

**ATLANTIC CAPE MAY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD  
STRATEGIC PLAN TO SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES**

January 1, 2012 – June 30, 2015

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

### A. Executive Summary

The Atlantic Cape May Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and its Disabilities Workforce Committee have developed a plan that is compatible with the WIB's Strategic Plan. This plan will provide recommendations to integrate the delivery of services and coordination of partners within the Atlantic and Cape May One Stop System (OSCC) to increase the employment and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This shall be accomplished in conjunction with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) and the Title I and II Literacy programs, while fostering an environment for provider collaboration and partnerships.

The WIB Board has established partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, educational institutions and government agencies to provide a seamless system of employment, training and social services to residents and employers in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. The Board's mission is to ensure the coordinated and efficient delivery of the region's workforce readiness resources through membership which provides leadership, direction, and accountability for the service area.

The WIB is comprised of 45 representatives shared between Atlantic and Cape May Counties with more than half its membership representing the private sector. The WIB has six (6) working committees, one of which is the Disabilities Workforce Committee and three (3) industry specific sub-committees. The current WIB Strategic Plan states that the vision of the Disabilities Workforce Committee is:

1. To develop and implement a strategic plan to address issues related to the employment and job training of individuals with disabilities;
2. Enable individuals with disabilities to have universal access and integrated services within the OSCC;
3. Increase the number of individuals with disabilities securing and sustaining unsubsidized employment in the workforce;
4. Upgrade the skills of incumbent workers with disabilities to promote career advancement; and
5. Ensure that the WIB Board policies and program strategies provide employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The Disabilities Workforce Committee endorses a systematic approach to the delivery of services to the customer. It supports implementing service strategies to:

1. Ensure that the services for individuals with disabilities are integrated into the One-Stop system;
2. Improve accessibility to OSCC services and programs for individuals with disabilities;
3. Identify the employment related needs and resources for individuals with disabilities and employers;
4. Increase OSCC personnel knowledge and practices.
5. Expand specific services, such as job training, on-the-job training, literacy, social service, where appropriate and eligible; and technology training for individuals with disabilities;
6. Develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) with community and faith based organizations to augment the OSCC service strategy;
7. Leverage private sector WIB Board members to identify employment barriers and labor needs to increase the employment opportunities for this population;

The Committee also supports obtaining resources to:

1. Continue funding and expand the role of the Disabilities Program Navigator (DPN) Program.
2. Research and recommend online learning professional development programs for OSCC personnel and service providers related to serving individuals with disabilities.
3. Develop a web-based clearinghouse of online tools and libraries as a resource for OSCC personnel and service providers.
4. Modify literacy services to address learning styles, abilities and aptitudes of individuals with disabilities.

5. Expand OSCC services to rural areas of Atlantic and Cape May counties to increase participation among this population through the utilization of the OSCC Job Development Van.
6. Provide resources to develop an annual Employment Disabilities Awareness event, open to the public that assists this population in obtaining employment.
7. Secure funding to operate a technology geared entrepreneurship program to assist homebound individuals with disabilities with start up businesses.

The Committee accepts state-backed standards, assessment tools, and measures of outcomes related to the WIA, WFNJ or literacy programs as defined by the New Jersey State Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJLWD). The Committee also incorporates the WIB's goals in this plan. It's also important to note that workforce development issues of employers in local industries are understood and acknowledged in this plan.

This plan has specific goals to be accomplished during a detailed timeline and provides a proposed itemized budget for consideration in future grant applications and resource allocations. This plan has the support of the Disabilities Workforce Committee, the WIB Board, the Executive Director of the WIB and the One Stop Operator (OSO).

### **B. Plan Development**

The Disabilities Workforce Committee lent support to the development of this plan. The Committee consists of representatives from private business, community, faith based and government agencies and post secondary education institutions. The Committee met bi-monthly to review and discuss survey findings, provide direction and approve preliminary plans. The WIB Executive Committee has also been frequently updated by the Chair of the Committee and WIB staff to ensure a smooth transition to the One Stop Operator for implementation of plan goals.

The Committee surveyed OSCC personnel and service providers to garner their input in the development of this plan (see survey results in Attachment A). The Committee accepted anecdotal input from professionals working with individuals with disabilities to record customer and business community perspectives. In addition, formal facility assessments were conducted at the NJLWD endorsed comprehensive OSCC offices in Hammonton, Pleasantville and Wildwood. An informal assessment was conducted in the Atlantic City office. From survey results, the Committee identified service gaps, training deficiencies and accessibility/equipment operation issues, which lead to a decreased participation in One Stop services and its impact on one's ability to secure unsubsidized employment.

It is the Committee's goal that this plan clearly demonstrates how the OSCC serves individuals with disabilities through workforce development programs and services. The question most frequently asked throughout the development of this plan was "what are the systems capacities and what resources are available in the community to supplement the One Stops?"

### **C. Target Population(s)**

The Committee identified the populations served through implementation of this plan as follows:

- Existing or potential OSCC customers with disabilities able to integrate into the workplace, including the youth population;
- OSCC personnel, including co-located partners and One Stop partners;
- Contracted vendors and area service providers; and
- Business community

OSCC personnel, service providers, contracted vendors and employers have distinct missions and goals, but collectively aspire to assist this population in achieving self sufficiency through meaningful and sustainable employment. Through awareness of the myriad of One Stop services, employer financial incentive programs and professional development seminars, the Committee is confident the goals listed in this plan are achievable.

## SECTION 2: LABOR MARKET TRENDS

The makeup of the southern region of New Jersey is very similar in its unemployment trends and poverty levels. For this reason, the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) began hosting statewide meetings that included WIB Disabilities Chairs from each county. The purpose of these meetings were to share labor market information and best practices and discuss planning goals for the workforce development system as it relates to the disabled population. To expand their knowledge base, the group also began meeting with their respective OSCC to address the workforce needs of individuals with disabilities and that of the employer community.

The economic downturn of the past three (3) years has had significant impact on the Southern New Jersey region. This impact has been felt worldwide, but has been more noticeable in the Atlantic Cape May region as evidenced by near doubling of the unemployment rate over a one year period. According to the NJLWD, the Atlantic County unemployment rate in September 2011 was 11.8%, not seasonally adjusted and 9.0% in Cape May County for that same time period. At the conclusion of 2010, Atlantic County held at 12.4% unemployment rate while Cape May County was at 11.9 percent. The Committee deduced that Atlantic County has a slightly lower current unemployment rate as compared to the same time period in 2010, while Cape May County has substantially reduced the unemployment gap. When reviewing Labor Force Estimates by municipalities with a population greater than 25,000, Atlantic City (17.2%), Galloway Township (12.0%), and Egg Harbor Township (11.8%) ranked highest. There were no Cape May County statistics available as there were no municipalities that met the population requirements for the survey.

