



Department of Human Services

Town Hall, 110 Myrtle Avenue
Westport, CT 06880
Westportct.gov
humansrv@westportct.gov
Telephone (203) 341-1050

WCPD EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE WORK SESSION MINUTES

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2023 AT 10AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 309,
TOWN HALL

AGENDA

Discussion of Commission Employment Initiative: Employment is for Everyone

The purpose of today's meeting is to review the logistics of the project and come up with strategies to increase community engagement and continue to refine the process for businesses to post positions and for job seekers to get support.

Elaine reported that the program requires some revamping to deliver the goals stated on the info page (attached). Specifically, there have been challenges in recruiting businesses to post positions, and then informing Human Services if they've filled the positions so that we can take them off the website. Additionally, business outreach efforts require a more synchronized targeted approach to avoid burnout of a few members and/or duplication of efforts among commissioners.

Discussions:

What are the barriers from the business's perspective?

Fear of the unknown? Do businesses feel that they have the tools/skills necessary to meet the candidate's needs? Time constraints to train individuals; Afraid it might not work and they'll need to let them go; Legal concerns; There is a large range of disabilities, so how can an employer determine a candidate's skill level without a recommendation from a trusted source?

Human Services constraints and experiences:

- Human Services may be contacted by a potential job seeker, does a brief intake, and can assist with the application process, but DHS is not in the business of job placement and cannot comfortably make a recommendation to the business to hire said individual.
- Some individuals do not choose to self-identify as having a disability. Although they may find the position through E4E, they may not mention it to the employer and/or may not have requested an intake with a Town social worker so there is a breakdown of communication between the employer, E4E, and the candidate.

- Discussion of customized employment, creating jobs to fit specific skill sets vs posting positions, and successfully hiring individuals with the skills necessary to do the job, with support as needed. This was never intended to be the model. However, some businesses would benefit from brief discussions with commissioners who might suggest roles and responsibilities fitting for an individual with a disability. This is almost too granular for our purposes.

Is the platform working?

- Yes and no.
- WE have had several hiring success stories but they are limited because of the legwork required to get a position posted in the first place.
- We can post the handfuls of positions we are given, but the feedback loop is poor because we ask hiring managers to inform us when the position is filled. It's an added step. There are no guarantees that the positions will be filled by individuals with disabilities. Although many of them were.
- It's a constant ask and upkeep, requiring a great deal of time.
- It would be easier to request that each business give consent for us to post positions that we find on public sites like Glassdoor, Indeed, etc – this way, we can populate the platform more quickly, but we still won't necessarily know if the job was filled unless we have more direct engagement.

Who are our partners, and where are they in the process?

1. The Employment Support Agencies work with specific individuals to provide services, job training, placement, and on-site support if they fit specific criteria. Many individuals we've seen come through E4E are either already connected but haven't found the right job fit, or they do not meet the physical or cognitive benchmarks to gain access to agency support. Bring in BRS?
2. The Downtown Association and the Chamber of Commerce have created links on their sites. It would be helpful to ask each organization to help E4E by emailing their members from time to time.
3. Rotaries? TEAM Westport?
4. Businesses hired from E4E candidates include MoCA, Michaels, Lululemon, Nomade, and WCSA. Some that have expressed interest but may not have found the right match yet – Rommanaccis, Fleet Feet, etc
5. Commissioners! It would be helpful to create opportunities for connections to local business owners and managers to suggest that they consider posting their positions simply. This requires a more hands-on approach, coordination, and time.

Ways to dispel myths and ease the businesses' concerns of failure:

- Provide information about tax incentive programs for those that hire individuals with disabilities
 - Provide training for businesses around Disability Etiquette - offering best practices in working with individuals with disabilities and offering legal and general tips for those concerned with saying or doing the wrong thing.
1. Invite businesses to attend a job fair for individuals with disabilities to attend – essentially provide opportunities for connection, therefore reducing fear and anxiety among all parties.

2. Encourage trial hires and/or help them find simple, finite tasks/roles so they can try it out first.
3. Utilize the Staples High School Transition Program as an example of how it can work well.

Solutions:

Press Releases, direct requests to businesses and partners, email businesses with direct marketing materials and warning that we're coming to visit,

1. Commissioners need to hit the streets with a collective effort with succinct messaging about E4E. We'll try this in September in place of our regular meeting.
2. Lift up businesses that are hiring. The First Selectwoman will go to businesses to highlight and celebrate their success. Use these visits as opportunities to highlight them in the press.
3. Create regular press releases throughout the fall, now that college kids will return to school and more positions may become available.

Next Steps:

1. Schedule press with First Selectwoman. (Can we film businesses that are great examples?)
2. Schedule Outreach - Choose a date for Commissioners to collectively hit the streets with succinct ask and email businesses before visiting to contextualize the ask. Possibly Sept 12th or 21st.
3. Pre-determine/assign commissioners with businesses to avoid duplications of efforts and have one point person to avoid confusion and simplify follow-up.
4. Set up various in-services for commissioners and the public and businesses. Ideas include BRS, Judge Wexler, Disability Etiquette, WPS Transition Program, etc.



WESTPORT'S EMPLOYMENT IS FOR EVERYONE (E4E)

E4E is a collaboration between the Town of Westport, local businesses, and Westport's Commission on People with Disabilities.



E4E's Mission

- To encourage and support local businesses in hiring and advancing people with disabilities.

Embracing a Disability-Friendly and Inclusive Culture is Good for Business - Your Business!

- Disability-friendly employers realize increased profits, higher employer satisfaction, and greater consumer loyalty. (*Accenture, Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage, 2018*)
- Throughout Fairfield County, many people with disabilities are eager and able to work.
- Several Westport businesses have embraced an inclusive culture with great results!

Westport Center for Senior Activities

"Hiring Bobby is one of the best decisions I have ever made! His reliability and work ethic exceed what I ever could have imagined."

MoCA

"Hiring individuals living with disabilities isn't just right; it's smart. Their unique perspectives spark innovation, their determination fuels progress, and their inclusion fosters a culture of understanding and acceptance."

WHAT DO WE DO?:

- Assist businesses in exploring and promoting inclusive positions within their companies.
- Offer community-based disability and employment resources to support employers and job seekers.
- One-on-one consultation and referral for Westport job seekers with disabilities.
- Maintain and promote online E4E Job Bank opportunities through community outreach and advocacy.

READY TO EXPLORE E4E?

www.westportct.gov/E4E

CALL 203-341-1050

EMAIL HUMANSRV@WESTPORTCT.GOV

Employment is for Everyone is not a job placement service. We offer resources, tools, and encouragement to employers and job seekers in creating opportunities for the advancement of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.