



## **Workforce Study 2020**

Employment for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) & Direct Support Professionals (DSP) on the Upper Shore of Maryland

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# Executive Summary

The Arc Central Chesapeake Region (The Arc), with support from a Rural Maryland Council (RMC) Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) grant, engaged Jeff Trice Consulting to perform a workforce study across the five counties of the Upper Shore of Maryland's Eastern Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot).

The intent was to engage businesses in the Upper Shore region in a new way, and to offer discussion about recruitment, screening, and retention of the workforce, providing a snapshot of the region and how the disability community fits into the fabric of work in a rural community.

## The project had two overarching aims:

- To increase inclusive employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).
- To decrease employment gaps as it pertains to Direct Support Professionals (DSP) on the Upper Shore.

This report will elaborate on the five key findings summarized below and will propose a series of recommendations with associated strategies for consideration. It is important to note that both project aims are impacted by ongoing legislative and economic changes such as the end of the sub-minimum wage and rising minimum wage rates, and population factors such as the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) health crisis.

## Key Findings

Interviews and discussions with almost 300 people, including businesspeople who employ workers with I/DD, other employers, government officials, civic organizations, family members, staff, and agencies who work with the I/DD community, along with extensive research, indicated the following:

- 01 Workforce challenges identified for the Upper Shore disability community are not unique.**  
The workforce challenges faced by people with disabilities seeking meaningful employment are not all that different than the challenges faced by people without disabilities. Indeed, many of the challenges, findings, and recommendations of this study mirror those of the workforce at large. National and state data is referenced widely due to this similarity; it greatly supported the interviews and data encountered locally. While numbers and individual situations in the local community vary, the overall picture did not. The analysis of these findings covers some of the unique challenges of a rural environment, including logistical issues relating to transportation and geographic distance, and addresses how they relate to the disability workforce.
- 02 Relevant rural and local data is just beginning to be collected, shared, and archived.**  
Due to a lack of local/rural data, other data sources were explored to validate the data obtained from local interviews. National and state data (which includes data reported by local agencies) has been found to support the conclusions of this local study. While rural areas may present challenges that are unique to their county or region, the findings show that challenges facing rural areas are more alike than different from urban and suburban neighbors.

**03** **People with I/DD are an underutilized population of potential employees for Upper Shore businesses.**

Businesspeople interviewed generally expressed satisfaction with employing people with I/DD. Communicating this value to other potential business partners will grow this population's participation in the workforce. The Department of Labor's (DOL) transition from jobseeker-directed services to a business-driven approach supports the use of demand-driven, business-focused services. Identifying business needs, as well as communicating the value that a person with a disability can bring to meet those needs, addresses the first aim of this project.

**04** **Messaging and marketing opportunities to broadly share stories exist, especially in terms of diversity and inclusion.**

Research performed during this study indicated that diversity and inclusion are hot topics for organizations today. Many businesses and organizations are adding diversity and inclusion goals to their Strategic or Business Plans. This offers opportunities to target messaging that supports the employment goals for both populations in the Upper Shore region: people with I/DD and DSPs.

**05** **Pay, compensation, recognition, and certification are of utmost importance to decrease employment gaps as it pertains to DSPs.**

Interviews with local DSPs revealed that those who choose this profession do so for a variety of reasons, including having a strong desire to care for and support others, to make a difference, and to support their families. However, recruitment and retention of DSPs is hampered by issues of pay, overall compensation, and recognition of the scope and breadth of a DSP's workload. The lack of a Standard Occupational Code (SOC) recognized by the United States (U.S.) Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) makes it difficult to track data and advocate for improvements in these areas.



## Foreword

Although the research and data gathering that informed this report were performed prior to the emergence of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the conclusions and recommendations of this study are being drawn amid the pandemic. This crisis has the potential to alter much of what we know about the workforce in general, but more specifically, the efforts to employ people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and to develop the much-needed Direct Support Professional (DSP) workforce in the Upper Shore region.

The effects of this crisis are already evident in the tourism, food services, and hospitality industries. On March 23, 2020, the State of Maryland implemented a directive to close all non-essential businesses, and then moved to a “Stay Home, Shelter in Place” order on March 30. These efforts were implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19, reduce exposure, and to “flatten the curve” of the outbreak, in order to reduce the mortality rate in the state. Businesses will continue to see dramatic changes to their bottom lines due to these regulations. Even as the measures are lifted, business operations will be altered for the foreseeable future.

