







Despite progress in legislation, research, and service development, youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities continue to be employed at significantly lower rates than their peers without disabilities (Trainor et al., 2012). To improve employment outcomes at a local level, stakeholders must collaborate to identify community-specific interventions. One promising approach to facilitate these collaborations is community conversations.



"Community conversations" offer a novel, asset-based approach for launching and informing efforts to improve employment outcomes for young people with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009). These structured community events foster collaborative dialogue on expanding integrated job opportunities for people with disabilities and identifying a range of formal and informal solutions that reflect the priorities, culture, and available resources of a local community.



I conducted a longitudinal mixed-methods study to explore how seven diverse communities applied the community conversation approach to expand local employment opportunities for people with disabilities in their community. In the first phase of the study, I examined community motivations to participate in the project, how they personalized events to reflect their community culture, and what factors contributed to their success.



Although considerable consistency was found among the motivations to launch change efforts, each community identified unique priorities in their personalization of the events. Conversation attendees and organizers viewed these events as promising and productive pathways to begin change efforts. Recommendations to enhance the quality and richness of community conversations are identified.

OBJECTIVES

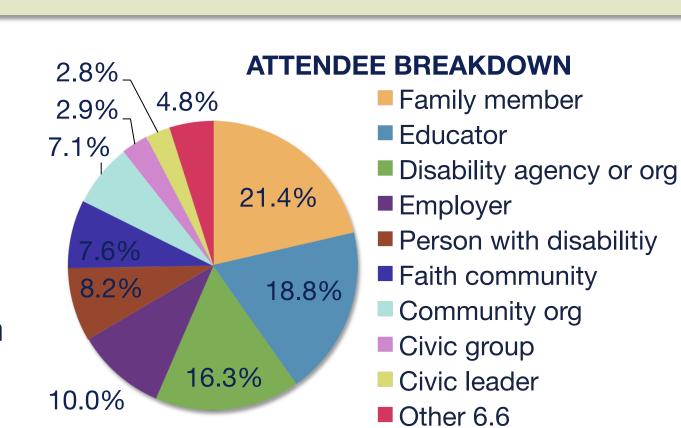
The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine how diverse communities applied the community conversation approach to expand local employment opportunities for people with disabilities and to identify factors that informed and strengthened their

Research Questions:

- 1. What motivated each community team motivation to launch local employment change efforts?
- 2. How did planning teams personalize their events to build on the strengths and unique features of their community?
- 3. What factors influenced the richness and quality of each event?
- 4. How did attendees view these events and their communities?
- 5. What community-generated strategies emerged within and across events?

PARTICIPANTS

- We analyzed ideas and feedback shared by the 548 community members who attended the seven community conversation events (M = 78; range, 12-161 per event)
- We interviewed the two lead organizers from each local planning team



METHOD & MATERIALS

Communities self-selected to participate in the project through a mini-grant application process, and two organizers from each team attended a group-based training. Local teams planned and carried out a community conversation with technical assistance from the research team. The first round of community conversations took place between July and November 2015, and two members of the research team attended each event. I provided copies of all transcribed data and survey results to organizers following each conversation. The organizers use this data to identify at least one promising idea to implement prior to their second community conversation 12-18 months later. Additionally, I conducted interviews with two lead organizers from each community.

We collected and analyzed several data sources to answer our research questions: including (a) in-depth interviews with two organizers from each community, (b) research teamer reflections from observing each event, (c) table host notes from small- and largegroup conversations, (d) anonymous end-of event and follow-up surveys, and (e) permanent products from each event.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION?

members, and use a "coffeehouse feel" to encourage rich conversation. Diverse attendees

conversations, and build relationships to support sustainable follow-up action. All attendee

ideas are recorded by table hosts, and the most promising ideas are shared with the group

at the end of the event. This versatile event structure can be applied to a broad range of

QUALITATIVE Constant comparative analysis

Events are held in neutral community locations, are attended by 40-80 community

generate creative, solutions-focused ideas over a series of small and large-group

transition topics and adapted to fit community culture.

