



Lighting the Way: Helping Families See Possibilities in Competitive Employment

Presenters: add information such as presenter's names, location, date or event.

Today's Agenda

- Understanding the impact of disability on families
- Why families are apprehensive about competitive employment
- Strategies to work through that apprehension
- Tips for your agency to create a family-centered approach

Group Question

What has been your experience when discussing the prospect of paid, competitive employment with families of youth and individuals with disabilities?



Understanding the Impact of Disability on Families

Initial Emotions

- Denial
- Anger
- Guilt
- Fear/uncertainty
- Strength

Impact on Daily Life

- Marriage
- Employment
- Finding healthcare
- Finding Supports
- Social Relationships

Impact of Negative Messages

Families of youth and individuals with significant disabilities are often confronted with negative messages about what their son or daughter will achieve.

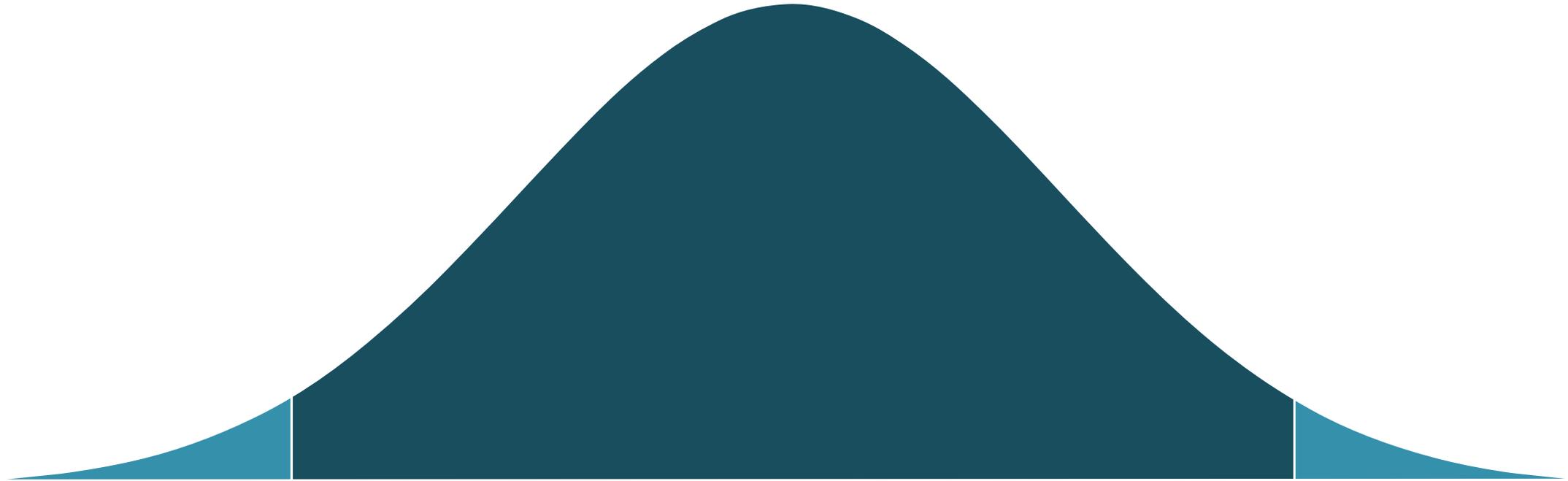
- Begins at birth
- Friends, family, society
- Early childhood
- School years
- Transitioning into adult life

Why Families are Apprehensive About Exploring Competitive Employment

Group Question 1

Why do you think families might be apprehensive to explore paid, competitive employment as an option for their son or daughter?

Source: Don Lavin, Strengths at Work



Are not ready yet.

Our goal is to be patient and get families to consider possibility

Tell me more.

Families want to know how this will impact things

Already sold.

