

READY, WILLING & **ABLE.**



WHY IT PAYS TO HIRE PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES

#inclusionWORKS

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For further information, contact us at: info@iwsiamerica.org

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AT IWSI AMERICA, WE BELIEVE:

WORDS MATTER

IWSI America believes in workplace equality, and believes workplace equality will be achieved when organizational recruitment and staffing practices elevate the unique skills, talents, goals and aspirations of the individual, and do not allow people with a disability to be defined or excluded from opportunity on the basis of a disability.

Employers hire individuals. Individuals with names. Individuals who are striving for the opportunity to contribute their skills and abilities to advance the success of their workplace and achieve the American Dream.

People with disabilities enrich our communities and our society and should be able to choose where they are educated or trained, where they work and where they live.

Throughout this report, we use people-first language because we believe it is a respectful way to speak about people with disabilities by underscoring the person first, rather than their disability.

Examples include:

- **people with disabilities**
- **people without disabilities**
- **person who has Down syndrome**
- **person who has (or has been diagnosed with) autism**
- **student who receives special education services**
- **person who uses a wheelchair or a mobility chair.**

We've added a glossary at the end of the report to define range of terms associated with disability employment.



THE NEW FRONTIER:

INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE US

In 2020, companies from Main Street to Wall Street significantly expanded their efforts to recruit, hire and retain a more diverse workforce, as part of a national conversation on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Companies large and small are exploring DEI tactics to attract new employees and retain existing staff. Companies also recognize that a commitment to DEI can markedly widen their customer base.

On LinkedIn or Indeed, you now see many new job posts for executives dedicated to internally championing DEI. On Instagram or Facebook, you see many new consumer-directed social justice media campaigns. And many well-known stores and brands are openly signposting their commitment to a greater diversity of customers, clients and colleagues. **But amidst this ongoing conversation, we fear the majority of companies and organizations are overlooking the most underemployed segment of the US population – people with disabilities.**

At IWSI America, we believe in the benefits and dignity of work for all Americans, including those with disabilities. The time is now to leverage the untapped talent of a population who has been outside of our labor market because the social and economic reality is that we have an entire population of people who are ready, willing and able to work.

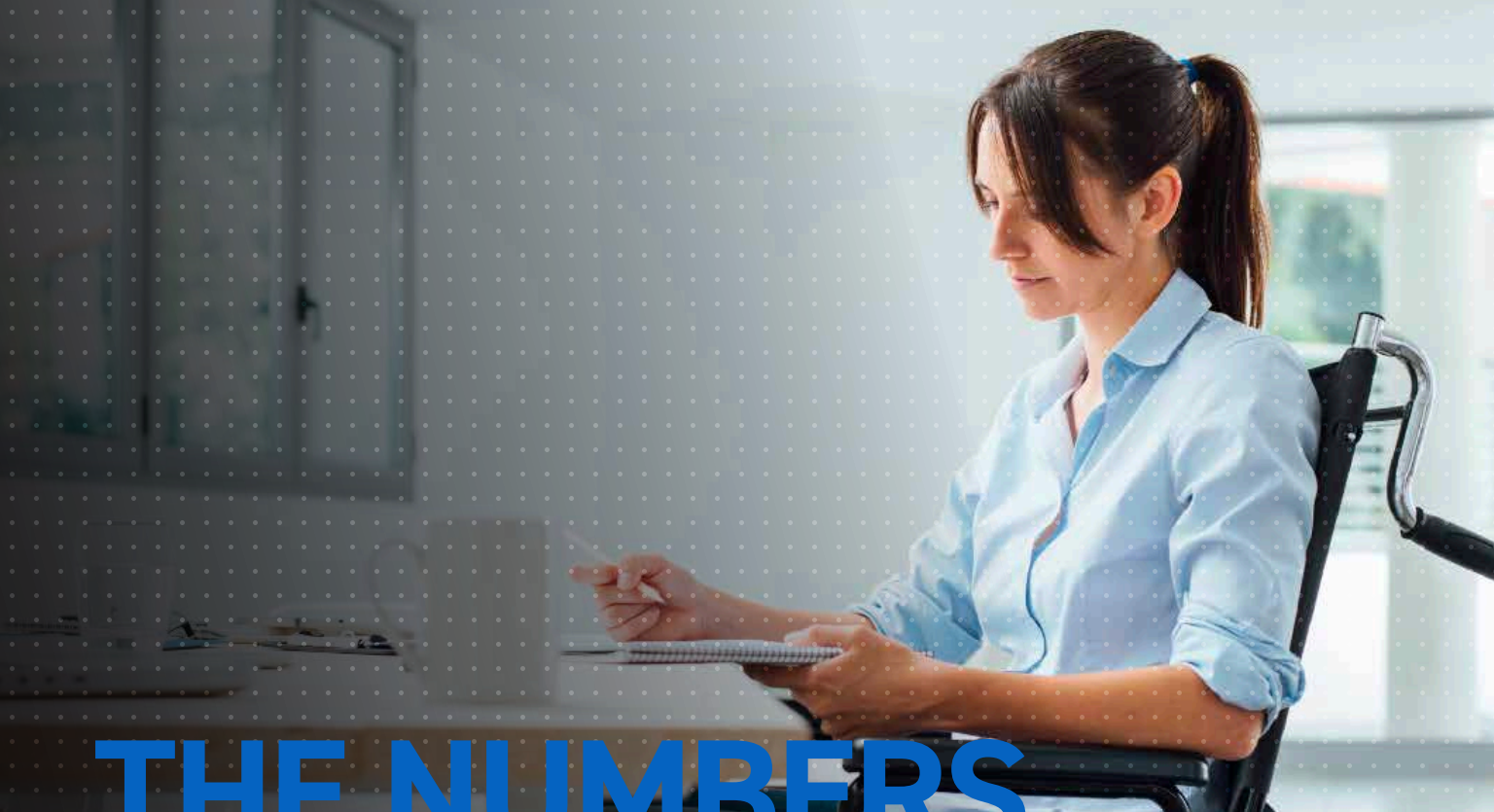
In this report, IWSI America describes the stark numbers on employment of people with disabilities in the US and some of the reasons behind those numbers. We highlight examples from forward-thinking companies and organizations that are already working to include people with disabilities on their staff, and the rewards they reap for doing so.

We offer guidance on how to start apprenticeship programs that offer opportunities for people with disabilities to develop new skills and gain career expertise.

We also make recommendations to employers and small businesses about how to advance disability employment, change perceptions, turn inclusion into advantage, and make a difference in both the workplace and community.

Finally, we include a series of concrete policy recommendations for the US Congress to reform a century-old system rooted in antiquated ideas that actively discourage paid work. We are advocating a wholesale change in employment policy and law to significantly improve the employment prospects of people with disabilities.