QUANTITATIVE Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies, means, and standard deviations)

CONCLUSION

- Although considerable consistency was found among the motivations and areas of individualization across events, the manner of implementation reflected the unique strengths, resources, and culture of each community.
- All communities emphasized the importance of including individuals with diverse strengths, abilities, roles, and experiences in event planning and implementation to enhance the richness and quality of the conversation.
- Feedback from attendees both immediately after the event and approximately six weeks later affirmed the social validity of this approach to community dialogue.

HOW DID PLANNING TEAMS PERSONALIZE THEIR EVENTS?

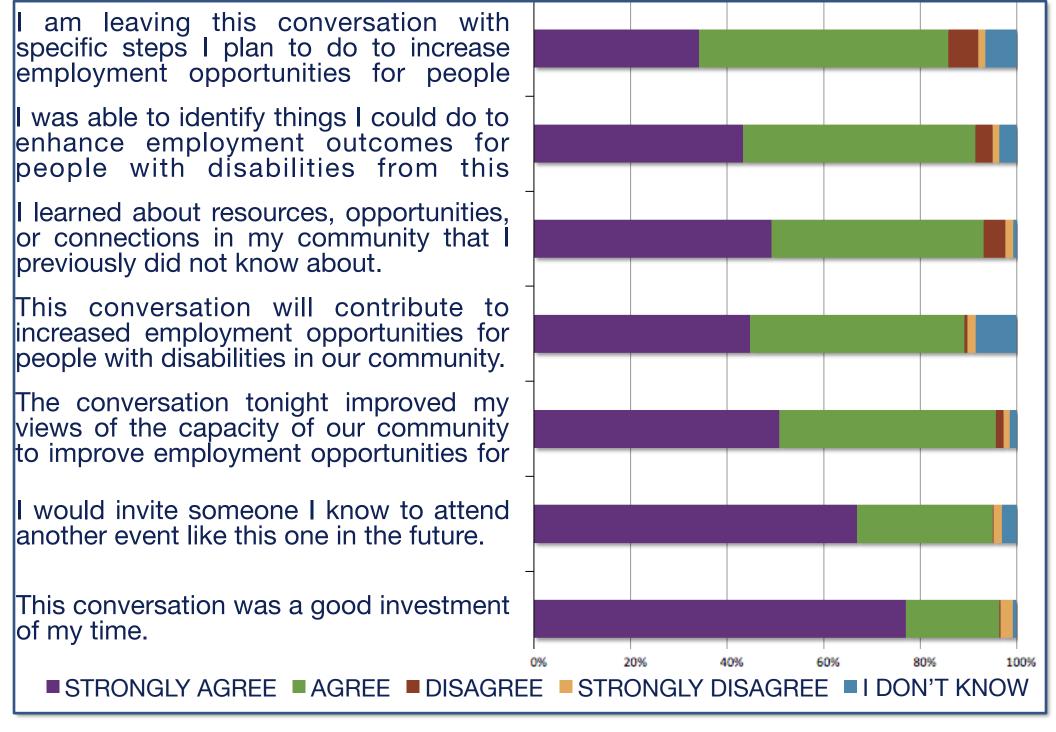
Recruitmen efforts





Community **Partnerships**

VIEWS OF EVENT



VIEWS OF COMMUNITY

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCED THE RICHNESS AND QUALITY?

Effective Planning Team

Improve

outcómes

Planning team included committed individuals with diverse strengths and roles, and began their efforts early in the planning process

(1)"I think you have to wisely delegate and know what people's roles are going to be." (6) "You really have to know your community and the resources that are out there. ...one person can't do it alone." (2) "Start with a core group-a cross section of people who have the buy-in already."

Involvement of people with disabilities

People with disabilities were involved in the planning and implementation of the event

(2) "We involved our students with disabilities in the advertising, in the going out in the community, in the program, in the evening..." (5) "I think I would stress getting the people with disabilities and their parents involved more."

