

“New Conversations” Webinars Shine a Fresh Light On Integrated Employment

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A project of



Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities can work and want to work--yet the majority don't have jobs.

State and national policies exist to increase employment, but systems have not aligned to make integrated employment a priority.

To address these challenges, our center integrates research, dissemination, and knowledge translation. We support activities in 4 areas:

- 1) Knowledge translation and support for individuals and families to promote engagement in employment planning
- 2) Increasing the effectiveness of supports and services provided by an employment consultant
- 3) Building capacity and supporting organizational transformation for community rehabilitation providers
- 4) Policies and practices of high-performing state employment systems

The RRTC is a project of ThinkWork at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. It is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research in the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Partners include the Arc of the US, Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota, National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, and the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).

The “44” Webinar Series

We knew that our work on the RRTC would include ongoing webinars. But we wanted our format to be unique, dynamic, and innovative, and to differ from conventional webinar content about disability and employment.

Our webinars encourage creative thinking and provoke reactions. In each session, we share a fresh perspective, and expose participants to new ideas and new ways of thinking about our field. We hope that viewers will reframe their thinking and get inspired.

The challenges we face today in our work are complex. We seek out intriguing topics, and reach out to leaders in the field and respondents, including self-advocates, to present their perspectives.

Polls, videos, and discussion pods provide many chances for audience interaction.

And we do all this in 44 minutes per event! Why? Because when we launched this webinar series, 44 states had some level of official Employment First activity. (Today it's almost 50!) We also wanted to keep each webinar concise and participatory.

Registration has maxed out at 499, and attendance hovers around 200 per session.

Starting this fall, we began rolling meaningful RRTC research findings into our conversations. We are excited to share what we have learned!

Meet Our Webinar Team:



Allison Hall



Cindy Thomas



Anya Weber



Melanie Jordan



John Butterworth

www.ThinkWork.org

Got **44** Minutes to Think About Employment?

Here are brief summaries of our first five webinars in this series. For more details, and links to the archives, see our flyer.

Employment Service Professionals: Leaders for Change (7/22/15)

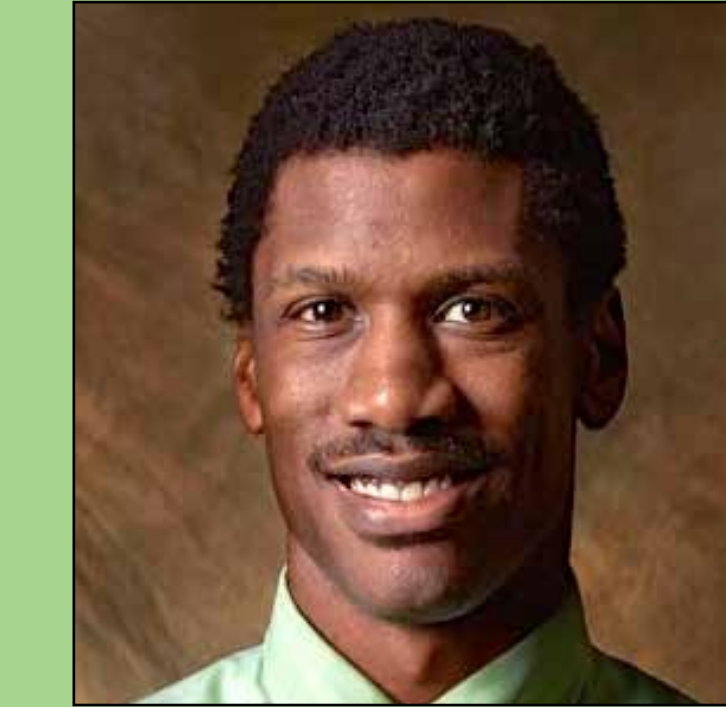
How do we validate front-line employment professionals who do important and hard work, often while being underpaid and feeling devalued? We talked about employment consultants as civil rights leaders and change agents.



Genni Sasnett, Human Services Consultant



Jill Eastman, Employment Specialist



Max Barrows, Self-advocate



Rosalie Edes, Parent and Agency Director

Does All Mean All? Culturally Diverse Families and Access to Services (12/9/15)

How do culturally diverse families access employment services for their family members with disabilities? We looked at the challenges facing Hispanic families in rural Kansas as they seek services for their children, and the solutions the family members and service providers have found.