In a post-COVID era, as employers continue to re-think workplace design, now is the time to create a more inclusive US economy. The actions and steps we take today will shape a better and fairer future for people with disabilities, and companies large and small will benefit from a stronger workforce driven by a talented labor pool that results in a better bottom line. ***At IWSI America, our goal is to ignite a deep and important conversation that will change the future of the disability employment sector in the US.***



THE NUMBERS

AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAP A NEW POPULATION SEGMENT

How bad is unemployment among people with disabilities? The raw numbers underscore the size of the challenge:

- 61 million adults live with a disability in the US. That amounts to 26% or 1 in 4 adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹



Percentage of adults living with a disability in the US



That amounts to 26% or 1 in 4 adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



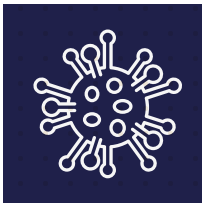
- People with disabilities are also subject to the worst pay gap in the labor market, making 66 cents for every dollar earned by people without a disability, according to recent US Census data.²



Disability and the next generation of youth



17% of the next generation of youth, ages 3 through 17, who will enter the workforce, identify as having a physical, intellectual or developmental disability – approximately 1 in 6 Americans.



Workers with disabilities dismissed from employment



COVID-19 : As of March 2020, 1 in 5 workers with disabilities had been dismissed from employment, compared with 1 in 7 in the general population according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.



7.3% of people with disabilities are unemployed



7.3% of people with disabilities are unemployed according to the a 2019 US Department of Labor report – about twice as high as the rate for those without a disability.

- Across all age groups and education levels, people with disabilities are much less likely to be employed than those with no disability. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the employment gap between people with and without disabilities was a staggering 47% – only 19.3% of people with disabilities were in the workforce, compared to 66.3% of people without a disability.³

As a country, and the world's leading economy, can we accept a 47% employment gap? Can we afford to let the talents of more than 61 million Americans go untapped?



WHAT SMART EMPLOYERS ALREADY KNOW

DIVERSITY BENEFITS

Did you know that many major financial institutions employ people with disabilities to track and prevent international cyberattacks⁴?

Or that the US Department of Defense employs Americans with disabilities across a number of training, logistics and analytics functions, including top-secret work at the NSA⁵?

Or that tech giants like SAP and Microsoft employ people with autism in computer coding and product development roles⁶?

EMPLOYEE DIVERSITY PROVIDES NUMEROUS BENEFITS

Wall Street analysts might spend their careers devising complex models to identify companies poised to outgrow their rivals, but the easiest way to identify a company going places is to look at its commitment to disability employment and the strength of its disability engagement and employment strategies.

A 2018 Accenture report revealed firms in the top 20 percent for workplace disability inclusion achieved 28 percent higher revenue and 30 percent higher profits than competitors over a 4-year period.⁷

And a 2020 McKinsey study confirmed the greater the diversity within a company's leadership, the greater the likelihood of that organization financially outperforming its less diverse rivals.⁸

Smart employers, from UPS to the Israeli Defense Forces, have recognized and are capitalizing on what should be self-evident: **expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities and engaging a broader range of talents and perspectives in key company decision-making processes is the fastest way to guarantee superior business performance and build a defensible competitive advantage.**

Diversity in workplaces has been proven to correlate with superior financial performance across a range of dimensions, including higher or improved levels of:

- workplace productivity
- employee satisfaction and job commitment
- employee loyalty and workforce retention
- employee reliability and punctuality
- individual and collective innovation
- cultural inclusivity, workplace communication and transparency
- company reputation and customer attitudes toward company products and brands
- customer diversity, loyalty and satisfaction
- new product and service development
- market penetration
- engagement with the local community.

And of course people with disabilities are consumers themselves. The US Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) estimates that people with disabilities are the third-largest discrete market segment in the US – a segment with a discretionary income of more than \$21 billion annually.

The data is clear: **including people with disabilities in the workforce is one of the most cost-effective investments a business can make in their growth and profitability.**

Yet, despite the obvious advantages, recent data from the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that only 13% of American employers have a dedicated strategy to attract, hire and retain people with disabilities.⁹

“MANY EMPLOYERS SIMPLY LACK VISIBILITY OF AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO ENGAGE WITH DISABILITY COMMUNITIES, AND OVERESTIMATE WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT WORKERS WITH A DISABILITY.

EVERY TIME WE EXPLAIN HOW THE COMMON BARRIERS TO DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT CAN BE EASILY ADDRESSED DIRECTLY IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS GOALS, AND HOW RELATIVELY CHEAP AND STRAIGHTFORWARD IT IS TO ADJUST RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PROCESSES, IT'S REMARKABLE TO SEE THE ORGANIZATIONAL TURNAROUND.”

Jim Atwater

InReturn Strategies



“THE BIGGEST IMPEDIMENT TO DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT IS NOT ACTIVE DISCRIMINATION BUT OUTDATED PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CAPABILITIES OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW EASY AND UNCOMPLICATED IT IS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE.”

Dr. Beth Myers
Syracuse University

We need to better understand why millions of American organizations are excluding people with disabilities from the workforce. Because the longer they wait, the longer they miss out on the many benefits of greater workforce diversity.

Let’s take a more in-depth look at some organizations already engaging individuals with disabilities, providing an on-ramp to employment and realizing the rewards of doing so. We will also look at how people with disabilities are building their own road to employment, from the frontlines of one of the world’s largest companies, to serving in the military, to entrepreneurship.

UPS: CUSTOMER FIRST. PEOPLE LED. INNOVATION AND INCLUSION-DRIVEN



"WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF OPTIONS UNLIMITED, INC. AND THE COALITION FOR WORKFORCE DIVERSITY, THIS PARTNERSHIP WOULD HAVE FAILED. COMPANIES OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES NEED TO RECOGNIZE WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW. THE UPS TRANSITIONAL LEARNING CENTER HAS CHANGED OVER TIME.

IT BEGAN AS AN HR FUNCTION, BUT EVOLVED OUTSIDE THE TRADITIONAL HIRING PROCESS TO GIVE EMPLOYEES WITH A DISABILITY THE TLC "SECRET SAUCE:" HANDS-ON PRE-TRAINING FOR A SMOOTH, SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO THE COMPETITIVE UPS WORKFORCE CULTURE."

