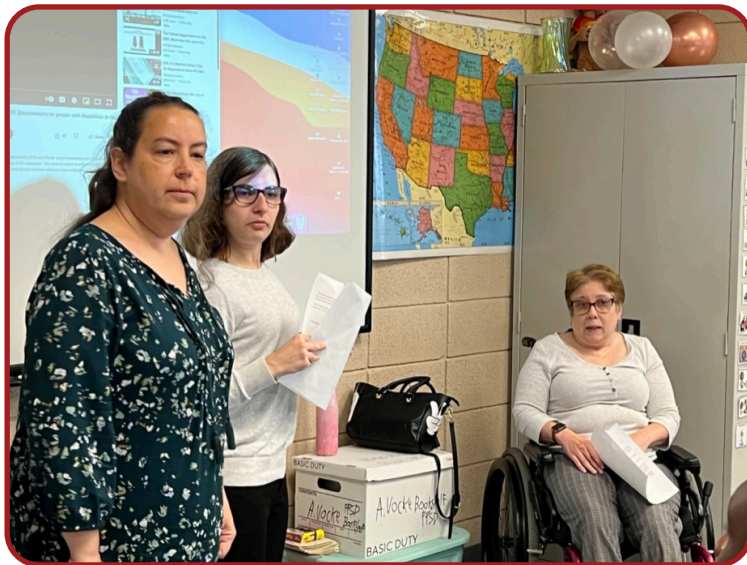


RI WINS (Workforce Investment & New Solutions) is the name utilized by the RI Cross Disability Coalition for our DD Transformation Grant in collaboration with the RI Developmental Disabilities Council (RIDDC) and Skills for RI's Future. This newsletter provides information on the status of implementation of the goal areas within the project and efforts to educate and provide support to people with disabilities, staff from community agencies, and RI employers on creating sustainable change for meaningful and inclusive lives for individuals with disabilities.

The four interconnected components of the transformation grant are: Peer and Family Empowerment Network, Workforce Development, Employer Engagement Roadmap, and Transformation Stakeholders' Learning Collaborative Initiative.



Tanja Blicher-Ucran, Deanne Gagne and Rachel Ferriera

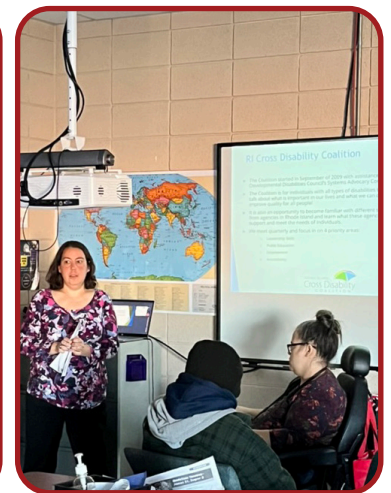
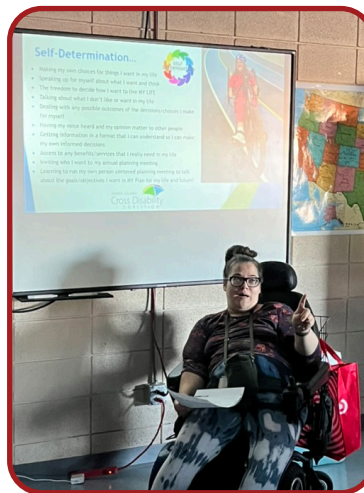
Peer and Family Empowerment

The team of Tanja Blicher-Ucran, Deanne Gagne and Rachel Ferriera executed an ambitious plan of peer education across the state, focusing on person centered planning with presentations as part of the Speakers Bureau.

Their topics ranged from "Employment Can Work For You" to "Owning Your Own Business," presentations on work and self employment. "Life Is Good" is focused on aspects

of life important to all people - independence, productivity, self-determination and integration/inclusion. Other topics were "Let's talk about money management" and "Healthy relationships," where they discussed developing good relationships.

Powerpoint presentations and discussions led by the team - together with guest speakers sharing their self-employment.



Workforce Development

At the same time, in highlighting goal 2, Workforce Development, Sue Babin mentioned that the grant requirements of conducting three, 3-day training sessions with Doug Crandell were already exceeded, and a fourth round of the training was held in October had twenty-five participants.

More than 85 staff members from agencies across the state have participated in this Employer Engagement training, including:

- **20 I/DD agencies** (West Bay, Avatar, Looking Upwards, Seven Hills, ABE, Whitmarsh, GTC, BVC, Fogarty, ReFocus, Opportunities Unlimited, Access Point, Perspectives, ProAbility, Project Friends, Trudeau, Lazo, RI Cross Disability Coalition, Spurwink, Goodwill),
- **3 State agencies** (The Department of Behavioral

Transformation Grant (cont.)

Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals (BHDDH), The Office of Rehabilitative Services (ORS), The Department of Labor and Training (DLT),

- **3 Educational agencies** (Narragansett Transition Academy, Pathways Teaching Center, West Bay Collaborative)
- **2 Behavioral Health agencies** (Care New England and Lifespan).

On behalf of Skills for RI's Future, Danna Spencer, Senior Manager of Supported Employment, addressed their workforce development activities as "mostly in direct hire and in creating and fostering relationships to help meet the needs of the businesses." Her agency's efforts were "in line with this transformative approach to employer engagement that Sue and her team were looking to promote across all the agencies with job developers, job coaches who are really out there doing this work to build relationships with employers to determine their workforce needs and on behalf of their candidates."

Employer Engagement Roadmap

Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) has become a popular phrase, and for the collaborating partners in this Transformation Grant, it is integral to its mission.

A 3-part series focused on "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility" for employers was developed in conjunction with the Secretary of State's office and a very diverse working committee including key staff from Providence Business News (PBN.)

In the PBN interview for the DEI Award, contributing writer Meredith Wilshire quoted Sue: "By fostering a culture of diversity to appreciate and value individual differences, employers benefit from varied perspectives on addressing workplace challenges and achieving greater success."

Fundamental questions to be answered in each part were:

1. What does Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the workforce mean?
2. What have the employers in RI who have tackled Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility done? What has worked, and what has not worked? What impact has Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility had on their workplace, culture, environment and even their bottom line?
3. What community resources are available for employers to access? What grants? Tax incentives? How do you

reach people? Consider community groups, not only traditional newspapers to reach the I/DD or diverse cultural communities.

Sue noted, "What's exciting is that this completed curriculum will be offered on a regular basis," which speaks to continuity.

As a result of the combined efforts of the RIDDC, RI Cross Disability Coalition, and Skills for RI'S Future, the sum total of its efforts - even in its infancy - has resulted in noteworthy recognition within the state.

Providence Business News awarded the RIDDC, in conjunction with its partners and this project, a 2023 Annual DEI Award for the social/non-profit organization category.



On hand to receive PBN's DEI Award were (L-R): Karen Gasperini, Brian LaFauci, Sue Babin, Tanja Blicher-Ucran, Mike Matracia, and Kevin Nerney

Transformation Stakeholders' Learning Collaborative

Four recurring themes that fall under the Transformation Stakeholder' Learning Collaborative Initiative have surfaced during quarterly zoom meetings among the grantees:

- **Supports** - those that are in place and what else is needed.
- **Shared Experiences** - to enhance any and every facet of the transformation process.
- **Workforce Shortages** - agencies are struggling to recruit qualified candidates for vacant positions that are integral to transformation and their daily operations.
- **Continuation Funding for Transformation Projects** -

Transformation Grant (cont.)

agencies are making progress with their initiatives and some need continuation funding to achieve greater success and additional positive outcomes for people with disabilities.

With early successes on many levels, so was the opportunity to establish “best practices,” which includes tackling the challenges.

A recap of the first such meeting included sharing information on the status of projects, a discussion of opportunities for collaboration, identifying implementation challenges, and brainstorming solutions. From staff workforce recruitment to unqualified interviewees to practical concerns and time constraints among the grantees to family concerns about the loss of SSI/SSDI benefits with employment.

Emphasized repeatedly is the importance of sharing experiences at every level. Employers, agencies, team members, etc. Foundation work is in place in terms of the process, and equally integral to the process is the building of trust among the participants.

The informal and ongoing meetings have helped to create a basis to maximize the potential for access as well as for sustainability.

Supports

Ongoing support for the various Transformation Grantees remains central to the program.

Acknowledging the importance of identifying the challenges and technical assistance needs of various Transformation Projects, Sue Babin, cited the importance of ongoing communications with various grantees in these Stakeholder meetings.

“Bringing together key agency representatives who received the DD Transformation Grants - whether it was phase one or phase two - is important to share information about the status of implementation on the various grants, and identify any issues, barriers, and challenges people are experiencing. Equally important, she noted, “we also have technical assistance and resources included in our grant to identify people locally and nationally with expertise to provide informational webinars and assistance in the key areas of challenges identified by Grantees.”

Shared Experiences

Jeannine Pavlak, CEO, New England Business Associates, and champion of technical assistance for those transforming their organization’s service delivery from facility-based to community-based is the facilitator of the Learning Collaborative and responsible for assisting in identifying potential resources for support for Stakeholders.

Participants have discussed key components within various transformation grants including community integration, staff recruitment, customized employment, family education, technology, employer connections, shared living, education for people with disabilities, employer education, and staff training.

For More Information on the Transformation Project and collaborative partners RI Cross Disability Coalition, RIDDC or Skills for RI’s Future contact:

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