According to a NJLWD representative, "What began with tightening of credit markets precipitated by losses associated with subprime mortgages has morphed into a full-blown global economic crisis. What many saw as a temporary disruption that made raising money difficult for highly leveraged projects such as new hotel casinos, intensified and spread throughout the broader economy as the year 2008 drew to a close. Needless to say, consumers have cut back sharply on discretionary spending in the face of falling home and stock market values, and growing employment insecurities. Now officially in recession since December 2007, the severity of the national economic downturn will depend to a great extent on how consumers react to the uncertainties that currently surround their own employment and financial circumstances. At a different point in time, the efforts of households to reduce debt, increase savings and otherwise live within their means might be welcomed -- at this moment, not so much. Like so many other parts of the country, projects flowing through Atlantic and Cape May counties' economic development pipelines slowed dramatically or stopped entirely during 2008 -- and some may never see the light of day."

The majority of recent job losses have been felt in the leading occupation for the southern region – that of Hospitality and Tourism. The job losses in this industry reflect the region's true economic picture. According to a Press of Atlantic City article published in 2011 entitled: *South Jersey Poverty, Unemployment up Sharply as Effects of Recession Linger*, "the casino and tourism industry is built of people spending discretionary money, but when they lose confidence in the economy they hold onto their money." These losses are a testament of the severity of the crisis and will require the most effort and funding to retrain its workforce for new careers or to advance in existing careers in the industry. However, one would be remiss if not to make mention of the sizeable downturn in the Retail and Construction (Natural Resources Mining and Construction) industries, which have seen losses for several years leading up to this crisis.

In more recent months, the local area has seen an increase in Construction Trades employment as Atlantic City breaks ground on the Hard Rock Café Casino and the continuance of projects at The Revel and recently of Trump Marina, now known as the Golden Nugget. These projects are scheduled to open and expand in 2012 and should bring thousands of jobs, but could be short lived due to competition within the industry. It was also noted in the Press of Atlantic City article that "employment is dependent on the future of an industry's performance. The principal economic locomotive is slowing down and a turnaround really isn't imminent."

A bright spot for the Atlantic Cape May area has been the expansion of the Healthcare Industry. Although not growing at the anticipated rate, this industry has continued to build infrastructure and employ qualified and trained healthcare workers to meet the demands of the local region's residents. Unfortunately, the upswing in this industry has done little to offset the substantial job losses in what were previously considered demand occupations.

Similarly, and aligned with the United States of America President's goals to increase awareness and train individuals for employment in the "green jobs" sector, this WIB has continued to research entry level and advanced training in this occupational cluster. With the development surrounding the new Aviation and Research Park being built at the Federal Aviation Administration in Egg Harbor Township, there should be substantial opportunities for both entry level and management positions in this sector. However, one must note that this may require additional job training, funding and time to mature into a new economic engine in this region. As supported by the NJLWD, there has been a significant upswing in new business development as the unemployed engage in entrepreneurship endeavors.

It would appear that the local economy has been unable to maintain employment levels for individuals without disabilities, so one could deduce that there is little opportunity for individuals with varying disabilities to secure meaningful and sustainable employment. New data available from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and published in the October 2010 Labor Review issued by the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Institute for Health and Aging at the University of California, indicates that between October 2008 and June 2010, job losses among workers with disabilities far exceeded those of workers without disabilities. A decade ago, individuals with disabilities naturally secured employment in entry to mid level jobs in hospitality, tourism and retail career clusters. However, as the recession took the local economy hostage, competition for traditional employment opportunities in those job sectors rose for individuals without disabilities. What was learned - Individuals with disabilities need a competitive edge.

### **SECTION 3: NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

The United States Census Bureau defines a documented disability as an individual with a sensory, physical, or mental or employment disability. A recent demographic analysis conducted by Cornell University as listed in the 2008 Disability Status Report in 2008 estimated that approximately 9.8% of New Jersey's population (prevalence rate and in all age categories) possessed a documented disability (non-institutionalized). In other words, in 2008, 841,500 of the 8,571,600 individuals in all age categories reported one (1) or more disabilities. While among the six (6) types of disabilities in the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), the highest prevalence rate was for "ambulatory disability" at 5.7 percent. The lowest prevalence rate was for "visual disability" at 1.9 percent. According to that same survey, in 2008 the overall percentage of people with a disability in New Jersey ages 16 to 20 was 4.1 percent, while the age group of 21 to 64 age totaled 7.7 percent. Of those individuals age 65 to 74 years of age, 21.6 % were reported as having a disability.

The Cornell University report continued by exploring statistics regarding those individuals not working, but actively seeking employment. In New Jersey, 8.2% of the working age, individuals with disabilities were actively looking for work. As compared to the working age of individuals without a disability not working, but seeking a job at 23.1 percent. The difference between the two (2) statistics is approximately 15 percentage points. According to the report, the employment rate of working-age people (ages 21 to 64) with disabilities in New Jersey was 41.7 percent. These estimates are consistent with our own findings that highlight the need for job skills training, literacy and employment services for this population.

#### **A. Customers**

The Committee understands that we live in a society that values reading and writing skills and we have an educational system that favors those who do well with these skills. Unfortunately, there are also a lot of individuals who have learning disabilities or learning styles that do not help them in a traditional classroom. Those that are not strong in these academic modes generally experience less success. Those that subsequently are not successful in traditional learning systems receive less formal education, are challenged in developing a strong sense of worth and ultimately are at a distinct disadvantage competing in the modern labor market. Education is clearly associated with employment opportunities and financial success. Yet many of those adults at the bottom of the education ladder struggle to achieve the same level of success as their counterparts.

According to the Cornell University report in 2008 noted above, the percentage of working-age people (21-64) with disabilities with only a high school diploma was 36.0%, with only some college or an associate degree was 26.1% and with a bachelor's degree or more 17.6 percent. These are sobering statistics that further demonstrate the educational deficiencies among this population.

Workforce professionals believe that workplace literacy and soft skills are essential in today's global economy. For individuals with healthcare related barriers these two (2) skill sets can be difficult to master. In many instances, traditional academic and social assessments are not appropriate to determine an individual's readiness to move forward with their education and employment goals. As a result many OSCC customers with disabilities do not perform well in these environments, score poorly on assessments and require intensive remediation.

The Committee informally interviewed OSCC literacy instructors and concluded that modified curriculum and assessments are necessary to advance ones' educational functioning level. The barriers of course are limited resources to perform such tasks. In addition, OSCC Employment Counselor's have cited a participant's level of acceptance of their disability as an obstacle and interferes with referrals to appropriate services and programs. This too, has become a barrier. To meet this need, instructors and counselors alike have sought materials from varying sources and used different curriculums. It became apparent in this process that the OSCC Workforce Learning Links and learning labs do not have the resources available to provide quality and adequate instruction for individuals with learning disabilities. The Committee recommends that a universal curriculum be developed or purchased that includes both a scope and sequence with materials and resources to support small class or one on one learning. If that endeavor is too costly, the Committee recommends that the OSCC invest in professional development workshops presented by Developmental Instructors or persons with a background in adult literacy. Currently, the OSCC utilize the Tabulation of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine an individual's academic level. Committee members felt there are other options available such as Best Plus, CASAS, ABLE and Work Keys. It has been suggested that an alternative assessment tool be made available if a learning disability is suspected (based on a TABE score) or one is acknowledged in advance of formal assessments.