Judith Gross, Researcher



Grace Francis, Researcher

Financial Well-Being: Reframing the Conversation (1/28/16)

Benefits can be a lifeline, but continuous reliance on them can limit people to exist in poverty. In this conversation, we talked about changing the theme from how to protect benefits to how to help people achieve their goals.



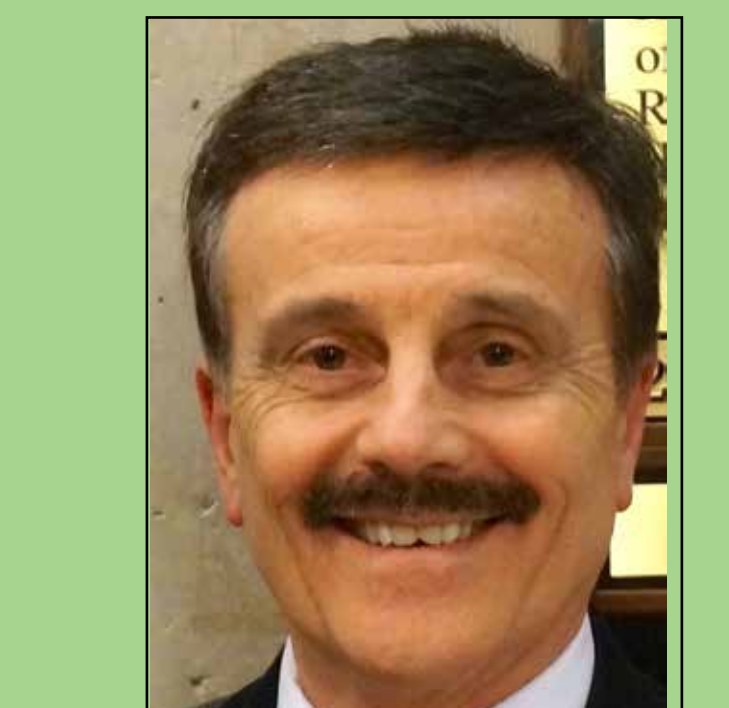
Debra Whitehead, Senior Trainer/Consultant



Margo Love, Employment Services Director

Informed Choice and Employment First: What Does It Really Mean? (3/15/16)

This webinar looked at the subject of informed choice. What considerations come into play when someone with intellectual and developmental disabilities “chooses work” in their community?



Don Lavin, Nonprofit Director



Nicole LeBlanc, Self-advocate

Organizational Transformation: From Workshops to Community Employment (10/20/16)

Provider agencies across the country are transitioning from segregated “sheltered” workshop options to supporting integrated community careers for people with disabilities. We shared findings from a panel of experts about characteristics considered essential for provider transformation.



Jaimie Timmons, Researcher



Dan Burke, Agency Director

What's on your mind about advancing integrated employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Jot your ideas on the index cards provided, and get a reward!

What did participants say?

“By talking about this, I will now encourage my staff as social change agents.”

“All does mean All with the right supports and services, natural and formal.”

“Need to spread the word about financial education.”

“Not to be afraid to say to our consumers to think vision instead of benefits first!”

“Presenting the issue as an incompatibility between life goals and reliance on disability was interesting.”

“To continue to push parents and teachers outside their comfort zone when putting competitive, integrated employment out there as an option for any student with disabilities.”

“To realize that I, as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, am the first person to connect with the individual and family, and the importance of assisting them in making informed choice and helping to empower them.”

“One step at a time creates a ripple.”

“...People (from whatever culture) can evolve and change in their thinking. Sometimes cultural competence discussion pigeonholes people upon whatever their culture is – forgetting that it is not all static.”

“I think we definitely should be always aware of the traditions and values of the families – their dreams, goals and visions for their loved ones.”

“Start with person-centered dreams, not the institutional model of SSA Disability Benefits.”

“The importance of raising expectations.”

“I loved hearing from Nicole [a self-advocate]. She really makes you remember to listen to what individuals want...and how to actually provide them with informed choice.”

“Remember that individuals need to see, hear, and feel what it is like to work!”

“We can't continue offering the same services and service delivery models and expecting better results.”

“Not working is not an option!”

“That we are all experiencing similar barriers all over the country.”