

START

"There is no power of change greater than a community discovering what it cares about" - M. Wheatly

community CONVERSATIONS

what is a community conversation?

Community Conversations are one strategy that has been used to discover, support, and disseminate creative and promising approaches for supporting students with disabilities to participate more fully and naturally in school, work, and community activities, including the same relationships, work and community experiences as their peers.

The process is a creative, productive, and powerful way of identifying how diverse members of a community might work together in compelling ways to solve an important challenge.

The focus of our work with START/BYF has been on opening doors and engaging within our communities across the state using more business networking.



When families, schools and communities at large ask the question "how can we work together to support meaningful employment and community engagement for people with ASD living within our communities?" Solutions emerge!

Community Conversations is a organizational tool that promotes a stage for dialogue. By drawing out the best ideas of parents, educators, service providers, community leaders, employers, and ordinary citizens, communities can discover they already have the capacity to open doors for real change in this area.

why host a community conversation?

No one knows the strengths and possibilities of a community better than those who live within it.

Empowering individuals and communities to discover and draw upon their own assets is the most promising pathway for improving inclusive social/recreational and employment outcomes of community members with ASD.



sample timeline for a community conversation:

3-4 months before:

Organize your planning team

2 months:

Find your venue, choose date and time of event. Decide on food, decorating, choose questions

6 weeks:

Invite participants – personal invitations, e-invites, flyers, news release, phone contacts, social media announcements

2-4 weeks:

Gather all needed materials, decorations, place mats, markers, pens, name tags, etc.

1 week:

Visit the venue for final check. Make sure any technology you plan to use functions and the planned layout will work in the space

The day of:

Allow plenty of time to arrive, set up, and problem solve any glitches that may occur

1- 7 days after:

Follow up with participants through e-mail, thanking them for attending, and sharing information gathered during the harvest and from table host notes

2 weeks after:

Follow up with any participant who offered to assist with specific ideas of initiative

how does it work?

During a community conversation, between 10-60 members of a community gather together to reflect on the resources, supports, relationships, and other assets in their community that could be drawn upon to expand social and recreational, employment opportunities.

Through a series of 'coffeehouse' conversations, first at small tables and then as a whole group – the group identifies the very best ideas that will truly work in that community. A facilitator(s) guide the process.



who attends a community conversation?

Anyone can come. The goal is to gather a diverse group of people who care about making their community more supportive of people with disabilities.

In addition to people with disabilities and their families, educators, service providers and disability organizations. It is especially helpful to invite new voices like employers, civic leaders, members of the community associations, faith community members, and others.

Drawing in people who are not normally part of conversations related to disability can bring new perspectives and solutions to this issue.



sample questions:

- How can we as a community expand social, recreational, and employment opportunities for individuals with ASD?
- What can schools and families do to better prepare young adults for the workforce?
- What can I do in the next 3 months to improve collaboration between my community, schools, and families?

resources:

- Launching Inclusive Efforts Through Community Conversation: <https://goo.gl/qRVF41>
- What Matters Most: Research on Elevating Parent Expectations: <https://goo.gl/o8M1iq>
- START Community Conversations Help Students Gain Valuable Opportunities: <https://goo.gl/NpTxiD>
- Technical Assistance Request for Community Conversations: <https://goo.gl/iBAKhT>
- Knoxville Community Conversation: <https://goo.gl/WHRdCy>

"Instead of pouring knowledge into people's heads, we need to help them grind a new set of glasses, so they can see the world in a new way. That involves challenging the implicit assumptions that have shaped the way people have historically looked at things..."

John Seely Brown