Through anecdotal testimonials, the Committee concluded employment continues to be the greatest disadvantage compared to the general population. Employment continues to elude people with disabilities despite passing of federal legislation and the influx of employment placement, government and non-profits agencies developed to assist these individuals in preparing for and securing employment. The absence of job openings is only one half of the equation. As per the National Organization on Disability survey released October 5, 2010, the biggest barrier to hiring people with disabilities is not being able to find qualified candidates. Through acquisition of testimonials there appeared to be a common thread – people with disabilities are under-represented in OSCC programs and do not take advantage of the myriad of services available. It was unclear as to the exact cause, but it was suggested that many individuals do not "acknowledge their disability, are not aware of the services, are unable to navigate the OSCC system or do not wish to utilize the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRS).

It is well known that workers with disabilities are more likely to have short-term, part-time or contractual jobs leaving them vulnerable to the pendulant swing of the local economy. Moreover, these same individuals are typically employed in occupations with lower status and less stability. As a result there is a much greater presence of workers in low skilled jobs then in medium or high skilled occupations. The opportunity for workers with disabilities depends not only on the type of employment sought, but also the kind of work that is available and in-demand. Furthermore, many people with disabilities possess poor work ethic, which has been passed on from generation to generation, lack family supports, have limited guidance and direction and are fearful that employment will lead to a reduction or complete loss of financial and benefit supports. There are three (3) issues that clearly impact employment status – skill-sets of workers with disabilities, their desire to work and employer perception.

## **B. OSCC Personnel and Facilities**

Professional development of the OSCC staff is critical to continued success and full integration of services for individuals with disabilities. Performance standards set forth by the NJLWD clearly impart the importance of providing excellent customer service, effective communication and understanding job functions and One Stop partners as essential components for staff that administer direct services to the public.

A University of Kansas study published in the March 2010 edition of *The Career Development Quarterly* found that the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), which set up one-stop centers to cluster services for the unemployed – "has done an inadequate job aiding people with disabilities to find employment." The article suggested that consumers that utilize services within an OSCC experience "low self esteem," "feelings of disempowerment" and engage with staff that is "not qualified to assist with their particular

needs.” It was concluded that training needs to be offered on a continuing basis to OSCC staff, because of the “fairly high turnover rate of job counselors,” to appropriately serve this population. It was further suggested that the increase in population size of workers with disabilities, the changing economy and lack of good paying jobs creates an uncertain atmosphere, which further deteriorates ones’ self worth.

The One Stop System in Atlantic and Cape May counties have not been immune to the findings listed in the cited survey. As a result, in late 2010 the Atlantic Cape May Workforce Investment Board (WIB) embarked on a journey to ensure that all OSCC customers received a full array of services in an appropriate and timely manner. This prompted the Disabilities Workforce Committee to issue a comprehensive online survey to assess the local area’s compliance with legal requirements for structures and devices as well as service accessibility and staff knowledge. Survey questions were complimentary to those endorsed by the United States Department of Labor’s (USDOL) “One Stop Disability Resource Manual” issued by the Institute for Community Inclusion.

One hundred and fifty (150) surveys were issued via Survey Monkey with 81 (54%) responses of which 49 or 33% were partially completed. In general, survey results indicated that One Stop personnel were knowledgeable about how to identify individuals with disabilities and refer customers to appropriate services. There seemed to be more understanding among instructors and counselors on how to provide services to individuals with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, but very little for the many other learning disabilities. Likewise, survey results indicated that when a OSCC staff identified a customer as having a disability, they referred the individuals to the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJ DVRS) regardless of the appropriateness of the referral. Personnel were less experienced in identifying and managing mental illnesses such as post traumatic stress disorder, visual and hearing impairments and learning disabilities as they relate to career counseling and job placement. Survey results revealed specific topics for training needed to improve service quality and efficiency. They may include, but are not limited to:

1. Training in emergency evacuation procedures for customers with disabilities;
2. Updates on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including rights to privacy;
3. Strategies to communicate effectively with individuals with specific disabilities;
4. Uniformed referral process to partner agencies;
5. Academic, social and workplace readiness assessment tools available;
6. Verbal, informal assessments to conduct when a disability is suspected; and
7. Demonstrations on Equipment and Software

The Committee recommends that ongoing professional development benefits not only the personnel, but the customers as well. To this end, the Committee identified agencies that may develop and provide professional development seminars at minimal costs. They may include, but are not limited to:

1. Commission on the Blind
2. John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
3. University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ)
4. New Jersey State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJ DVRS)
5. AtlantiCare Behavioral Health
6. Tony Canale Training Center
7. Community Quest
8. City of Pleasantville, Emergency Management
9. Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing
10. Community Health Law Project

For this population, career counseling is essential to increase employment and career advancement opportunities. It’s not just about getting the job, but more about employment retention and continued education that lead to promotions and higher paying wages. Individuals with disabilities need to visualize the ladder to success. They need to have positive experiences within the OSCC. To this end, staff must become experts in assessment, referral processes, and job or training placement. Furthermore, they need to clearly impart the message that work can be a positive experience and communicate the benefits of employment.

The Committee utilized a checklist developed by the United States Department of Labor's (USDOL) One-Stop Disabilities Initiative to ensure that the facilities of the OSCC were physically accessible for individuals with disabilities and met all ADA requirements. Facility assessments were conducted of the NJLWD endorsed comprehensive OSCC offices in Hammonton, Pleasantville and Wildwood. The only standing issue with the Hammonton and Pleasantville sites was inoperable Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TTY). Both locations' equipment was not working and is now considered outdated by professionals working in the field. It is understood that this technology has been replaced with a Telecommunications Relay Service. This service also known as TRS, Relay Service, or IP-Relay, or Web-based relay services, is an operator service that allows people who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Speech-Disabled, or Deaf/Blind to place calls to standard telephone users via a keyboard or assistive device. Originally, relay services were designed to be connected through a TDD (TTY) or other assistive telephone device. Services have gradually expanded to include almost any generic connected device such as a personal computer, laptop, mobile phone, PDA, and many other devices. The Committee recommends that this service be made available and strategically placed throughout the OSCC for accessibility, while maintaining at least one (1) TTY device at each location.

It's important to note that One Stop partners will be notified of the training opportunities and may send representatives to attend for minimal to no cost.