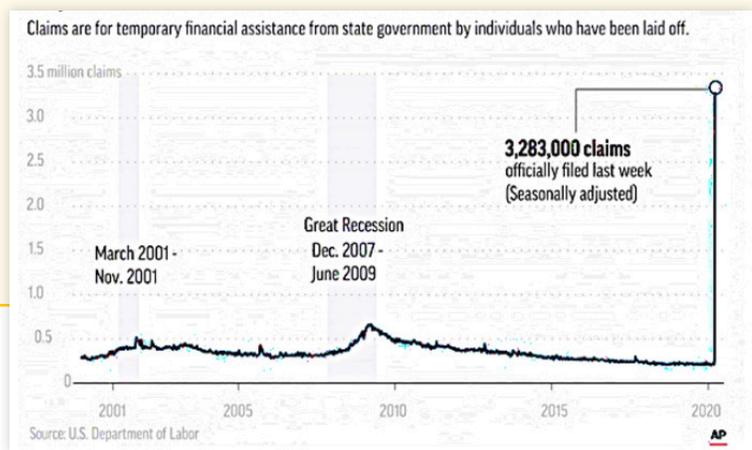
On a positive note, many businesses have adjusted quickly and changed the way services are provided to customers. Curb-side pickup, online ordering, shopping services, and delivery are the new norm. These models are being created out of necessity, but may persist once the crisis subsides, and could create new business structures based on lessons learned and emerging best practices. The changes could increase or decrease employment overall; only time will tell. Some businesses will not survive this event, while those that do will likely come out stronger. Some people will return to their jobs, while others will look at this as an opportunity to make a move. New positions will emerge, others will disappear, and some will be restructured to meet business needs in a new landscape.

It is necessary to acknowledge COVID-19 and the impact it will have in our communities in this report. Assuming we all return to work in some fashion, the recommendations herein will still be valid, although the business climate we face may be vastly different, with a greatly altered economy. Many workers will be displaced during this crisis, as evidenced by the number of people applying for first-time unemployment benefits, according to statistics from the Maryland Department of Labor’s (MDDOL) Division of Unemployment. **Figure 1** below highlights the national impact of COVID-19 as it pertains to new unemployment claims. The impacts to businesses and employees may impose challenges on the disability community. It will certainly offer employers an opportunity to rethink their structures and re-evaluate their staffing needs.

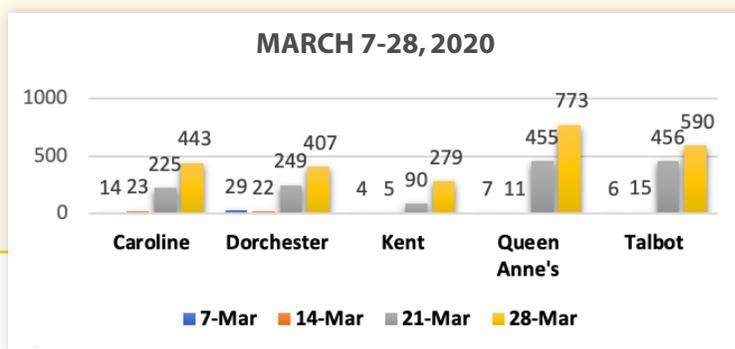
*“In the week ending March 21, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 3,283,000, an increase of 3,001,000 from the previous week’s revised level. This marks the highest level of seasonally adjusted initial claims in the history of the seasonally adjusted series. The previous high was 695,000 in October of 1982.”*

Reference **Figure 1**, right.  
**Source: MSNBC**

**Figure 1.** U.S. Jobless Claims Hit Record 3.3 Million



**Figure 2.** Upper Shore Unemployment Trend



The local COVID-19 picture mirrors this national trend. According to the MDDOL, unemployment claims doubled in a week, totaling more than 126,000. During the week ending March 28, the 84,230 initial unemployment claims more than doubled the previous week’s record high of 41,882. The Upper Shore counties’ totals are reflected in **Figure 2**, left.

In early May 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced a national unemployment rate of 14.7%, which is expected to increase, even as efforts to reopen the United States (U.S.) economy get underway in most states. Local impacts will certainly be felt and will affect future planning. Decisions being made at national and state levels will have an impact at the local level and therefore cannot be ignored.

## Workforce Profile of the Upper Shore

As noted in the executive summary, for the purposes of this project “Upper Shore” includes Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s, and Talbot counties, as defined by the State of Maryland Department of Labor (MDDOL), Licensing and Regulation. In this section, relevant statistics and characteristics of the Upper Shore will be presented to provide a frame for the report. Unless stated as I/DD specific, “disability” or “disabilities” refers to all people with any type of disability.

A study of Upper Shore workforce data revealed that the workforce climate on the Upper Shore in recent years has been one that mirrors that of the nation, the state, and even other countries, with low unemployment (**Figure 3**)<sup>1</sup> and a declining labor force participation rate.

**Table 1** below includes data for Maryland and the Upper Shore counties referenced in this report. It captures community-at-large and disability community employment, unemployment, income, and commute data so that comparisons can be made.