Todd Coffey

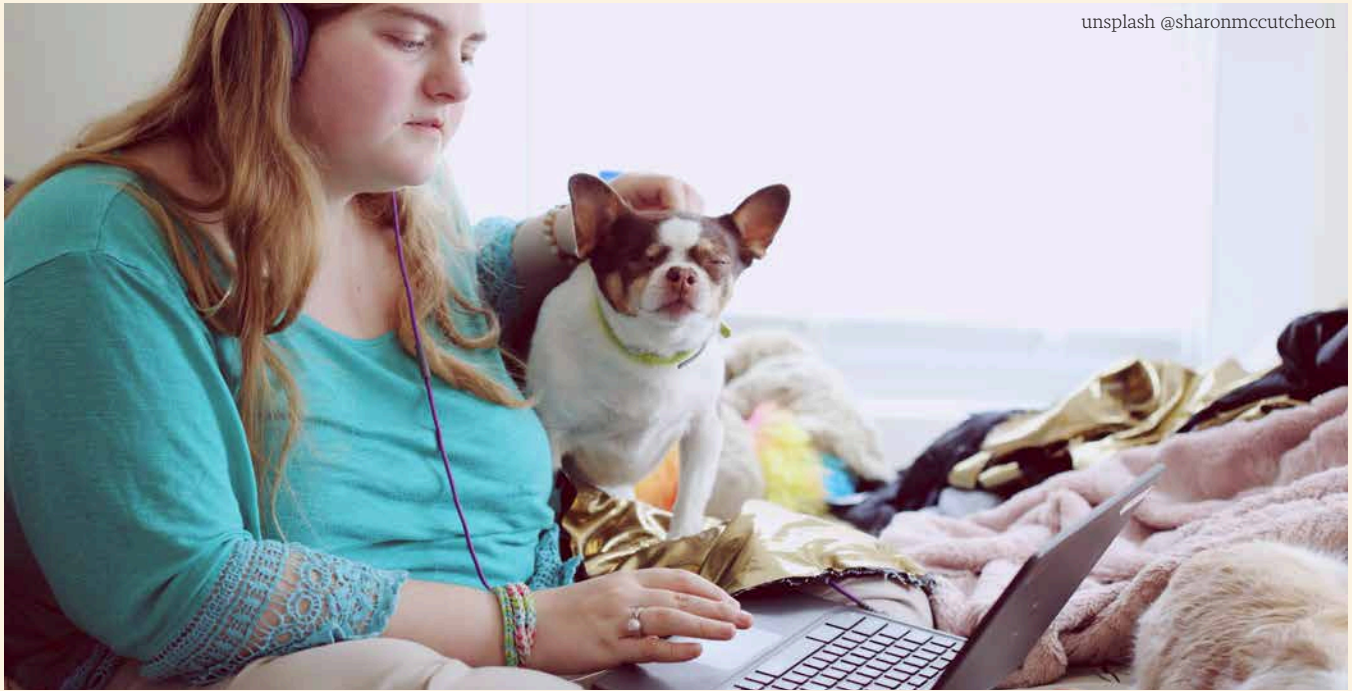
*UPS Transitional
Learning Center*

The story of UPS, the world's largest package delivery company, began more than a century ago with a \$100 loan to jumpstart a tiny messenger service. Today, UPS is a multibillion-dollar global enterprise with more than 495,000 employees connecting over 220 nations and territories via highways, railways, skyways and waterways. At Worldport, in Louisville, Kentucky, UPS not only delivers packages – it also delivers dream careers for people with disabilities.

In 2012, UPS partnered with Options Unlimited, Inc., a disability service provider in Kentucky, to build and lead a coalition of 40 disability agencies and providers that would advance new strategies to hire individuals with disabilities. The new initiative is called the Transitional Learning Center (TLC), which offers a two-week, pre-employment training program staffed and operated by UPS training supervisors and job coaches from Options Unlimited. The program combines classroom training and a simulated work environment to teach participants job responsibilities, safety procedures and soft skills, providing participants with invaluable hands-on practice.

THE UPS RETURN ON INVESTMENT:

- 417 of 480 TLC trainees were placed in competitive jobs at UPS, an 87% placement rate since 2012.
- Options Unlimited, Inc., earns a \$1500 training fee from KY's Office of Vocational Rehab (OVR) for participation in the TLC, and the supporting agency receives approximately a \$1500 placement bonus for securing a competitive position at UPS.
- Each year, 88-90% of TLC trainees stay on with UPS, and 51% are still employed there after 7 years.
- 15 TLC graduates have been promoted to trainers, and of these graduates, 4 have been promoted to part-time supervisors within UPS's frontline operations.



ANZ SPECTRUM: PEOPLE WITH AUTISM EXCELLING IN FINANCIAL SERVICES

Across the globe, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face significant obstacles in finding and maintaining ongoing employment, despite possessing a range of abilities and attributes typically sought by prospective employers – superior memory, mathematical and numerical skills, and the aptitude to develop structured skills at a faster rate than neurotypical people.

People with ASD experience great difficulty transitioning from school into employment. The unemployment rate for people with a form of ASD is estimated at more than 30% – 5 times the general population.

Yet these inequitable employment outcomes can be addressed through a simple reframing of the recruitment process to ensure individuals with ASD, who often struggle with structured screening and interviews processes, are not disadvantaged by their unique communication styles.

One company that has benefited significantly from restructuring its hiring processes to improve employment opportunities for neurodiverse individuals is the ANZ Banking Group, one of Australia's major banks.

ANZ started its Spectrum program¹⁰ in 2018 to bring neurodiverse perspectives into its operations. The program tailors the recruitment process to the needs of people on the autism spectrum so they can showcase their abilities. Successful applicants receive an intensive induction into the ANZ Cybersecurity and Testing teams, and are provided with ongoing support from a dedicated Autism Spectrum Consultant to proactively address potential barriers to continued employment.

The organization has been quick to realize the positive workplace contributions and impact of people with ASD, as well as the strategic, cultural and productivity benefits of incorporating neurodiverse viewpoints into their decision-making processes.

ANZ is not the only one grasping this opportunity. A 2016 analysis by JP Morgan – whose *Autism at Work* program is a leader in employment for Americans with ASD – found their ASD employees were a whopping 48 percent faster and as much as 92 percent more productive than their neurotypical peers when given environmental support.

The ANZ Spectrum program boasts an enviable 100% success rate: 100% of Spectrum participants remain in the program or have transitioned into permanent employment with ANZ Bank.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY: *HARNESSING ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT*

Taking steps to ensure people with disabilities have equal access to workplaces is one way to boost employment and improve the company's bottom line. But employers can benefit people with disabilities – and their communities – in another way: by supporting entrepreneurs.

People with disabilities are adept problem-solvers – they face numerous challenges in their daily lives that require creative solutions.

It's no surprise then that over the last several years we have seen the emergence of entrepreneurs with disabilities – people creating steady employment by starting their own businesses, often alongside dedicated family members and caregivers, with a business model that includes employing others with disabilities. These new entrepreneurs are leaving the outdated disability system behind and charting their own path to gainful employment.



JOHN'S CRAZY SOCKS

John's Crazy Socks is a father-son venture inspired by co-founder John Lee Cronin, a young man with Down syndrome in New York. John's affinity for crazy socks paired with his love of making people smile made their mission clear: they wanted to spread happiness. Through their model, they have grown a start-up business into a full-fledged multimillion-dollar enterprise with more than 20 employees with disabilities.



RISING TIDE CAR WASH

Founded in Florida in 2013 by John D'Eri and his son Thomas, Rising Tide is a social enterprise with the primary mission of employing adults with autism. The D'Eris were inspired to do this by watching John's son and Thomas' brother, Andrew, a vibrant young man with autism, struggle to find his place in the world. Rising Tide has grown from its humble beginnings and now washes more than 150,000 cars per year. With 80% of its workforce comprising individuals with ASD, Rising Tide has become one of the largest employers of people with autism in the US, and enjoys an employee retention rate more than 5 times the industry standard. To further its mission of empowering individuals with disabilities through gainful employment, Rising Tide is planning to expand the company's footprint.