### **C. Providers**

Although this plan does not quantify the demand for services from people with disabilities, our interviews with providers in both counties indicate a need and anecdotal evidence suggests a lack of accessible and evaluation of the most appropriate services. Although providers were not surveyed on specifics regarding how many or how well the OSCC or their respective agencies serve people with special needs, the interview process suggested that providers are sensitive to such needs and with limited funding are trying to make appropriate accommodations. Therefore, the Committee deduces that ongoing professional development at minimal to no cost would be of great benefit to area service providers whether co-located within an OSCC or operating at a separate location.

It's important to note that the local area community based providers of services for individuals with disabilities have been providing supported employment programs that have made significant contribution to the Atlantic and Cape May business communities. Furthermore, these opportunities positively impacted the population in successfully integrating into gainful employment. Although, these agencies experience some success, barriers still exist that are prohibitive to attaining goals.

Based on interviews with a variety of community based agencies, the economy was identified as the primary barrier of employment for people with disabilities. For more than a decade, these agencies have relied on self-operated "sheltered workshops" wherein individuals garner job preparation skills through work experience paid at a minimum rate. This strategy has proven positive in helping people learn job related skills, but has done little to promote self sufficiency. According to the Kessler Foundation in a report released in May 2011 entitled *Social Enterprise Businesses: A Strategy for Creating Good Jobs for People with Disabilities*, many community based service providers operate supported employment activities for individuals with disabilities in settings in which they do not work alongside people without disabilities. It was suggested that many "advocates" for people with disabilities do not support this type of employment, because it reinforces the stigma that people with disabilities cannot perform the same tasks in the same workplace as their counterparts. It is the opinion of this Committee that individuals with disabilities that are able to integrate into the traditional workplace should do so, as "earned income" through a work experiences is not considered traditional "employment." Based on the severity of the disability sheltered workshops may be an appropriate service, as work is always the preference.

Providers struggle to maintain adequate staff, resources and space to provide these much needed services. Many have been successful in obtaining resources from partner agencies, but many have been unable to expand services due to these barriers. It was noted that funding restrictions and reductions are the primary barriers to community based agencies serving this population. According to the Cornell University report released in 2008, the poverty level of working age people with disabilities (ages 21-54) was 18.8 percent in New Jersey. Even more staggering is that only 27.0% of the population reported full time/full year employment. Research shows and service providers attest that there is a substantial increase in need for social services and employment programs for this population. The primary reasons – the increasing number of veterans, a universal recognition of mental illness as a disability, the lack of

resources available and the deinstitutionalizing of individuals in mental health institutions. In the NJDVRS Annual Report released in 2009, it was reported that the most prevalent disability for customers served in Fiscal Year 2009 was mental illness and/or substance abuse.

#### **D. Employers**

The labor exchange, which is the overall goal, occurs when the services providers and/or the OSCC are successful in preparing individuals with disabilities for employment. According to the Kessler Foundation and the National Organization on Disability (NOD), a survey released October 5, 2010 stated that “although companies say they are open to employing people with disabilities, only half actually hire applicants with disabilities and even fewer seek them out. It appears that companies have scaled back their disability hiring initiatives over the past 15 years.”

The recent recession and subsequent reduction in staffing hit local employers hard. In this rebuilding stage, fear of a reemerging recession, mandatory cross training and a technology driven economy have drastically altered the evolution of the workplace. This leads to little time for transition, job coaching, and workplace modifications that enhance workers with disabilities job performance.

Employer perception is a vital component to full integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce. Several employer misconceptions have been cited by the NOD. They included:

1. Frequent absences related to the disability
2. Less productivity
3. Increase in healthcare related costs
4. Costs associated with workplace accommodations

The Committee does not suggest that this is a frequent practice or opinion of employers in Atlantic and Cape May counties, but none the less share national statistics to prompt continued diligence in connecting the OSCC with the business community. With that said, the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) in an article entitled: *Companies Have Scaled Back Disability Hiring Program*, reported that individuals with disabilities have a “lower rate of absenteeism and turnover with higher rates of loyalty. And, the costs of hiring and retaining a person would be the same as hiring a person without a disability.” The Committee found that in many instances, modest adjustments in workplace technology and ergonomics are sometimes all that is needed to accommodate an employee with a disability.

Large companies recognize the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. In general they have fully developed recruitment and in-house training programs and well as the knowledge of specialized state and federal programs. The small to midsized businesses may not possess the same knowledge or ability to access such services. As such, it was concluded that small to midsized employers are underutilizing the OSCC; specifically individuals with disabilities as a resource to meeting their workforce needs. The key is marketing how businesses can make the needed changes that enable them to best use the fine skills of the full range of our workforce, including people with disabilities.

#### **E. System Capacities**

As described above, the Committee has informally surveyed the existing OSCC system to identify service strategies, accessibility and equipment operations, personnel knowledge and provider abilities to serve the customer. Driven by the assessment results identified in this plan, the Committee felt it critical to examine the readiness of the OSCC system to meet those demands. A full list of OSCC programs and services are available online at [www.learntrainwork.com](http://www.learntrainwork.com). For the purposes of this plan the services primarily utilized by existing OSCC customers will be reviewed.

#### **1. Customers**

Atlantic and Cape May Counties has received an annual grant to employ a full time Disability Program Navigator (DPN). This position is a key component in developing new and on-going partnerships to achieve seamless, comprehensive and integrated access to services, creating systemic change and expanding the workforce investment systems capacity to serve customers with disabilities and employers. With that said, the NJLWD has made no promises that this program will have its funding renewed on an annual basis. As identified in the customer assessment, many individuals with disabilities are not aware of the services available and those that are may not be equipped to navigate the myriad of departments, eligibility requirements and paperwork associated with enrollment. The Committee recommends that funding for this position continue and proposes its expansion. Currently, the DPN strives to “connect” individuals and service providers within the OSCC system. The Committee feels this role should be focused on engaging individuals with the OSCC system and its providers. They see the role of the DPN as a hands-on Employment Specialist that provides initial assessment, counseling, referral and follow-up services. The existing DPN staff is an experienced Employment Specialist and could transition into this expanded role.

The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRS) provides financial incentives to encourage businesses to employ and retain individuals with disabilities. The Committee acknowledges that some may feel this is the role of NJDVRS, but one could argue that there are many individuals with disabilities that prefer or are not eligible for NJDVRS services. In these instances other OSCC services may be more appropriate and of great benefit to OSCC customers with disabilities.

