

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION RESULTS

SITE: People First DATE: 8/19/06

CONVERSATION TEAM: Delene Porter, Sherry Lee

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (Approximate): 8

IDEAS AND THOUGHTS:

People First is a national organization with local chapters. Its members are people with disabilities and their families. We asked two questions:

What are the issues you face in finding employment?

How do we make Athens a more welcoming place for adults and youth with disabilities?

1) Transportation-

- a. can't get there to apply or get there on time
- b. Expensive- taxis \$8 one way
- c. The Lift is \$2.50 while the bus is only \$1.25- in violation of the ADA Act
- d. Lift won't pick up at house
- e. Lift has a 4 page application- "worried that people would use it 'just for convenience'"
- f. Lift discourages you from using it if you're not in a wheel chair
- g. Difficult to make transport reliable- you set a time and then they get calls en-rout to pick someone else up which makes you late
- h. Busses should be ride-able for everyone- we don't want to be isolated since it means we have fewer options
- i. Bus doesn't go everywhere and even where it does go can't get from house to bus stop because there are no sidewalks
- j. Gotten mixed information about routes and times
- k. More people would ride if there was rider training
- l. Live in different county where there is no service
- m. It becomes a family affair- hard of family and caregivers who have their own jobs to get to too
- n. Employers ask if you're going to be able to be there every day- not without reliable transportation
- o. Need more big busses since the students fill the bus and others have to stand at certain times of the day

2) People aren't educated about disabilities-

- a. Most employers only see disability, didn't know what they were capable of

- b. Employers scared it would cost them money to accommodate
- c. There are so many resources and agencies in town that help with employers if they just knew and wanted it- Department of Labor, Institute for Human Development and Disability
- d. Some are accommodating, but getting a job is about good timing and contacts
- e. They don't get that we are able to work
- f. People with disabilities get lumped in with the idea that people don't want to work
- g. Experience: One person got a job working the express isle of a store. She could do everything, but, after only two weeks, they said she wasn't fast enough and fired her. They only gave her two weeks and they didn't look for any simple things they could do to help her perform better- they didn't call the Department of Labor or the Institute on Human Development and Disability. They also didn't move her to a different job. It's as though they feel like they've done their good deed by hiring her, it shows up on their reports, but they've really done a disservice to everyone since they lost a good employee and they've reinforced a stereotype about people with disabilities.

3) Customized Employment-

- a. Need to match employers with employees and help employers see just how many people would match their needs if they were given a chance.

4) Vocational Rehabilitation-

- a. The community doesn't expect us to work
- b. There are so many people who are put in "workshops" at 18 and then retire from them at age 70, all the while being told they're preparing for work- this is like a segregated place to park people with disabilities. "There is nothing better than a job and a paycheck."
- c. One man in this program has still not had anyone ask if he wants to look for a job.
- d. A work shop in Griffin offers Driver's Ed and Forklift operating training
- e. Kelley Diversified doesn't have much work- Athens' economy doesn't have much work- need to find real competitive jobs.
- f. The Federal Government create strict laws because some workshops were having people do work for nothing- like slave labor

5) Housing is not Affordable-

- a. There are gaps in programs- Had to appear to be homeless to qualify for help
- b. Neighborhoods where you can afford to live aren't safe- may be a target because of ramp
- c. Affordable Housing Programs don't fill in all the pieces- 2 people wanted to move in together but one needed a personal assistant- they were told

“you don’t need support, you’ve got your mother”- you have to be abandoned before you can qualify

- d. One person bought house and has roommate also with disabilities. They can help each other out, but she still goes home on the weekends to give her roommate a break.
- e. Housing, especially with some accommodations, is so costly that you have to have help from your family- this makes you lose some independence because they create rules (like you can’t use the oven)- But there is a switch that you can install that will turn the oven off for you
- f. Housing is critical to how you live and feel about yourself

6) Health Care is expensive, even through work

7) Social Opportunities

- a. No social things for people with disabilities to do together (there is church and work, but not just for people who understand each other)
- b. Respite care for caregivers needed too
- c. Not enough inclusive activities- Not activities for people with disabilities, but just activities that people with disabilities can attend
- d. Project Reach- but that is exclusively for youth with disabilities
- e. Leisure Services tries but say people don’t come out- we have to find out why
- f. We want programs to be presented just as programs- programs for everyone, not just people with disabilities- make it truly inclusive
- g. Gainesville has a children’s program with a waiting list of kids without disabilities because it is such a good program
- h. ACC Leisure Services- Leslie Black is the Inclusion Coordinator knows which programs are inclusive and can help get summer programs to be inclusive, but you have to let her know well before the summer
- i. Damien Goes West- is a perfect example of friends who supported another friend to do what he wanted- They traveled with him, not because he was disabled, but because they were his friends
- j. We want to live in a community that cares about having us be part of it