Its second site achieved breakeven sales after only 2 months, and construction is already underway on a third location in Coral Springs, Florida, which is due to open in early 2022.

COLLETTEY'S COOKIES

Colletley's Cookies was launched in Boston by Collette Divitto, 30, a woman with Down syndrome, after she was rejected repeatedly when applying for jobs. Divitto was determined to open her own business and earn a living on her own. Through her secret cookie recipe, Collette has created a global movement and a recipe for success, including a record-breaking 2-week period when she produced 30,000 cookies.





“PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE INHERENTLY ENTREPRENEURIAL. FROM THE MOMENT WE WAKE UP, WE HAVE TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO LIVE IN A WORLD THAT IS NOT BUILT TO FIT OUR NEEDS.”

Diego Mariscal

CEO and Chief Disabled Officer of 2Gether-International

These individuals are not alone. Advocates and leaders like Diego Mariscal, CEO and Chief Disabled Officer of 2Gether-International, are flipping the narrative and offering business accelerator programs that help individuals start, grow and scale their own businesses, showcasing disability as a competitive advantage for startups, rather than something that needs to be fixed or overcome.

As an entrepreneur with Cerebral Palsy, Mariscal argues that “people with disabilities are inherently entrepreneurial. From the moment we wake up, we have to figure out how to get dressed, how to drive, how to communicate, how to live in a world that is not built to fit our needs. The mindset of disabled people is innately collaborative and communicative, which positions us for success as entrepreneurs.”



SKILLING UP OUR YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS:

HOW APPRENTICESHIP CAN HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ENTER THE WORKFORCE

“EMPLOYMENT IS AT THE CENTER OF ADULthood, AND SOMETHING WE SPEND OVER HALF OF OUR WAKING LIFE DOING. THUS, PREPARATION FOR A CAREER, NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, MUST BEGIN WITH A SOLID, INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS TO ALLOW ANY INDIVIDUAL TO ACHIEVE THEIR OWN AMERICAN DREAM.”

Sara Hart Weir
IWSI America

Millennials, Gen Z and all generations after them know the landmark Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) as a birthright. And individuals with a disability in these and future generations will continue to demand that the Act fulfills its promises.

Among those promises is the right to participate fully in the workforce. Schools can help prepare students with disabilities for work through vocational education and school-to-work transition services, but those students also need direct work experience and engagement with employers.

Structured apprenticeship is one of the best ways to obtain that experience, and can work particularly well for young people with disabilities.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS: COULD THIS BE THE SOLUTION TO AMERICA'S DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT GAP?

Could the humble and resilient apprenticeship be the skills development model to help employers successfully engage and integrate more Americans with disabilities into their workforce?

Many global employers, from Adidas to Volkswagen, rely on apprenticeship programs to meet their workforce skills needs and provide a pipeline of diversified talent. Apprenticeship programs equip young people with the general and workplace-specific skills required to prosper in their chosen profession. While apprenticeship is the cornerstone of skills training and workforce entry in many major economies around the world, it is underutilized and underappreciated by American employers.

What is an apprenticeship? It is a structured employment program set out in an agreement between apprentice and employer wherein the apprentice is paid while they learn on the job (“earn while you learn”). The enduring value of an apprenticeship is its fusion of on-the-job learning and formal technical instruction, which provides ongoing opportunities to develop and refine skills through workplace exposure and practice.

Participants who successfully complete an apprenticeship obtain a national, industry-recognized qualification with none of the debt they might have incurred pursuing a university degree. They are often offered full-time jobs with the company that sponsored their apprenticeship, and their pay increases commensurate with increasing skill and experience.

Apprenticeship programs can transform integrated employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. The reason apprenticeship works so well for people with disabilities is that it's adaptable. Apprenticeships are modular and sequential. They can be highly responsive to individual needs and learning styles, which helps people with learning or developmental disabilities better master the required skills.

European data indicate that employers who have people with disabilities in their workforce are 40% more likely to establish targeted apprenticeship programs to provide workforce entry pathways for school-leavers with disabilities can get that all-important first job. It's time American employers understood the great benefits of apprenticeship for building an inclusive workforce.



IGNITING YOUR OWN PASSION THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP: DANIEL'S ROADMAP TOWARD A CAREER

Daniel Ruthenberg is one young man who has not let the challenges of living with disability get in the way of pursuing his dream career. Growing up with moderate to severe hearing loss in regional Australia, Daniel was always fascinated by cars and interested in solving mechanical and engineering problems.

“WE DIDN’T WANT TO SET DANIEL UP FOR FAILURE. WE KNEW HE HAD THE SKILLS AND ABILITY TO DO HIS APPRENTICESHIP SUCCESSFULLY IF WE MADE SURE EVERYTHING WAS IN PLACE AND THAT HE KNEW HE HAD OUR SUPPORT. IF THERE IS SOMETHING THAT ISN’T QUITE WORKING, WE GET FEEDBACK FROM DANIEL AND HIS MENTOR AND CAN QUICKLY SET ABOUT FIXING IT.”

Mark Huston
Huston Motors

Although his parents and educators were concerned that Daniel’s disability could limit his career options post-school, he is now thriving as an automotive apprentice with the prestigious Nissan Mentored Apprenticeship Program (NISSMAP), a program created by Nissan and IWSI America’s Australian affiliate WPC Group.

Daniel’s journey started at Huston Motors, Kingaroy, where he worked as a car detailer after leaving school. Management quickly identified Darren’s strong work ethic and enthusiasm, and encouraged him to apply for a place in the highly selective NISSMAP apprenticeship program.

This award-winning program provides apprentices with access to Nissan-specific flexible training options, intensive ongoing mentoring and personalised support so they can become a qualified mechanic in an accelerated time frame. The flexible apprenticeship model, which allows Nissan to customize the scope and speed of training, makes it easier for apprentices managing a disability to work at their own pace while developing functional skills.

Daniel’s success is testament to what can be achieved through the mutual commitment and goodwill that defines the employer-apprentice relationship. Huston Motors, which recognized that Daniel’s confidence and commitment could only grow with appropriate support, is committed to making all necessary workplace physical and process accommodations to minimize the workplace impacts of Daniel’s disability.

Margaret Huston delights in seeing how Daniel’s confidence has grown since starting the NISSMAP program. “There is a brightness on his face when talking about motors - he has shown great enthusiasm and you can see his ability to liaise with people has improved.”

When Daniel completes the NISSMAP program, in addition to graduating with a nationally recognized qualification, he will also be a Nissan Certified Technician, a qualification that opens up a multitude of career paths and gives him the opportunity to work on Nissan vehicles across the globe.



EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS:

RETHINKING

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND REWARDS FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

“THE PERCEPTION IS THAT IT’S COMPLICATED AND THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF HOOPS TO JUMP THROUGH. BUT THE REALITY IS, WHEN YOU BRING PEOPLE FROM THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY INTO YOUR BUSINESS, YOU ARE GETTING INCREDIBLE EMPLOYEES WHO PROVIDE AMAZING BENEFITS FOR YOUR BUSINESS.”

Ashley Helsing

National Down Syndrome Society

Business leaders must start by asking themselves the following:

- Do you see people with disabilities as part of our society?
- Do you see people with disabilities as part of your company?
- How do you scale that value?
- How do you measure value?

The path to include people within your workforce is simple and must start with your company’s mission, purpose and bottom line.

You must establish strategies inside and outside DEI platforms to scale job opportunities for people with disabilities across a business – from consumer-driven products, goods and services; to marketing departments; to HR and hiring managers; to accounting and finance departments.

*Savvy employers consistently push to maximise growth, profitability, and value, so that's where you start when it comes to scaling career opportunities for individuals with disabilities. **You need to see the disability community as both a market and a talent pipeline for your institution.***

We have outlined concrete actions you can take in 3 areas – recruitment, retention and reward – that will help you attract and retain people with disabilities.



RETHINKING RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is a company's first outreach to the millions of individuals with disabilities who are ready, willing and able to work. But a company's recruitment process can unintentionally screen out people with disabilities. Often, websites and technology platforms are inaccessible, local job networks do not include people with disabilities, and intern slots and apprenticeships are closed to them.

Here are some steps you can take to alleviate those problems and open up your talent pool:

- **Maintain an accessible website that meets the standards of the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA.**
- **Adopt company-wide Universal Design (UD) practices that start with recruitment. Remember that access goes beyond making sure people can use physical accommodations; it also applies to websites, digital tools and job postings.**
- **Use accessible technology platforms where candidates with disabilities, local service organizations and local and national disability organizations can meet to promote job opportunities.**
- **Open a dialogue with school districts and local high schools to align skilled labor needs with educational experience and outcomes at the local level, similar to the UPS model.**
- **Build relationships and partner with regional or local Think College¹¹ organizations (college and university programs designed to support students with disabilities by getting them career-ready).**

- Partner with disability-related organizations at the national, regional and local level to foster alignment and create relationships with local talent and skilled labor.
- Include people with disabilities in DEI recruitment strategies, goals and measurements.
- Establish apprenticeship programs, summer internship and mentoring programs that make a concerted effort to give individuals with disabilities job training and experience.

Modern recruitment tools and processes are increasingly automated, and can unintentionally screen out people with disabilities. Yet, this automated recruitment technology can just as easily be repurposed to enable employers to explicitly market job vacancies to people with disabilities – affirmative action for a different population. In fact, the software to do so has already been developed.

InReturn Strategies is one company that has done so. They've developed a cloud-based platform that helps companies execute a 'disability agnostic' recruitment process to help ensure people with disabilities are included in the recruitment process, and employers can easily connect with candidates.

It's time for companies to rethink the traditional hiring process, which typically bars individuals with disabilities from even getting a foot in the door, and adopt simple strategies like these to attract candidates with disabilities.



RETHINKING RETENTION

Organizations can also make it easier for employees with disabilities to stay in a job and thrive. Proven strategies include training, from the C-suite to the mailroom; workplace accommodations that ensure employees with disabilities can perform necessary job tasks, and ongoing support from mentors, coaches, supervisors and co-workers.

We have outlined a continuum of strategies that help organizations keep employees with disabilities on the job and ensure the proper supports are built into the workplace:

“MENTORSHIP AND COACHING ARE THE MOST COMMON FACTORS IN THE SUCCESSFUL RETENTION OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES.

MENTORS PLAY MANY ROLES, INCLUDING TEACHER, ADVISOR, CONFIDANT AND MOTIVATOR.

JOB COACHES ALSO PLAY AN INVALUABLE ROLE IN HELPING NEW EMPLOYEES BUILD CONSTRUCTIVE WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS AND HABITS, SET GOALS AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

DEPLOYED TOGETHER, MENTORS AND COACHES ARE A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO HELP EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES THRIVE ON THE JOB AND STAY IN THE JOB.”

Dr. Stephen Hamilton

Cornell University

Professor Emeritus



ORGANIZATION-WIDE

- Develop an organizational disability employment strategy
- Review and improve recruitment processes and practices for inclusivity
- Identify necessary operational supports
- Create customized workplace accommodations for individual employees, and develop a company-wide policy

COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING

- Develop an inclusive employee on-boarding program
- Develop and deploy inclusion training on a regular basis
- Create disability awareness and employment training

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTS

- Ensure flexible work arrangements
- Create ongoing skill, leadership and career development programs
- Ensure access to accelerated promotional pathways
- Adopt a formal mentoring and job coaching system

Organizations that are most successful in retaining employees with disabilities develop and continually review these strategies to ensure all programs stay on track. But it is important to at least take that first step, starting down a path that will benefit all employees, as well as the company bottom line.

RETHINKING REWARD

Recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities are the first two challenges to creating a DEI workplace. The third is providing the same level of compensation and benefits as received by other employees in the workforce. But providing equivalent compensation can pose a challenge because current federal law limits the amount of income people with disabilities can earn before they start to lose vital benefits and services.

Until public policy catches up to the DEI movement in business, employers need to get creative with strategies that equitably reward employees with disabilities.

"IN ORDER TO TRULY ACHIEVE INCLUSION, WE NEED THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY TO WORK ALONGSIDE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO SPEAK UP AND SPEAK OUT THROUGH THE HALLS OF CONGRESS ABOUT THE INEQUITIES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FACE WHEN IT COMES TO EMPLOYMENT. THIS NEEDS TO BE A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE PUBLIC, PRIVATE SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE THE LARGEST UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS IN THE US"

Sara Hart Weir

IWSI America

These strategies include:

- Offering employees with disabilities the option to access the same benefits package (healthcare and retirement) as other employees, and allowing them to make the choice between a traditional benefits package or public benefits (for example, Medicaid or Social Security)
- Being flexible with employees who receive public benefits by working with them to adjust hours so they don't lose necessary federal and state assistance
- Encouraging employees with disabilities, their family members and caregivers to use ABLÉ Accounts as a way to save resources without jeopardizing benefits. Today, an individual who is working can contribute up to \$27,760 to their ABLÉ without impacting benefits.



Shawn Murinko, a Washington State attorney (pictured with family), a husband and father of two daughters, is forced to choose between the personal care attendant who helps get him out of bed each day and accepting a raise at work. A highly skilled attorney, Shawn needs extra supports and services to get from home to work. Although he's successful at his job, Shawn is not treated like the rest of his colleagues. He can't have a retirement account; he gives up raises; and he even turned down his dream job in Washington, DC because he didn't want to risk losing benefits and facing a long requalification period for Medicaid support in a new state. A self-described Cerebral Palsy thriver, Shawn's disability doesn't limit him as much as our outdated federal benefits our outdated federal benefits system does.