For the purposes of this section, NJDVRS defines an individual with a disability as having any physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment may qualify an individual for vocational rehabilitation services. When eligible individuals with disabilities may afford themselves of the following DVRS sponsored services:

- A. Vocational Counseling & Guidance – Providing assistance to the consumer in handling the job search issues that impact employability, job maintenance strategies, and developing the overall techniques needed to be successful in a work environment
- B. Placement Services - Development of job leads both with and for the consumer and support during the job search; could include On the Job Training (OJT), Supported Employment (SE) or Time Limited -Placement and Coaching (TLPC)
- C. Job Seeking Skills - Guidance in work search activities such as resume writing, interviewing skills, job search organizations.
- D. Supported Employment - Through referral to an SE provider, one-on-one assistance in job searching, interviewing, applying for jobs; followed by coaching on the job to facilitate learning job duties and adjusting to the work environment; followed by periodic follow-up to ensure job retention
- E. Time Limited Placement and Coaching - The first two categories of Supported Employment Services without periodic follow-along
- F. Job Accommodations - Guidance on changing the worksite’s physical environment or adding equipment that will allow an individual to do more work tasks independently, effectively, and safely
- G. Skills Training - Vocational school, technology or trade School, business school, etc.
- H. College Training - 2 or 4 year programs leading to a degree
- I. Physical Restoration - Equipment or therapies which improve physical or cognitive functioning so that a person is able to work; examples could be physical, occupational, or speech therapy; cognitive therapy which includes those modalities; prosthetics or orthotics such as artificial limbs, braces, special shoes, hearing aides, and eyeglasses (in some instances)
- J. Emotional Restoration Services – Short-term individual, group or other types of counseling to reduce symptoms of mental health problems and improve work-tolerance and the ability to get and keep a job.
- K. Mobility Equipment
- L. Driver Training - Assessment of driving ability and equipment needed to drive safely; assistance in purchasing driver training lessons if needed to reach a specific work goal.
- M. Vehicle Modification
- N. Home Modifications, if needed to reach a specific work goal

For those individuals with disabilities that do not wish to utilize NJDVRS services, the NJLWD operates Employment Services at the OSCC that help individual’s find full-time or part-time employment. All services focus on their existing job related experience and abilities. The following is a list of core services, which are generally self-paced with little staff interaction.

- A. Use the public access self-services listed below at no cost and at the customer's convenience.
- B. Computers with printers are available to write cover letters and resumes.
- C. Fax machines and telephones are available to correspond with employers.
- D. Employment related resources are available about local job market trends and a list of demand occupations.
- E. The Internet is available for job searches.

In Atlantic County workshops and classes are also provided based on assignment to help you find employment. Employment Specialists are available to assist with resume and cover letter development. In Cape May County, customers are encouraged to register to attend workshops and classes. The following is a list of intensive services, which generally require staff interaction.

- A. Job Matching and Referral Service is available to refer customers to job openings listed in the One Stop Career Center national database based on the individual's job skills, education and experience, which are matched with those needed by an employer.
- B. In some cases, and when eligible, individuals may be referred to other services such as: job training, public assistance (health, housing, legal etc...), vocational counseling, and/or educational services.

There are federal grants up to \$5,000 and State of New Jersey grants up to \$4,000 available for job training. These are available for customers that meet certain eligibility requirements. A recipient cannot get both grants but either grant may be used in addition to Pell Grants and/or Stafford Loans offered by the training providers. Grants are paid directly to the approved New Jersey Training Providers which are listed on [www.njtopps.com](http://www.njtopps.com). Other non-monetary training opportunities include Tuition Free Waivers at Public Colleges where participants simply pay for books, materials, and fees.

There are many cost free adult education programs that help OSCC consumers improve their reading, math, and communication skills in preparation for employment. These services may or may not be appropriate based on the individual needs of the customers and their level of disability.

- A. Workforce Learning Links: This program helps individuals enter the workplace, prepare to take enrollment test, or advance to further training by providing self-paced tutorials. These activities are computer based with assistance from an instructor and open to the public. There is no registration required. Customers may learn at their own speed. Participants are required to register "for work," enter into employment counseling and develop an employment/education plan with assistance from an employment counselor.
- B. Learning Labs: This program is available for individuals that need small group instruction and are available for beginner and middle level learners.

## **2. Employers**

In early 2007 the NJLWD implemented Business Resource Centers (BRC) in each WIB area across the state. For approximately six (6) years, the BRC had been staffed by one (1) Business Services Representative (BRS). The goal of that program had been focused on helping businesses navigate the labor market exchange system and coordinate services with outside agencies that serve the same. This service strategy has been successful in recruiting large corporate employer partners, but had experienced less success with the smaller business community. In general, the focus had never been placed on marketing and outreach as these were considered beyond the scope of the aforementioned position. Rather, local businesses learned of the services through rapid response, cold calling, distribution of materials and past experience.

In July 2010, this local area hired a Job Developer to work with the BRC to recruit employers and encourage the development of employment opportunities through On-the-Job Training (OJT) programs for public assistance recipients and other hard to place populations. This strategy was employed to assist OSCC participants in a to-work activity obtain and retain employment, thus

eliminating future need for public assistance. This local area expands the scope of this service model to recruit additional employer partners to develop jobs for other special populations within the OSCC and has experienced some success in doing so.

There has been much discussion about the role and responsibilities of the One Stop Business Resource Center (BRC), and Job Developer as it relates to economic development. For this reason, the WIB recently consolidated its Business Outreach Team with its Economic Development Committee. The goal of such a consolidation is to develop a plan that is aligned with the WIB's Strategic Plan to integrate the delivery of services for the employer community within the Atlantic and Cape May region. This shall be accomplished through the coordination and leveraging of joint resources and federal and state sponsored business financial incentive programs provided by the New Jersey State Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJLWD) through the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC). The recruitment and participation of local businesses in the labor exchange system is critical to placing job seekers into part-time or full-time unsubsidized employment. The Committee recommends that the BRC and Job Developer focus more attention on the hiring of individuals with disabilities.

Financial incentives are available to employers that wish to hire individuals with disabilities. The OSCC system has the capacity to provide such programs as follows:

- A. On-the-Job (OJT) Training: Supervised paid training of individuals seeking employment that takes place at the employer worksite and allows the individual to build and update skills and employment competencies. Currently provides between 50% and 90% wage reimbursement for eligible workers.
- B. Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC): A federal tax credit incentive that the Congress provides to private-sector businesses for hiring individuals from nine target groups who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment. The main objective of this program is to enable the targeted employees to gradually move from economic dependency into self-sufficiency as they earn a steady income and become contributing taxpayers, while the participating employers are compensated by being able to reduce their federal income tax liability.

The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRS) provides financial incentives to encourage businesses to employ and retain individuals with disabilities. The Committee acknowledges that some may feel this is the role of NJDVRS, but one could argue that there are many individuals with disabilities that prefer or are not eligible for NJDVRS services. In these instances other OSCC services may be more appropriate and of great benefit to OSCC customers with disabilities.