Families might push you harder than you push them

Reasons for Apprehension

- Fear of disruption of routine and services
- Fears over vulnerability
- Questions about ability to work
- Fear of losing benefits

**DON'T JUDGE
MY CHOICES
WITHOUT
UNDERSTANDING
MY REASONS.**

Additional Reasons

- Poor communication – misunderstanding what work can look like
- Idea appears driven by professionals (what is this thing you are trying to get me to do?)
- Being told to “let go”
- Have not seen examples of how it can work



Strategies to Work Through Apprehension

Group Question 2

What are some ways that you have helped families work through apprehension so paid, competitive employment becomes an option?

Build Trusting Relationships

Families want to know that you understand their son or daughter and want what is the best for them.

- Pitfall: Not taking the time to get to know the family, their child, their hopes, and their concerns.
- Strategy: A solid person-center planning process will allow you to gather information and show families you understand the uniqueness of their son or daughter.

Focus on Communication

“If you have not gotten a response you have not communicated.”

Barb Ziemke, PACER Center

- Pitfall: Assuming families know what you are trying to accomplish and of the importance of competitive employment.
- Strategy: Figure out what method of communication works best for each family, give frequent updates and celebrate success.

Help Families See Youth in a New Way

Sometimes families just don't see how their son or daughter will be able to be employed in the community.

- Pitfall: Believing families “are the problem” for not seeing how their youth can be employed.
- Strategy: Use tools like the Positive Personal Profile to identify strengths and talents, and show families how those talents translate into an employment setting.

Let Youth be the Driver

Families might be more open to exploring jobs in the community if their sons or daughters are the ones asking for that opportunity.

- Pitfall: Ignoring the impact youth can have in convincing their families that their dreams for the future include a job in the community.
- Strategy: Use assistive technology and multimedia (slide show or collages) to give youth a voice. Help them express their vision to their families.

Negotiate the Risk

Families have valid concerns over vulnerability. This includes taking public transportation, working unsupervised, or fitting into the workplace.

- Pitfall: Blaming families for being too protective, or pushing for things that you know the family is not comfortable with.
- Strategy: Work closely with the family to negotiate the risk. For example, how can we break down taking the bus into small steps so families see progress rather than something scary?

Partner to Provide Parent Training

Parents need reliable information from reliable sources so they can make informed decisions and feel comfortable with employment.

- Pitfall: Parents who lack good information, resources, or connections to advocates and other families.
- Strategy: Build partnerships with local advocacy groups and conduct periodic training sessions for families. Providing information early can ease apprehension later.

Provide Benefits Counseling

Families work hard to get the youth onto Social Security benefits without understanding the long-term impacts.

- Pitfall: Families who refuse to entertain competitive employment for fear of losing benefits.
- Strategy: Partner with local Work Incentives Planning and Assistance projects to provide accurate information and benefits counseling to families.

Train Staff

Building working relationships with families is a job skill that does not always come naturally.

- Pitfall: Assuming that your staff know how to build relationships with families and caregivers, including those from diverse backgrounds.
- Strategy: Make family partnerships a stated priority and provide training to staff on how to do it effectively.

Be Patient

It may take some families longer to become comfortable with the idea of community-based jobs for their son or daughter.

- Pitfall: Giving up on working with families if they do not embrace employment within a certain time frame.
- Strategy: Continue to focus on relationship building and revisit the idea frequently. Find ways to show families skills are being acquired and supports are available.

Creating a Family Centered Approach

Benefits of Partnering with Families

- Families become public champions for your services
- They become your best sales people
- Staff may enjoy connections
- **OUTCOMES!!!!**



Family-Centered Agencies

- Have buy-in from staff and board
- Assign family liaison and outreach lead
- Budget time and resources for family outreach and staff training
- Create opportunities to listen (and use what they hear)

Group Question 3

Based on the information you heard today, what are 1 or 2 things you can do right away to improve partnerships with the families you work with?

Questions and Resources

MARO Webinar on Partnering with Families

<http://maro.org/employment-first/member-resources/>

Michigan WIPA Projects

<http://miwipa.org/>

TransCen, Inc.

<https://www.transcen.org/>

Charting the LifeCourse Tools

<https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

Contact Information

- Presenters, add your contact information here so attendees can reach you with any questions.