**Table 1.** Data compiled from multiple sources by Jeff Trice Consulting, March 2020. Best comparison of data based on varying data sources and dates of data collection. Data Sources: American Community Survey 2014-2018, JobsEQ, Census 2018-Annual average growth rate since 2008, Maryland Department of Labor Labor Market Information (LMI) as of March 7, 2020.

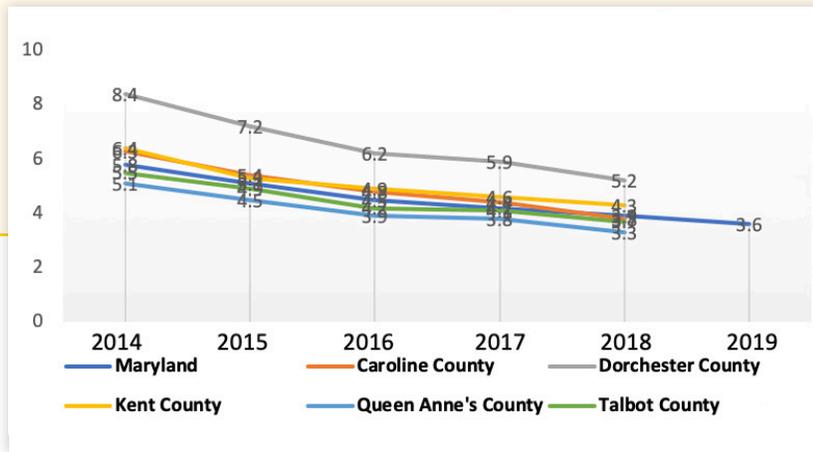
Description	Maryland	%	Caroline	%	Dorchester	%	Kent	%	Queen Anne's	%	Talbot	%
Population	6,003,435		32,875	0.55%	32,261	0.54%	19,593	0.33%	49,355	0.82%	37,211	0.62%
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 25-54)	3,232,422	85.80%	26,859	81.7%	27,551	85.4%	15,968	81.5%	41,952	85.0%	32,225	86.6%
Underemployed (overall)			6,126	18.6%	8,004	24.8%	5,925	30.2%	19,006	38.5%	13,191	35.4%
Unemployment rate	98,116	3.0%	557	3.1%	641	4.2%	364	3.6%	730	2.6%	565	2.9%
With a Disability, Age 18-64	325,210	8.8%	2,512	7.6%	2,514	7.8%	1,166	6.0%	2,465	5.0%	1,907	5.1%
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	155,329	47.8%	1259	50.1%	1106	44%	478	41.0%	1282	52.0%	1016	53.3%
Unemployment rate with Disability			143	5.7%	277	11%	36	3.1%	67	2.7%	170	8.9%
Disability Out of Labor Force			1253	50%	1408	56.0%	688	59%	1183	48.0%	891	47%
Median Household Income	\$81,868		\$54,956		\$52,145		\$56,009		\$92,167		\$67,204	
Poverty Level (of all people)	553,496	9.4%	4,754	14.7%	5,017	15.8%	2,210	12.3%	2,691	5.5%	3,508	9.5%
Mean Commute Time (minutes)	32.9		32.9		27.0		26.4		37.0		28.1	
Commute via Public Transportation				0.6%		1.0%		1.3%		2.0%		1.5%
Population Growth - Population Annual Average Growth				0.1%		-0.1%		-0.4%		0.7%		-0.1%

**Table 1** shows that the average commute pattern varies on the Upper Shore from a low of 26.4 minutes in Kent County, to a high of 37 minutes in Queen Anne’s County. These distances, along with limited public transportation, can restrict employment opportunities. This problem is compounded for people with a disability, as many workers with I/DD are dependent on others for transportation. Irregular and short (in duration) work schedules at part-time and limited full-time jobs add to this transportation challenge.

<sup>1</sup> Maryland Department of Labor (MDDOL), Unemployment Rate by County.

Prior to COVID-19, general unemployment on the Upper Shore was trending down in all five counties as seen in **Figure 3** below. Unemployment in the disability community on the Upper Shore has mirrored this trend, although in both Kent and Queen Anne's counties the disability community actually had slightly lower unemployment rates than the community at large.