The NJDVRS provides a multitude of employer based incentive programs, including:

- A. Training Reimbursement: DVRS will pay up to half of a worker's salary while the individual learns the essential knowledge and job skills required, in an on-the-job training program.
- B. Tax Incentives: DVRS will show you how to obtain tax credits you may be eligible for when hiring workers with disabilities.
- C. Placement Services: DVRS can provide pre-screened, trained, motivated, qualified workers. We will work to identify your needs and match the right worker to the right job.
- D. Recommendations on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): DVRS will help you understand ADA laws and make "reasonable accommodations" in the workplace.
- E. Job Modification and Barrier Removal Consultations: DVRS will evaluate your worksite to identify possible barriers and propose solutions that will benefit not only employees with disabilities, but also your customers with disabilities.
- F. Assistance Dealing with Troubled Employees: DVRS will provide counseling services for employees with disabilities who are experiencing problems.
- G. Follow-Up and Adjustment Services: DVRS counselors maintain close contact with employees to ensure that they are adjusting to the job and that both employer and employee are satisfied.

## F. Capacity Building Barriers

Both Atlantic and Cape May Counties face geographic barriers that challenge the cost-efficient delivery of services. Poor and non-existent mass transit routes, lack of enough affordable quality childcare slots, and high concentration of demand in distressed economic areas present accessibility challenges that demand creative solutions. Unfortunately, scarce resources make it difficult to

risk inventive ideas and moving both providers and customers to accept change in methods and channels of delivery is a time-consuming and labor-intensive endeavor.

At the NJDVRs Annual Public Hearings it was reported that the agency was operating at a 35% vacancy rate. More recently the agency has hired 25 new Vocational Rehabilitation I Counselors, of which Atlantic and Cape May counties received one (1) additional position. A positive outcome of these recruitment efforts and the agency's continued support of professional development is that 86% of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have Masters Degrees from UMDNJ Masters in Rehabilitative Counseling.

Staffing in the OSCC, regardless of agency affiliation is an issue. The economic climate has driven an unprecedented number of local residents into the system seeking a myriad of services. This has strained an existing workforce to provide adequate and appropriate services for typical customers without barriers to employment. Individuals with disabilities need close follow-up and consistent communication to be successful in a broad spectrum system such as the OSCC. This leads to a high level of consumer frustration and increases the likelihood of withdrawal from services and programs.

Business marketing and outreach is one step in a series of processes that connect the employer with the employee. The OSCC serves populations by funding source. These sources provide specific financial incentive programs, points of service entry and multiple contacts. This in many instances leads to miscommunication and frustration, which after awhile negatively impacts an employer's desire to participate in the labor exchange. Likewise, within the OSCC, personnel that assist the business community have overlapping responsibilities and in some instances duplicate efforts. The BRC and Job Developer have noted that a lack of resources to properly market employer based financial incentives has been a barrier to expansion of the program. Traditionally, the benefits have largely been sought by employers with a sizeable workforce. With that said, one could surmise that there is a significant pool of small and midsized employers that would consider participation given the knowledge, assistance and tools.

There is a disincentive for individuals with disabilities to seek employment when employers do not provide medical benefits. Many rely of the medical benefits provided through Disability and Social Security and when employed, even part-time see those benefits reduced or are found ineligible. In these economic times, many employers are unable to offer a medical benefits package to employees due to the rising costs in the healthcare insurance industry. Agencies that provide these support services have implemented a multitude of employment incentives and programs to encourage individuals with disabilities to pursue work, but this still seems to be an obstacle.

New Jersey Transit offers accessible bus features on most vehicles. NJ Transit Access Link provides an additional resource for transportation for employment for individuals who cannot take an accessible NJ Transit bus. Problems continue for those in rural areas with limited public bus service. NJ Commission for the Blind provides travel training for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Atlantic County ParaTransit has experienced growing needs and demands while experiencing a decrease in funding from the casino revenue under the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Program. In Cape May County "Fare Free" transportation is available, which connects rural areas with major NJ Transit routes. In spite of these transportation options, limitations exist that make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to access services and travel to and from work. These restrictions may include, but are not limited to: accessibility, eligibility and non-traditional work schedules, among others.

Gaps and barriers in the local service area are listed below:

- Economic Conditions
- Professional Development
- Operation of Technology
- Transportation

## **SECTION 4: SERVICE STRATEGY**

### **A. Priority of Service**

The Committee recommends that the OSCC primarily focus on individuals with disabilities that are able to work through job coach services, career counseling and entrepreneurship, OJT and job training grants. For these individuals this may mean securing part-time or full-time unsubsidized employment, re-entering the workforce after illness or injury or for career advancement opportunities. The fundamental goal is to increase the earnings potential for this population in an effort to promote self sufficiency and financial stability. The labor exchange system does not work without employer partnerships. Therefore, the Committee also recommends that the OSCC deploy an extensive marketing campaign to inform, influence perception and recruit area businesses for participation in the OSCC system.

Although the Committee recognizes that there are many individuals with disabilities that would benefit from OSCC sponsored services and are able to work in supported work settings, the WIB is tasked with workforce development and as such must remain dedicated to its mission. The Committee would recommend that community based and faith based organizations continue to provide meaningful and sustainable programs and services for those individuals not able to work.

### **B. Outreach and Recruitment**

The WIB has developed extensive relationships with community and faith based organizations and NJDVRS to cross refer customers. However, the OSCC predominately relies on consumer “self identification” of a disability or direct referrals from a partner agency. This has limited the scope of outreach and weakened the service strategy. There is room for improvement when it comes to appropriate referrals to and from services and programs. Therefore, the OSO has reinstated quarterly partner meetings to improve communications and developed consumer relationships. The OSCC shall continue to explore the best way to identify individuals with disabilities that do not “self identify” as possessing a disability in an effort to provide seamless and appropriate services in an efficient manner.

### **C. Access and Referral**

The WIB has worked hard with its One Stop partners and providers to ensure that customers of the OSCC receive the referrals and access to additional support services they need to be successful. Each One Stop has co-located partners and developed formal and informal relationships with provider agencies to ensure that the customer can address barriers that may inhibit their ability to learn and become productive workers and good citizens.

The WIB One Stop Committee is charged with the main responsibility of ensuring that universal access to necessary services happens as efficiently and effectively as possible. There is cross-membership between the One Stop Committee and the Disabilities Workforce Committee that ensures relevant issues are brought to appropriate venues. We expect that these communication channels will continue and strengthen over time.

