Inclusive Employment in Action

WorkAbility's Strategic Practices and Community Partnership with Diverse Ability Incorporated

Diverse Ability Incorporated

WORKABILITY

Welcome and Introductions!

Presenters:

Brande Kitzberger – Director of Transition Services, WorkAbility/ UCPSA

Jasmin Jimenez – Assistant Program Director, WorkAbility/ UCPSA

Susan Voirol – Executive Director, Diverse Ability Incorporated

Vanessa Zuber – Statewide Employment Services Director, WorkAbility/UCPSA

Learning Outcomes

1

Describe the core components of WorkAbility's provider transformation and how Employment First practices are being implemented to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities across multiple counties.

2

Explain how customized employment is integrated across WorkAbility's services and identify strategies that support individualized, meaningful employment outcomes.

3

Identify common systemic barriers to employment and apply advocacy and self-determination approaches that help address and reduce these barriers.

4

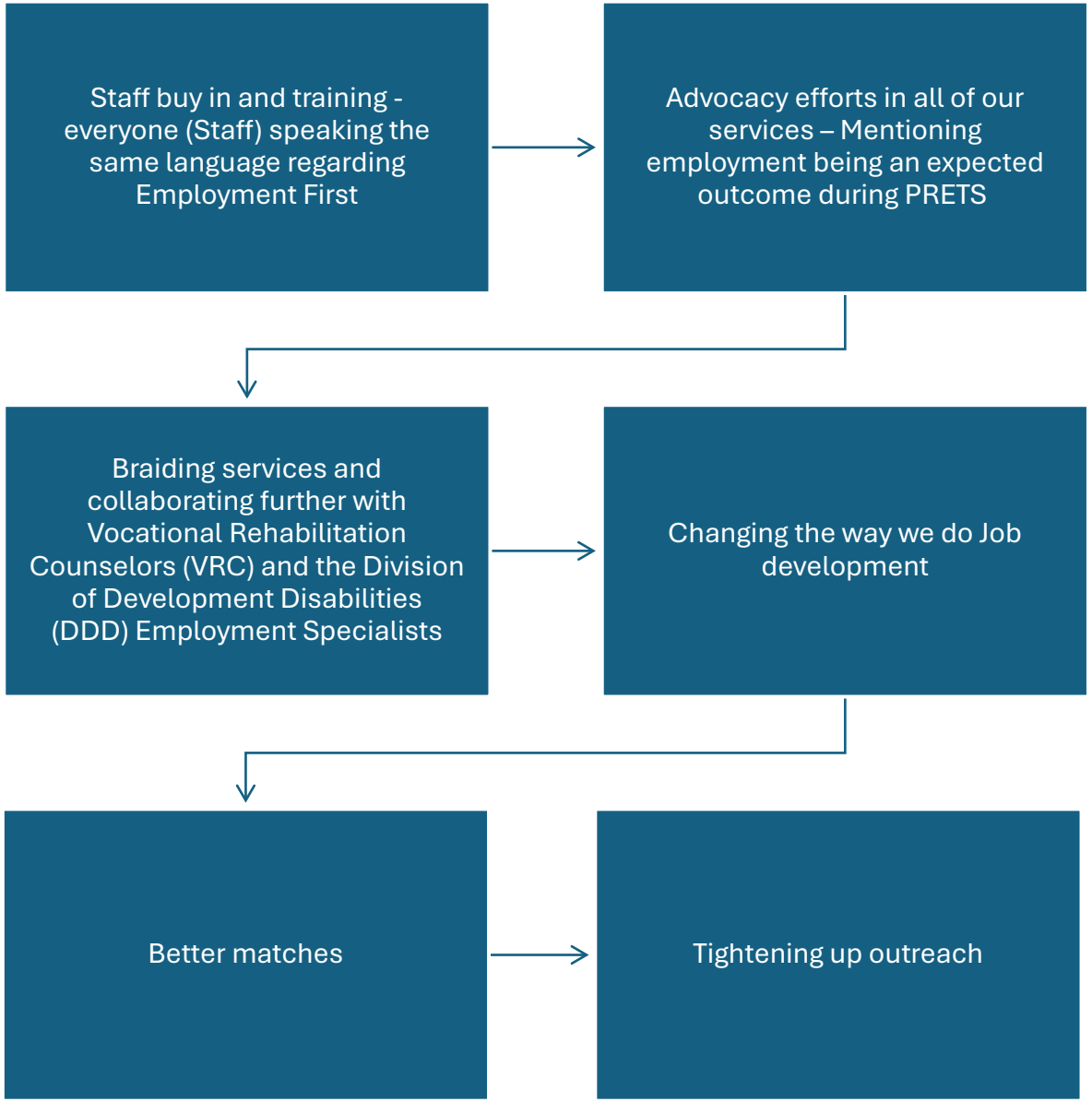
Analyze the role of community partnerships, including WorkAbility's collaborati on with Diverse Ability Incorporated, in strengthening transition and employment outcomes, and enhancing community advocacy efforts.

