

# Connect-Ability Infrastructure Change

## Executive Summary: 2007-2009

Prepared by:  
Kate Kellett, MA  
Julie Robison, PhD  
Noreen Shugrue, JD, MBA, MA  
Meliessa Hennessy, MPH

University of Connecticut  
Health Center

### **Background**

- Connect-Ability began in 2005 when Connecticut received a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to improve the State's employment and disabilities services infrastructure, identify employment barriers for residents with disabilities, and implement long-term solutions.
- Connect-Ability is organized around a comprehensive strategic plan led by the CT Department of Social Services' (DSS) Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).
  - Infrastructure change is broadly defined and can include changes to government agency policies and practices, changes to employer practices, development of new programs, and information dissemination, among others.
- The strategic plan was developed with input from a broad range of stakeholders in Connecticut including employers, people with disabilities, education professionals, community providers, parents of youth with disabilities, and government agencies.
- The strategic plan focuses on policy and practice changes in four priority areas: stakeholder education, recruitment/employment/promotion, transportation, and youth in transition from school to work.
- Project evaluators from the University of Connecticut Health Center interviewed key informants quarterly during 2007-09 to capture detailed information about infrastructure changes occurring as a result of Connect-Ability. Key changes are summarized below.

### **Key Infrastructure Changes**

Connect-Ability has brought about systemic change and progress in furthering the employment of people with disabilities in Connecticut in many ways large and small. Key changes include the creation of a Technical Assistance Center (TAC), a comprehensive Marketing Campaign, the implementation of a Partnership Model, and the offering of new and expanded resources that increase flexibility and choice and enable a more diverse workforce in the state.

#### ***Technical Assistance Center***

*The TAC has become Connecticut's primary source of information and a single point of entry to inform employers, employees, service providers and job seekers about employment issues and people with disabilities.*

#### ***The Technical Assistance Center***

- serves employers, people with disabilities who seek new or different employment, families, employment service providers, school systems, and career counselors.
- includes a toll free number (1-866-844-1903) and interactive website ([www.connect-ability.com](http://www.connect-ability.com)) to access information and technical assistance, and a resource locator to help people find programs, services and locations serving Connecticut residents with disabilities.
- provides solutions to address the process of recruitment/hiring/retention and barriers associated with transition from school to work (e.g., on-the-job training, internships, working interviews, job shadowing, and company tours).
- offers job retention resources to help employers retain employees with disabilities (e.g., Job Task Analysis, Rehabilitation Technology Evaluation, Work Environment Analysis, Action Plan, and Follow-up).
- maximizes opportunities for employers and enables a more inclusive work environment in Connecticut by making it possible for agencies to share more job leads and experience more success in finding the right job for clients.
- helps employers plan for and implement a diverse workforce by connecting them with on-site training and information related to disability awareness training, training for trainers, best practices, employer collaboration on disability issues, and guidance for reasonable accommodation and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.
- addresses barriers related to inadequate transportation and enables more people with disabilities to get to work.

## **Marketing Campaign**

*Through the marketing campaign, Connect-Ability widely disseminated information designed to create a greater awareness about the ability of people with disabilities in the workplace and the value of building relationships between different agencies and organizations to further employment opportunities for people with disabilities.*

- Connect-Ability's comprehensive marketing campaign, coordinated by Mintz and Hoke, was launched in June 2007, has achieved brand recognition, and is being used as a model by other organizations.
- The marketing campaign, intended to influence people's perceptions of one another, includes videos, television, radio, and print messages, and encourages Connecticut employers to hire qualified job seekers with disabilities.
- The marketing campaign and website ([www.connect-ability.com](http://www.connect-ability.com)) focus on the abilities of Connecticut residents with disabilities in a broad range of settings and demonstrate the perspectives of employers who have hired the best person for the job.
- The marketing campaign, with a tagline of "See the Ability. See How We Can Work Together," demonstrates that there are multiple benefits to hiring people with disabilities and this begins with valuing the skills they possess.

## **Partnership Model**

*The partnership model Connect-Ability created brings state agencies, service providers and businesses together in a common system and has furthered progress in increased communications, networking, and collaborations across and within state agencies and with other (non-state agency) organizations to help remove employment barriers and ensure a useful, accessible infrastructure.*

- Through partnerships, Connect-Ability is reaching new audiences and providing opportunities for agencies and organizations to broaden viewpoints, share knowledge, and create synergistic overlaps.
- Connect-Ability is building new relationships with employers through programs such as "The Best Places to Work in Connecticut" and marketing a range of incentives (e.g., tax credits, on-the-job training opportunities) to employers through the Connecticut Department of Labor to help them strengthen their workforce through the hiring of people with disabilities.
- Through the Local Level Pilots initiative, intense work in local areas created new partnerships and strategies that can be used in other parts of the state and have the potential for sustainability.
- Connect-Ability's partnership with the Connecticut Office for Workforce Competitiveness, BRS, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and other state agency partners involved with the Connecticut Agency Data Exchange (Conn-ADE) project is implementing a platform to share data among agencies serving the same individuals for improved case management and program efficiency.

## **New and Expanded Resources**

*Connect-Ability encourages agencies and organizations to create new programs or change existing programs to improve services and supports related to the employment of people with disabilities. Connect-Ability has provided these resources through multiple venues, including:*

- The annual Connecticut Employment Summit, begun in 2006, which showcases new and expanded resources to help break down employment barriers and achieve workplace productivity
- The Knowledge Transfer Project, which disseminates strategies and resources crucial to pre-employment issues and tasks to better prepare people with disabilities for employment
- Connect-Ability's commitment to mentoring, which helps employers and job seekers find an appropriate match and promotes the training and hiring of people with disabilities and Connecticut's economic well being
- Connect-Ability's support for employers through the Connecticut Business Leadership Network, which maximizes employment opportunities for people with disabilities by expanding outreach, networking and collaborations with the business community, state agencies, and other organizations.

**Annual Connect-Ability Infrastructure Change reports, containing detailed information on all infrastructure changes occurring in each period, can be downloaded from the Research Papers page of the Connect-Ability website ([www.connect-ability.com/](http://www.connect-ability.com/))**