### **D. Service Integration**

In general, eligible individuals who are unemployed recently laid off, underemployed (still working) or a young adult ages 14 to 21, may access OSCC sponsored programs. These services and programs are provided free of charge and include:

1. Adult Literacy and Educational Assessments
2. Career Assessments and Counseling
3. Job Search Assistance and Placement
4. Job Training
5. Public Assistance

All services are provided based on program availability, eligibility and where appropriate for individuals with disabilities. These programs are offered by a host of agencies, which include, but are not limited to:

1. Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development
2. County of Atlantic, Office of Workforce Development
3. New Jersey State Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Employment Services Unit (Hammonton, Pleasantville and Wildwood)
4. New Jersey State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

In addition to those agencies listed above, the OSCC also partners with post secondary education institutions, public housing authorities, governmental agencies and community based organizations that encourage universal referrals between organizations to better accommodate customers. These include:

1. Atlantic Cape Community College
2. Atlantic County Institute of Technology
3. Atlantic City Housing Authority
4. Atlantic Human Resources
5. Cape May County Board of Social Services
6. Cape May County Technical School
7. Experience Works, Inc. (Cape May County Partner)
8. National Council on the Aging (Atlantic County Partner)
9. Family Service Association
10. City of Atlantic City Women, Infants and Children
11. Pleasantville Housing Authority

The WIB Board shall be leveraged to identify potential employer partners and encouraged to participate in this program. Leadership and guidance, performance review and marketing and service strategy discussions will make the difference between true successes or mediocre outcomes. About half the membership is comprised of private sector members and as a result the Board understands labor market trends and is better equipped to identify in-demand occupational titles and requisite training requirements to sustain the public/private sector link between economic and workforce development.

Despite these many obstacles, the WIB believes that it can positively impact the quality and quantity of services to individuals with disabilities who need employment, training and literacy in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. A population that is sometimes can be difficult to serve through OSCC services are young adults with disabilities transitioning from secondary schools to employment or post secondary education. Through research, the Committee identified specialized programs that may help to fill this gap in service. It's important to note that some agencies listed below provide social service and case management services that support unsubsidized employment. These include:

- Work Incentive Programs: Within last few years new work incentive programs for people with disabilities such as: SSA's "Ticket to Work", NJ Wins, and Workability have been implemented.
- "Promoting Self- Advocacy" was initially a shared initiative between the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJDOE) and New Jersey State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (NJDVRS) to fund Independent Living Transition Specialists in all 12 Centers of Independent Living (CIL). This year, funding was renewed only by the NJDOE. Atlantic County's CIL, located in Egg Harbor Township, is the Total Living Center (TLC). TLC has a full time staff person funded by this program who is conducting outreach, advocacy, and education through the local schools. The 2009 NJDVRS Annual Report notes many successful transitions for students with disabilities (both classified and 504) as a result of the "Promoting Self- Advocacy Program." The Committee is in support of continued funding of this local Independent Living Transition Specialist. This position has funding renewed on an annual basis for many years, but is not guaranteed for renewals.
- In May 11, 2011, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey hosted a local, annual "Dare to Dream," a self-advocacy leadership conference for transitioning high school students with disabilities and their parents. This annual conference

offered inspirational peer speakers, and many workshops lead by peers and professionals. The New Jersey Department of Education’s (NJDOE) Office of Special Education Programs, in collaboration with the United States Department of Education’s (USDOL) Office for Civil Rights, sponsored the conference.

- “Preferred Behavioral Health of New Jersey provides “supported education” services to individuals with mental illness. The LEARN Programs located throughout the state are designed to assist individuals with mental illness reach their post secondary academic goals. Services may include supportive counseling, skills development, information about accommodations and advocacy and funding for college tuition.
- The Family Support Center of New Jersey through funding provided by Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), coordinated statewide trainings entitled: “Pathways to Adult Life” for parents and children ages 14 to 19 years. DDD also offers “Life after 21: Transition Workshops” which focus of providing information and discussing needs for future planning for students ages 19 to 21. These trainings were provided by NJDOE, NJDDD and NJDVRS. A noteworthy booklet, funded by NJDD Council, “Great Expectations: Preparing your Child with a Developmental Disability for Employment Success” was developed by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University. DDD, primary case managers hold annual IHP meetings and should include future goals and transition planning. Also DDD offers Day Programs/ long term supportive employment. (Is there a current DDD waiting list for Day Programs?) Caring Inc., continues to provide the unique, DDD funded program called “Transitional Adult Program” (T.A.P.). T.A.P. is for medically fragile adults (21 and over) leaving school and needing total personal care.
- NJDVRS continues to fund a “Lead Transition Counselor” in each of their local offices. NJDVRS reports a significant impact with statewide numbers in FY 2010 as: provided 16,311 technical consultations, 1,473 IEP meetings, 2,694 presentations meetings with school personnel, parents and students.

In addition, the Committee identified service providers that may help to fill gaps in services. These include:

Disabilities Category	Service Provider	Program Description
<b>Deaf and Hard of Hearing</b>	New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Since 2009, southern New Jersey has a new regional center for individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing that are seeking employment. “Career Success Solutions” is operated by Burlington County College and offers specialized services and supports to residents of Atlantic and Came May Counties.
<b>Blind and Visually Impaired</b>	New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Main agency assisting with employment. The Absecon Lions Center for the Blind, although not specifically involved with employment offers programs can assist with work readiness such as DeWitt Computer Classes.
<b>Developmental Disability</b>	New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities	The agency has a MOU with NJDVRS for shared services, but remains the primary funder for long term supportive employment and day programs for this population.
<b>Brain Injury</b>		does NJ Plus do employment??? Div on Disability Services has Brain Injury Trust Fund with new changes ... Funds restricted to injury from accident no longer stroke... etc.. Coverage could related to needs for work ready/ employment
<b>New Jersey Wins</b>	New Jersey Work Incentive Network Support	Provides individuals with disabilities with free information and technical assistance to enable them to make decisions about employment. For example: “Are you afraid to take a job or increase your work hours

		because you think you might lose your Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or medical benefits?"
<b>Mental Illness / Substance Abuse</b>	AtlantiCare Cape Counseling Cross Road Jewish Family Services Taylor Care University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey	
<b>Ticket to Work</b>	Social Security Administration	Provides most people receiving Social Security benefits (beneficiaries) more choices for receiving employment services. Under this program, SSA issues tickets to eligible beneficiaries who, in turn, may choose to assign those tickets to an Employment Network (EN) of their choice to obtain employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, or other support services necessary to achieve a vocational (work) goal.
<b>Wellness and Recovery</b>	Family Service Association	

There are also services available that may assist individuals with disabilities navigate a complicated healthcare system in pursuit of employment and they include:

Application and Benefits Planning	Arc of Atlantic County, Community Quest and Human Resources Advantage
Online Computer Assistance	Atlantic and Cape May County Library Systems
Medical Co-Payment Assistance	Catholic Charities

**E. Coordination and Leveraging of Resources**

According to the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), WIB's are tasked with the development of workforce strategies and leveraging education and economic development stakeholders within their local communities, to ensure that state and local workforce development and job training programs meet the needs of employers. These investments in workforce development create a comprehensive system to provide a highly skilled workforce that competes in the global economy.

Coordination between the OSO and the WIB Board is a critical component to this plan. The OSCC and partner agencies must leverage private sector WIB Board members to identify employment barriers and labor needs to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. At the same time, these two (2) groups need to actively participate in incentive programs available to market both the OSCC programs and the customers served.