Employment First?

- Competitive, integrated employment is the top priority and preferred outcome for people with disabilities
- Presumption of Capability
- Equitable wages
- Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

Provider Transformation

Provider Transformation and Employment First



How is Customized Employment Integrated in Our Services

Barriers to Employment

Systemic Barriers

- Key employment supports (vocational rehabilitation, schools, developmental disability services, employers) often **operate separately**, leading to gaps.
- **Poor coordination during transition from school to work** leaves many young people without support entering the labor market
- People with disabilities in Arizona have **lower rates of college attainment**, which directly affects employment outcomes
- Employment rates rise significantly with education, but access to education is unequal

*https://mapazdashboard.arizona.edu/article/individuals-disabilities-tucson-education-employment-and-earnings-2022

*Disability Employment In Arizona & Strategies for Change by Jon Meyers Executive Director , ADDPC, 9-8-2025

Barriers: Families and Job seekers

- Lack of support
- Unaware of resources
- Bias/infantilism
- Fear of losing of benefits
- Late transition planning
- Lack of self-determination and advocacy skills training at home
- No expectations set for employment
- Internalized Ableism in job seekers

Barriers: Employers

1

Automated hiring tools screen out qualified applicants: Online applications may automatically reject candidates who cannot perform tasks like “standing for 4 hours,” even if they could do the job with accommodation.

2

Failure to provide reasonable accommodations (e.g., interpreters, assistive technology, flexible schedules) is a major barrier to both hiring and retention.

3

Workplace discrimination and bias still occur despite ADA protections, including refusal to hire or promote individuals with disabilities.

4

Employers may hesitate to hire due to **misconceptions about cost of accommodations, productivity, or legal risks.**

5

Many employers report being **unfamiliar with how to recruit, hire, or support workers with disabilities**.

6

Only about **34% of adults with disabilities in Arizona are employed vs. 72% without disabilities**.

Barriers: Limited Training and Provider Capacity

Arizona faces **limited provider capacity for employment supports** (job coaches, training programs).

→

There is **insufficient training for employers and support professionals** on inclusive hiring and retention.

Breaking Down Barriers

- Ongoing staff training provided
- Provide tech support and training to Employers
- Ensure Self-Determination & Employment First Practices and Principals are at the core of the work with individuals
- Be Creative | *Try a Different Way*
- Natural Resources
- Practice what we preach: hire people with disabilities
- Stay connected with national groups: APSE, NEON, WISE, NTACT
- Actively participate in local and statewide systems change and policy updates such as: Employment First Arizona, Community of Practices', APPDD Industries Committee

Breaking Down Barriers Cont.

- Self-Advocates: *Nothing About Us Without US*
  - Authentic youth engagement
  - Teach & Apply Self-Determination practices
  - Integrate the youth voice
- Show up, listen, and put into action
- Resource Sharing & Connecting
- Share success – through the voices of self-advocates
- Maintain meaningful relationships to engage in authentic....

COLLABORATIONS!

Foundational Tips: Successful & Sustainable Collaborations

- Persistence and Patience
- Win-Win: Open Communication, shared goals/leadership
- No competition | Support one another
- Build Capacity
- Build on each other's strengths, expertise, partnerships, and services
- Use existing and new Resources
- Be honest about what you can bring to the table/offer/fulfill

Collaborating with others: Questions to consider

- What do you need? Space, clients, support, staffing, etc.
- What could you provide to another organization?
- What does this look like?
- What are your values?
- Do your values match the other organization's values?
- How will this collaboration support the population we are mutually serving?

Getting Started!

WorkAbility & Diverse Ability Incorporated: Shared Goals/Leadership

- Focus on younger students
  - Same as students without disabilities
  - Language
  - Change the landscape
  - Increase outcomes earlier
  - End goal- work
- Pre-ets services
- Believe in people
- Employment First Principals and Practices

- Services are meaningful
- Building capacity in the family
- Values are the same
- Mentor staff
- High expectations for staff and students
  - Expertise across organization and topics

The Collaborative 'Dance': WorkAbility & Diverse Ability Incorporated

Charting My Course

Summer Lab

A 6-day experience for Arizona students ages 14–22 with disabilities.