We hope this report shines a light on the challenges faced by people with disabilities at every turn. It is time for the business community, CEOs and C-suite executives across the country to make the necessary DEI adjustments to include people with disabilities in their boardrooms, and engage in meaningful activism on Capitol Hill. The business community, disability community and Congress must align to create workplace equity for people with disabilities, inside and outside their organizations.



ENHANCE AND MODERNIZE

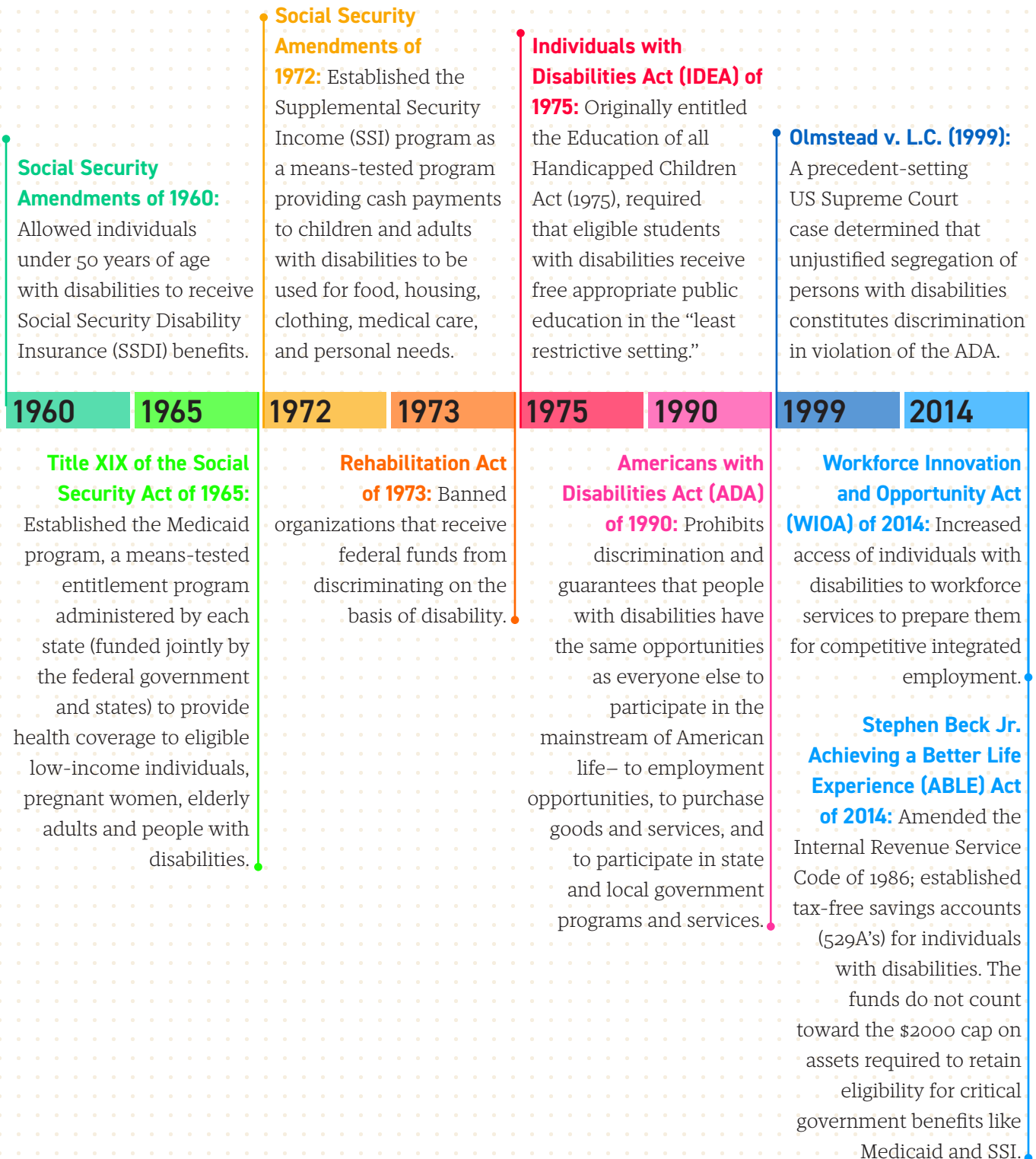
THE FEDERAL AND STATE STRUCTURE TO BETTER INCLUDE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Despite Congress passing the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and subsequent amendments in 2008, significant structural, economic, educational and regulatory barriers remain to employing people with disabilities.

People with disabilities, their families and caregivers continue to navigate an archaic system to access necessary benefits such as healthcare, job supports and other services. And even when a person with a disability is employed, they still face a series of limitations on how many hours they can work and how much money they can earn (and save). They cannot have a retirement fund and are still not treated equally in the workplace. Today's healthcare and benefits system was designed in the 1960s, when most people with disabilities were institutionalized, often from birth. The result is that the incentive to stay home, not work, and live in isolation far outweighs the incentive to seek a career and pursue the American Dream.

Over the years, we have seen US Congresses sporadically advance legislative reforms for people with disabilities. Below is a timeline of the key federal laws and judicial decisions:

US DISABILITY RIGHTS HISTORIC LEGISLATIVE MILESTONES



Despite these legal protections, people with disabilities still face an extra level of bureaucracy in federal and state systems, and live with the legacy of outdated laws and regulations in need of a comprehensive nationally coordinated overhaul. For example:

- **A 1938 subminimum wage standard, retained within section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, allows employers authorized by the Wage and Hour Division to pay less than the federal minimum wage to workers with disabilities.**
- **An outdated income limitation of approximately \$794¹² per month¹³ (only three-quarters of the federal poverty line) forces people with disabilities into a lifetime of poverty in exchange for SSI benefits that meet only basic needs for food, shelter and clothing.**
- **Individuals with disabilities are limited in how much they can save at any given time (\$2000 for an individual; \$3000 for a couple)¹⁴ if they want to receive SSI.**
- **Even if a person with a disability is employed, they are not eligible to access employee retirement benefits because those accounts are included in the asset limitation cap.**
- **People with disabilities have limited healthcare and insurance options beyond plans provided by state Medicaid agencies. These plans have long waitlists, are bureaucratic, offer no choice and confine individuals with disabilities to their state lines.**
- **Government aid (that is, Medicaid and Social Security) is general – not designed to support a specific disability.**

Earnings limitations in these means-tested programs have not been updated in more than 40 years, forcing people with disabilities to choose between necessary benefits and true, meaningful employment. Obviously, the prospect of losing dependable benefits discourages people with disabilities from saving money and seeking better-paying employment. The direct result of these barriers and limitations is a lifetime of poverty with little incentive to work. That outcome is borne out by the numbers. In the US, the poverty rate for adults with disabilities (25.9%) is more than twice the rate of adults with no disability (11.4%)¹⁵.