Connect with loca

supports

and

services

Compelling atmosphere

The event space, energy, and organization contributed to a welcoming and positive atmosphere

(4) "There was a lot of enthusiasm in the room...people were excited to speak up." (7) "It was calm. It was engaging. Everyone was there for the right reasons." (3) "Because we're a little town it was kind of like 'the' event for people to go to."

Mix of Attendees

Attendees represented a diverse mix of stakeholders, perspectives, and experiences

(2) "I think the value of the event is seeing that cross-section of the community and seeing people with disabilities...people start thinking, what could I do, ya know?" (7) "People were connected through a couple of different degrees...I think that is what really got the conversation going.'

Prepared table facilitators

Table hosts understood their role and effectively facilitated rich conversations

(1) "I think the guidelines for the monitors were really good...trying to make it so that nobody monopolizes the conversation, everybody stays positive, we go around quickly, get, make sure you are getting stuff from everybody, I was kind of surprised how well that went, that seemed like at every table."

Clear structure

The management, facilitation, and pacing of the event contributed to an organized conversation

disabilities.

(4) "I think what struck me about just the format for the community conversation is that it really allowed people who would not have shared much to contribute." (2) "The table hosts and the movement of all the groups. I think that really kept the conversation going and got more ideas out there."

Targeted Technical Assistance

Planning teams received trainings, resources, and technical assistance from the research

FUTURE RESEARCH

Follow-along studies could provide important insight into

how communities navigate long-term change efforts and

Studies applying the community conversation approach to

other transition topics such as interagency collaboration

could contribute to the development of new interventions

Future studies measuring pre- and post-event employment

outcomes for both the community and individual residents

to improve post-school outcomes for youth with

are needed to rigorously evaluate the community

conversation approach and its outcomes.

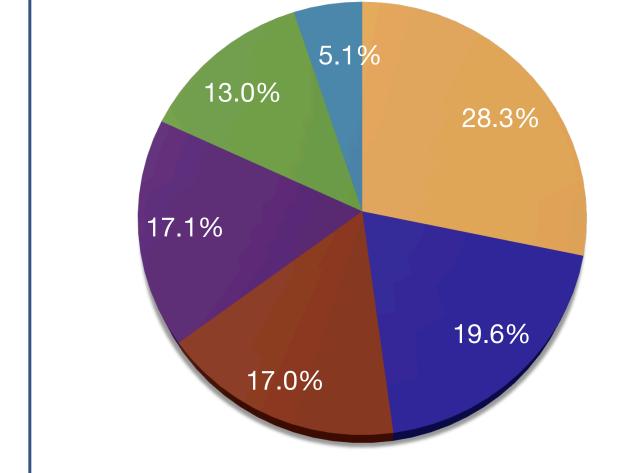
the successes and struggles they face.

(4) "The training was the most helpful...we came out of that really feeling that there was a lot of work to do, but that we knew what we needed to do." (6) "I liked being able to just shoot off an email and y'all had the answers. That had a calming effect on me."

(1) Brighton, (2) Gerst, (3) Gibblett, (4) Kipp, (5) Macory (6) Monteagle, (7) Norton

COMMUNITY-GENERATED STRATEGIES (BY THEME)

■ STRONGLY AGREE ■ AGREE ■ DISAGREE ■ STRONGLY DISAGREE ■ I DON'T KNOW



Follow-up events or actions on this issue

Members of our community need help

learning how to support people with disabilities in meaningful jobs.

Strong partnerships between employers community agencies, and families

People in our community are generally

receptive to employing people with

Our community currently has the capacity to support people with

are needed in our community.

currently exist in my community.

disabilitiés in meaningful jobs.

- Developing employment opportunities
 - Undertaking communitywide efforts
 - Strengthening school and transition services

WHAT MOTIVATED EACH

COMMUNITY?

Increase

communit

awareness

Streamline

school to

community

RESULTS

Equipping competitive applicants ■ Enhancing inclusive workplaces

Supporting families in

REFERENCES