There is consensus across Atlantic and Cape May Counties that a systematic and collaborative approach to the provision of services for individuals with disabilities is an essential underpinning of the plan. The WIB and the Committee is expected to take the lead role to ensure the development of appropriate informal agreements, called Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) between One Stop partners. In fact, these goals will be issued to the OSO who will be tasked with implementing the agreements.

It is also our goal that there will be appropriate agreements among providers to resource share; ensure ease of referral, transfer of records, knowledge of varying disabilities and recognition of learning styles. The WIB again may take a lead role in the development of such agreements upon the request of area service providers. MOU's do not require the exchange of funding between agencies, only the sharing of services and equipment, among others. With scarce and limited resources shared resources is the service model of the future.

## SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

Job training, and employment placement resources and funding are becoming scarce in New Jersey. Local governmental, community and faith based organizations should focus on building relationships with other like agencies to share resources. In doing so, each agency should be able to remain financially stable through the downsizing in grant funding and continue to serve consumers in its given service area.

The Committee firmly believes that the local economy will recuperate from the recession over the next three (3) to five (5) years. It was recently stated at the Atlantic County Economic Development Forum: *Beyond the Boardwalk* held October 19, 2011 that the local employment outlook over the next five (5) to 10 years out looks promising. It was noted that the national and state economies will recover at a much faster rate than in Atlantic and Cape May counties. However, it was suggested that with the advent of the Next Generation Aviation and Research Park there is great opportunity to transition the local economy from one reliant primarily on the Hospitality and Tourism industry to a diversified market.

The Committee presented this plan to the public at an event held October 20, 2011 at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City to celebrate National Disabilities Employment Month. The following suggestions were made:

1. The OSCC should increase the frequency of signage and update it to read easier. It was reported that some OSCC signage includes Braille, but it was noted that “hand made” signage does not.
2. Fund a Concierge/Greeter for all OSCC customers in a prominent location. It was noted that such an individual would provide immediate services to this population.
3. Seek funding for entrepreneurship grants issued by the OSCC, exclusive of NJDVRs.
4. Co-locate agencies that serve individuals with disabilities within the OSCC on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.
5. Develop a “map” for service access to provide community and faith based organizations with knowledge to assist their customers transition to OSCC funded programs.

### A. Opportunities

The WIB is fortunate to have a strong Disabilities Workforce Committee who agrees on a vision and demonstrates the commitment to achieve stated goals. The members of the Committee have exceptional expertise which they willingly and cooperatively share. There is also a vibrant commitment among local providers to collaborate, leverage resources, and meet the growing demand services. The leading industries have been effective in coming together with the workforce development system to articulate needs, define skill sets, and make the commitment to provide opportunities for potential and incumbent workers to gain the skills they need to become productive workers.

A joint venture publication written in May 2011 from the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and the Kessler Foundation entitled *Social Enterprise Businesses: A Strategy for Creating Good Jobs for People with Disabilities*, reported that over the past 10 years, there has been tremendous growth in social enterprise businesses. This approach has been particularly promising in creating new opportunities for individuals with disabilities in emerging and growth industries. Social enterprise affords nonprofit organizations the opportunity to form revenue generating businesses that employ both individuals with and without disabilities. This financially sound approach provides long term financial support for mission-based programs and services.

With the local economy slumping, the unemployment rate high and a job market saturated with job seekers, finding a job is difficult, if not impossible for people with disabilities. Social media provides an alternative job seeking method for this population to conduct job searches in a supported environment or from home, if unable to travel or secure transportation to and from an OSCC or other location.

Social media is also a medium of communication that eliminates the stigma of a disability. Candidates share their work and life experiences, credentials and certifications and are rated on those factors for employment consideration.

In the past 10 years, small businesses development has exploded in the bi-county region. The local economy lends itself nicely to such an “entrepreneurship spirit.” For individuals with disabilities this is a viable option for unsubsidized employment. It provides flexible hours, accommodations, work from home, and telecommute options, among others. There are limitations in that only a few agencies provide funding such as NJDVRS and the individuals must have the capacity to develop a small business plan.

With the aging of the baby boomer population, rest reassured that expansion of the Healthcare Industry is inevitable. Since this population is comprised of a variety of individuals with different attitudes, aptitudes, life and work experiences and disability levels, there is reasonably good evidence to suggest that this occupational cluster provides great employment opportunities. Entry level positions pay higher than minimum wage and both lateral and vertical career advancement is not only possible, but encouraged by the local healthcare institutions. At the Atlantic County Economic Development Forum: *Beyond the Boardwalk* it was stated that in New Jersey there will be a need for 40,000 Certified Nurse Aides (CNA) over the next ten (10) years. It was noted that the industry is transitioning to health and wellness, outpatient specialty services, and home based care. Likewise, the need for individuals certified in medical coding and billing will increase as the population seeking medical care expands. This is a career that offers home based employment and is a practical option for individuals with limited mobility or lack transportation. The limitation is that individuals must possess computer skills and the necessary equipment or the means to acquire such equipment.

The Committee makes the following recommendations to close the academic and employment gaps.

## **B. Recommendations**

1. Continued of the Literacy Lab to serve individuals (with suspected or acknowledged disabilities) scoring between a 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading or math computation level through formal assessment(s).
2. The development of a universal literacy curriculum that outlines strategies to aid in the instruction of individuals with learning disabilities. The curriculum should support at a minimum classroom and online based instruction and provide materials and resources to support small class or one on one learning.
3. Invest in professional development workshops presented by Developmental Instructors or persons with a background in adult literacy and/or developmental and learning disabilities.
4. Alternative academic testing instrument(s) should be available for utilization when a learning disability is acknowledged or suspected.
5. Ongoing professional development of OSCC personnel, One Stop partners and area service providers on the topics outlined in the plan. With that said, the Committee is hopeful that the WIB will endorse a mandatory professional development program for personnel on an annual basis.
6. Continued support of community based agencies serving individuals with disability.
7. Continued funding and expansion of the responsibilities of the DPN Program.
8. Market individuals with disabilities as a viable workforce for area employers. Financial incentives may be available through NJDVRS based on eligibility and availability.

## **C. Evaluation and Performance Standards**

An annual evaluation shall be conducted to determine the OSCC’s progress in attaining performance standards set by this Committee and to ensure the quality and effectiveness of programs offered to individuals with disabilities. The following performance standards are issued for this plan:

1. Within one (1) year of plan implementation, the OSCC shall provide the Telecommunications Relay Service to customers in the three (3) NJLWD endorsed One Stop Career Centers in Hammonton, Pleasantville and Wildwood.

2. OSCC will sponsor a minimum of two (2) professional development workshops in the areas outlined in this plan for Years 1, 2, and 3 or a minimum of six (6) over the plan period for both OSCC personnel, providers and area community based and faith based agencies.