Pre-ETS Workshops

Self-advocacy, job exploration, readiness, postsecondary options

Person-Centered Planning

Create a plan for your goals and future

Workplace Skills

Hands-on learning with Skills to Pay the Bills

Collaborative Village for Successful Outcomes

WorkAbility Collaborations

- Sonoran UCEDD CE Pilot
- Desert Survivors
- City of Tucson- Ward 2 Office
- High Schools
- CVS

Many more businesses and organizations in Tucson, Sahuarita and Santa Cruz and Yuma counties

Diverse Ability Incorporated Collaborative Initiatives for Youth/Families

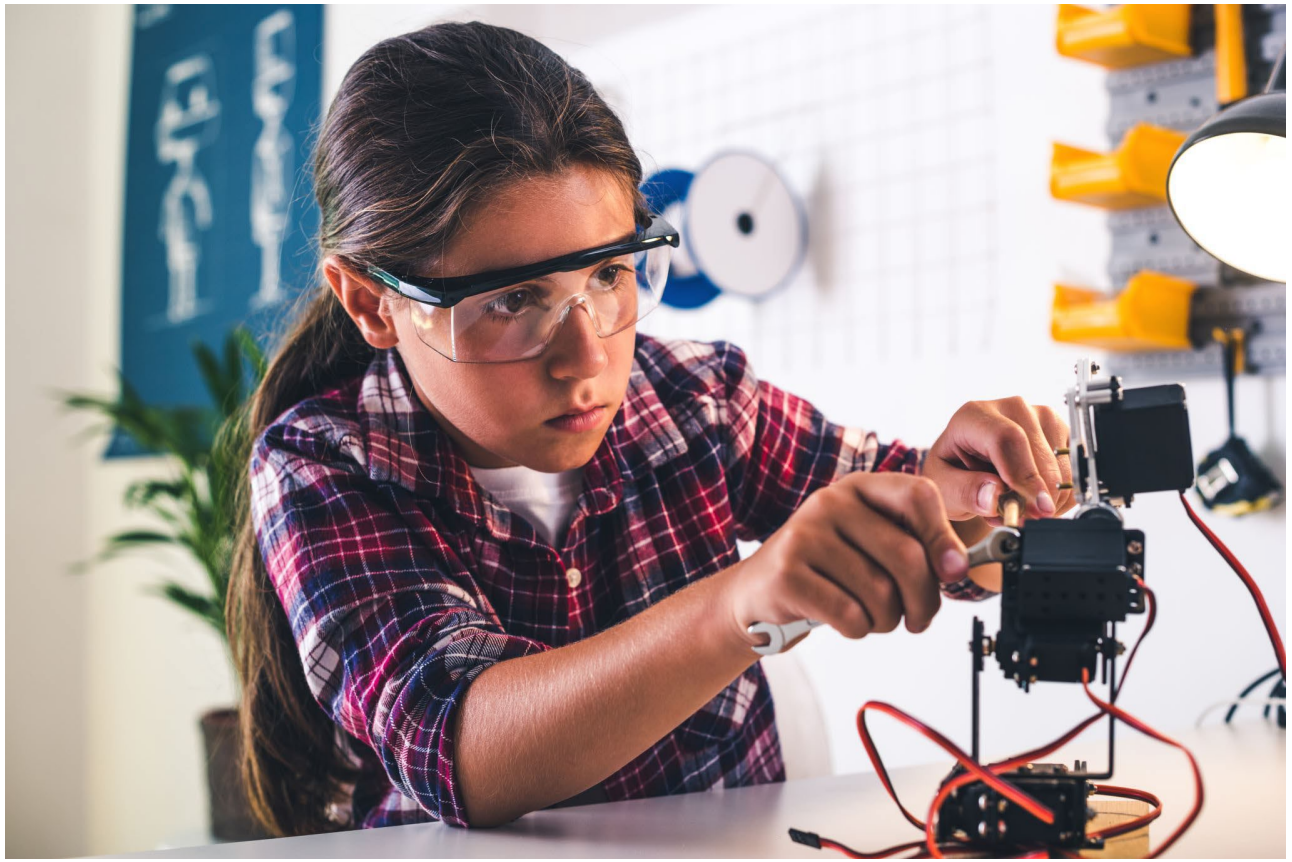
- Schools and VR pre-ETS (pre-employment transition services) Providers
- Family Transition Navigation Program
- Engaging Family and Young Adult Advisor Program
- Youth/Young Adult Training, Education & Engagement
- UA | Sonoran Center
- State and National Efforts

Success Stories

Katie

"At first finding a job was hard. For people like me who have a disability, it can be hard to find a job. Workability supported me in contacting businesses and following up in person to have a better opportunity in gaining employment."

DAI Success Stories



Questions?

Thank you

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