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THE DISABILITY INCLUSION ADVANTAGE



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

As noted above, US laws make it difficult for people with disabilities to retain access to necessary services while also seeking out and obtaining full-time employment. The disincentives, patchwork policies, and differences among states seriously limit employment possibilities for the population and make it difficult for the business community to reward employees for hard work.

We propose a series of legislative reforms that focus on streamlining and modernizing the outdated, piecemeal system for individuals with disabilities in the US. But first we would like to introduce a forward-thinking system from another country, Australia. Looking abroad can give us a fresh perspective on how we can collectively improve life outcomes for Americans with disabilities.

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has revolutionized the way in which Australians with disabilities are supported in their everyday lives. Since its nationwide rollout in 2016, the NDIS has extended access to high-quality specialist disability support services to enable the more than 4 million Australians with a disability to more fully participate in the country's social and economic life.



This groundbreaking reform passed the Parliament of Australia with bipartisan political support, born from the recognition that Australia's support systems for people with disabilities had not kept pace with cognitive, scientific, educational and technological advancements, and existing systems were not enabling people with disabilities and their families to fully realize their individual potential.

The NDIS does away with the centralized one-size-fits-all approach, replacing it with a personalized support plan and case management model, giving individuals with a disability the opportunity to select disability-specific services and supports so they can more actively participate in everyday life and pursue personal goals.

To enable people with disabilities to live in the community and participate in community activities, the NDIS funds a wide range of specialist disability support services, including assistive technology supports; specialist home, accommodation and vehicle modifications; life skills, employment and case management services; personal care support and transport assistance.

Like the US, Australia is a federation of states, with responsibilities and funding for disability services shared between federal and state governments. The NDIS is funded by a combination of federal and state taxes. It has been shown to yield a net economic gain for Australia, with the headline cost of the NDIS offset by the broader economic and social benefits the program facilitates and the employment growth it has enabled in the support sector. The NDIS has also reduced the unit cost of service delivery, eliminating cost-shifting between governments and costly duplicate services.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

FOR US LAWMAKERS

To achieve full employment and social inclusion for people with disabilities, the US Congress must consider the following.

DECOUPLE PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY FROM PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES.

- Decouple people with disabilities from those living in poverty by eliminating income and asset limitations for individuals with disabilities in means-tested programs. These limitations have never been adjusted for inflation and create a significant barrier to employment. Doing away with limitations altogether allows people with disabilities to retain the necessary supports and services while they take greater responsibility for themselves.

ELIMINATE THE SUBMINIMUM WAGE.

- Eliminate the use of subminimum wage and 14c certificates in the US. Bipartisan leaders in the US Congress introduced the ‘Transition to Competitive Employment Act’ (H.R. 2373) which focuses on phasing out the use of subminimum wage (that is, paying people with disabilities less than the minimum wage). Specifically, this legislation includes: a phase-out period of 14(c), with a systematic approach to expanding capacity for competitive integrated employment, particularly for people transitioning out of sheltered workshops; funding of \$300 million for 2 grant programs supporting competitive, integrated employment and a technical assistance center; and assistance to current 14(c) certificate holders located in states that do not apply for the state grants to transition their business models. This bipartisan legislation also enjoys support from the Biden Administration.

PRIORITISE THE FULL AND TRUE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN K-12 SCHOOLS AND ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MAKING SURE THEY ARE LIFE-LONG LEARNERS AND CAREER-READY.

- Ensure students with disabilities are fully included in all K-12 general education settings, public and private, at least 80% of the school day. This will lead to superior acquisition of job and academic skills. Examples include self-advocacy, flexibility, critical thinking, communication, strategies to cope with stimuli and the ability to follow directions. Key career and social skills are developed, learned and emulated at this early stage and can be deployed throughout one’s career.
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services should start engaging and supporting students who have disabilities at or before 14 years, while they are still in the school system. VR should prioritize job training through apprenticeships, school and summer job experience, internships and fellowships that supplement, but do not replace, typical classroom-based education.

- According to Think College, there are 307 colleges and universities programs that enroll students with disabilities. These programs must include technical training – such as welding, plumbing, mechanics and CNAs – and re-shift their focus from ‘college experience’ to quantifiable goals, including career readiness and employment outcomes. Further, all postsecondary institutions (that is, traditional higher education and technical training) should have to report to the US Department Education on the one-, 5- and 10-year full-time competitive employment outcomes of their graduates with disabilities.

ESTABLISH A NEW, NATIONAL AND COMPREHENSIVE US-BASED DISABILITY INSURANCE PROGRAM THAT PROVIDES THE NECESSARY SUPPORTS, SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, ALLOWING THEM TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN PROVIDERS, SUPPORTS AND HEALTHCARE OPTIONS WITHOUT MAKING THE PROGRAM MEANS-TESTED. THIS SYSTEMIC OVERHAUL WOULD:

- Combine all disability-related federal and state benefit programs based on the Australian model profiled above
- Eliminate the unnecessary red tape families and caregivers must navigate
- Eliminate state reciprocity issues that result from 51 different bureaucratic and complex Medicaid programs
- Provide a choice of healthcare options, including Medicaid (without adherence to income and asset limitations) and private insurance through an employer, the healthcare exchange or a private plan.



THE TIME FOR CHANGE IS NOW

We are at a critical crossroad. The global COVID-19 pandemic deeply affected the fabric of life, particularly in the disability community. A decade of employment gains for people with a disability was cruelly and suddenly reversed.

As we rebuild our economy in the wake of the pandemic, we are presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to redesign the world of work and fundamentally change the way in which people with a disability access the workforce.

We can reset our approach to disability employment and inclusion in the mainstream labor market by providing new and dynamic opportunities for the one in four of our fellow Americans with a disability.

If we are to reach genuine representative diversity and equality in the workplace, it is time to challenge corporate America, to support our small businesses, and for state and federal governments to work together with the disability community to generate thousands of new high-quality employment opportunities.

NOW IS THE TIME TO:

- Create well-paying, rewarding and sustainable employment opportunities for people with a disability, and tackle the pervasive, outdated perceptions that result in workforce underrepresentation and employment and income gaps.
- Change our concept of workplace and job role design, and embed equality of opportunity for people with a disability into our workforce development systems.
- Embed diversity, equality and inclusion strategies into organizational recruitment, screening and selection processes, and open the door for 61 million Americans with disabilities to participate in the economic mainstream.
- Look with fresh eyes at forging a new agenda for disability inclusion and employment, and consign to history the corrosive systems and structures which are leaving millions of Americans with limited options to share their talents with the community.
- Capitalize on the pandemic-accelerated adoption of flexible work policies and assistive communication technologies to bring millions of Americans with a disability into the workforce.
- Educate employers who think that creating a disability employment stream is costly or complicated on the opportunity cost of not having a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Transition to a more structurally inclusive economy and redesign our social safety net programs to eliminate 'benefits-lock' and incentivize the employment of people with a disability.

NOW IS THE TIME TO GET TO WORK.

Whether you are starting at zero or adapting your work environment post-COVID, IWSI America can help you harness the social, cultural and economic benefits of workplace diversity.



WORKING WITH IWSI AMERICA TO MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE

MORE INCLUSIVE

“MY MESSAGE TO EMPLOYERS IS, SIMPLY, GET STARTED. YOU DON’T HAVE TO REINVENT THE WHEEL - THERE’S AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY READY, WILLING AND ABLE TO HELP, AND EAGER TO HELP YOU GROW AND SUCCEED.”

Nicholas Wyman
Chief Executive Officer,
IWSI America

We hope the issues raised in this report have opened your eyes to the problems people with disabilities face in the workplace, and the ways in which the business community and government leaders can work to alleviate those problems. Improving the employment prospects of people with disabilities benefits individuals, companies and our communities.

We have made a number of recommendations in this report, but we are also prepared to offer more concrete help. IWSI America is your Disability Inclusion Employment specialist. We have decades of experience helping underrepresented communities, including people with disabilities, get into the workforce, build successful careers, and achieve the American dream.

IWSI America has developed numerous award-winning employment strategies. We collaborate with with a host of multinationals and small businesses to adapt human resource and recruitment practices to increase workforce diversity and employment pathways in a range of industries.

Talk with us about how we can help you access new and diverse pools of skilled talent and strengthen the inclusivity and dynamism of your workplace culture.

Disability Workforce Inclusion Services

Whether seeking to develop a disability employment pathway program, hire an individual or audit your recruitment strategies to reduce unnecessary barriers to employment, IWSI America Disability Employment Services can help your business begin the process with confidence.



Apprenticeship Program Development

With over 30 years of experience, IWSI America can help your business by:

- Identifying skills needed to fill talent pipelines
- Helping to recruit target populations
- Developing customized training curriculum
- Identifying weak links in existing programs
- Developing strategies to increase return on investment
- Reducing employee turnover through well designed apprenticeship programs, thereby minimizing recruitment and training costs
- Recruiting intermediaries to manage essential HR functions and provide employees with wrap-around services



Recruitment and Screening Support

- Developing role and disability-specific sourcing and recruitment strategies
- Sourcing and pre-screening candidates to accommodate specific learning styles and needs
- Advising on role design and potential task modifications
- Developing pre-employment programs to maximize candidate engagement
- Designing and administering trial employment exercises
- Assisting in interviewing and selecting candidates



Workplace Onboarding

- Designing and managing personalized and organizationally customized training plans to support employees with disabilities
- Advising on how to create a thriving and supported workplace environment for employees with disabilities
- Undertaking a comprehensive assessment to determine any workplace modifications or assistive equipment needs
- Conducting workplace inductions and staff introductions
- Delivering transitional training activities to ensure employees understand workplace standards and expectations
- Organizing 'job-ready' supports such as employee transport



Post-Placement Support and Administration

- Liaising with government bodies to ensure compliance with all legal and regulatory obligations
- Ensuring employer access to all available government subsidies and benefits for an employee's support needs
- Sourcing relevant technical and soft-skills training opportunities to aid continuous skills development
- Ongoing post-placement employee mentoring and support to encourage development opportunities and ensure early identification and resolution of issues that could affect employee engagement
- Providing access to employee-specific support programs such as counseling, health, and wellbeing services



Organizational Advisory Workshops and Training

- IWSI America Disability Employment Services can work with you to deliver a range of customized disability employment, diversity and inclusion workshops, and disability-specific awareness training sessions for different organizational audiences



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

IWSI America has included this important Glossary of Terms to expand on key terms and definitions commonly used in disability employment in the US.

A

Accessible Technology Technology that can be used by people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. It incorporates the principles of universal design, whereby each user is **able** to interact with the technology in ways that work best for him or her.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Signed into law on July 26, 1990, the ADA is a wide-ranging civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. It affords similar protections to Americans with disabilities as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made discrimination based on race, religion, sex, national origin, and other characteristics illegal.

Assistive Technology (AT) Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Examples include message boards, screen readers, refreshable Braille displays, keyboard and mouse modifications, and head pointers.

D

Disability According to the CDC, a disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions). There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's: vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, hearing, mental health and/or social relationships.¹⁶

Although “people with disabilities” sometimes refers to a single population, this is actually a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs. Two people with the same type of disability can be affected in very different ways. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.

E

Equal Opportunity An opportunity for people with disabilities to participate and benefit from programs and services that are equal to and as effective as the opportunity provided to others.

Employment Employment means full or part-time work, including self-employment.

Competitive Employment Individuals with disabilities are paid the same as people without disabilities for doing the same or similar work. The law specifies that competitive pay cannot be less than minimum wage.

Integrated Employment Individuals with disabilities have opportunities to interact with co-workers without disabilities in the workplace to the same extent as any other employee performing the same or similar work. The focus is on interacting with non-disabled co-workers, not with supervisors or disability support providers.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Federal agency primarily responsible for enforcement of Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which deals with employment discrimination.

I
Impairment A physical impairment is a physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the bodily systems. A mental impairment is any mental or psychological disorder.

Individual with a Disability A person with any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions). As the CDC suggests, “while ‘people with disabilities’ sometimes refers to a single population, this is actually a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs. Two people with the same type of disability can be affected in very different ways. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.”

O
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Under the US Department of Labor, this agency provides national leadership by developing and influencing disability-related employment policies as well as practices that affect the employment of people with disabilities.

R
Reasonable Accommodation A modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity. For example:

Modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires;

Modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or

Modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity’s employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by other similarly situated employees without disabilities.

Reasonable Modification A public entity must modify its policies, practice, or procedures to avoid discrimination unless the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of its service, program, or activity.

U
Universal Design (UD) Also known as "inclusive design" and "design for all," this is an approach to the design of products, places, policies and services that can meet the needs of as many people as possible throughout their lifetime, regardless of age, ability, or situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project benefited from extensive support, expertise and guidance from a number of employers, educators, industry experts and young people who gave generously of their time to share their experiences and insights with the research team, including:

- Simon Whatmore, Chief Strategy Officer
- Andrew Sezonov, Vice-President
- Nicholas Wyman, Co-Author
- Sara Hart-Weir, Co-Author
- Deborah Williamson, Vice President, Projects and Operations and Stephen F. Hamilton, Cornell University Professor Emeritus from our IWSI America team
- Dr. Beth Meyers, Syracuse University
- Carol Glazer, National Organization on Disability
- Neil Romano, Former Chairman of the National Council on Disability
- Ashley Helsing and Matteo Lieb, National Down Syndrome Society
- Emily M. Dickins, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)
- Jim Atwater and Scott Brouillette, InReturn Strategies;
- Todd Coffey, UPS
- and James Lawrence.

We are very grateful for their contributions to the project.

A special thank you to Tabaruba Design and WorldWide Writing for their contributions to this report.

Further, we truly appreciate the enthusiasm and interest of the IWSI Board of Directors in championing the disability workforce inclusion agenda.

FOOTNOTES

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