**Figure 3.** Upper Shore Unemployment Rate by County

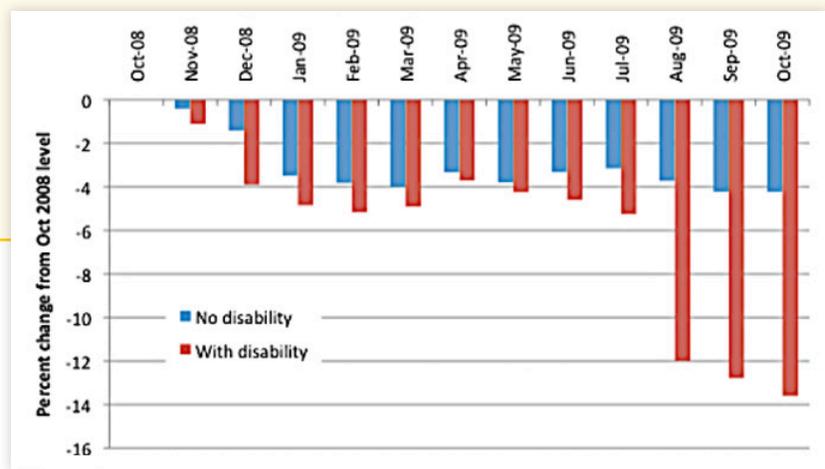


The effects of high unemployment felt nationally by the disability community were dramatically documented by H. Stephen Kaye, PhD, in *The Disproportionate Impact of the Great Recession on Workers with Disabilities*<sup>2</sup> during the Great Recession (**Figure 4**). It is logical to assume that this impact would be seen on the Upper Shore as well as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis.

This chart indicates that a tight labor market does not necessarily translate to increased employment for people in the disability community, as often businesses are not looking there for potential employees.

Despite low unemployment, businesses on the Upper Shore still struggle to attract and retain good workers. This offers the opportunity to promote the advantages of hiring from the disability community, which are well documented in *Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*,<sup>3</sup> a report by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). According to the MDDOL's LMI for March 2020, health care services, hospitality, retail, and manufacturing are the top four industries offering employment opportunities in this region.

**Figure 4.** Change in Employment Level, by Disability Status Oct. 2008 - Oct. 2009



<sup>2</sup> H. Stephen Kaye, PhD, *The Disproportionate Impact of the Great Recession on Workers with Disabilities*.

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). *Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

Considerations impacting workforce opportunities for this community are employment, unemployment, and poverty rates. Unemployment and poverty rates are generally higher for those in the disability community both nationally and on the Upper Shore.

Nationally, 37.5% of people with disabilities are employed compared to 77.8% of people without disabilities; people with disabilities experience a 26.9% poverty rate, compared to a 12.2% for those without disabilities, according to the [2019 Annual Report on People with Disabilities in America](#)<sup>4</sup> by the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire (UNH).

For the Upper Shore, labor force participation rates for people with disabilities are: Caroline-50.1%, Dorchester-44%, Kent-41%, Queen Anne's-52%, and Talbot-53.3% (**Table 1**). While labor force rates for the two groups differ greatly, the percentage gap between the two groups (people without disabilities and people with disabilities) remains relatively the same over time.

The overall poverty rate for all people by county is as follows: Caroline-14.7%, Dorchester-15.8%, Kent-12.3%, Queen Anne's-5.5%, Talbot-9.5% (**Table 1**). Based on 2016 data from the 2019 Compendium report, poverty levels for the disability community in each Upper Shore county were as follows: Caroline-25.8%, Dorchester-30.7%, Kent-15.2%, Queen Anne's-16.3%, Talbot-25.7%. This data for the disability community is older than the national poverty rate data, so while it provides a useful comparison, it may under-estimate or over-estimate current levels. As the poverty level for people with disabilities is more than double the overall national poverty rate, it is safe to assume this could hold true for the Upper Shore region as well.

A scarcity of data for rural communities was identified over the course of this study. While conclusions may be drawn from national and state data, the lack of local data indicates that more data capture would be useful. In addition, a lack of historical data, few data collection systems, and the lack of an accessible data repository creates challenges for strategic planning and forecasting. Rural data in particular is inconsistent and extremely difficult to access, yet critical when seeking funding. Data specifically for rural Maryland communities, including the Upper Shore region, was gathered for the first time in 2018 for the 2019 Compendium report referenced above.

Understanding and analyzing the data provides an objective framework for making strategic decisions. To address this project's objectives, it was necessary to examine the demographics of a rural community and identify how they influence outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire. 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium.

# Project Objective 1

## Increase Inclusive Employment of People with I/DD

### Awareness and perceptions – understanding the disability community.

Not all disabilities are visible; as we age, more of us will acquire a “disability.” As common as it is, deteriorating reading vision may require an employer to offer accommodations to an employee, sometimes in the form of a larger computer monitor. This is a simple accommodation that most employers are willing to provide, at little cost, to their valued employees. This example offers an easy way to introduce how simple and low-cost accommodations for an employee with a disability can be. The average accommodation costs less than \$500, and in many cases, the actual cost is \$0, according to the [Job Accommodations Network \(JAN\)](#).<sup>5</sup> The perception that hiring a person with disability is going to cost a lot is widely held. The challenge of changing this perception is getting this information to employers.

This project revealed an opportunity for local business to meet talent needs by broadening their search to include people with disabilities. Often a simple lack of understanding that a person with a disability might fulfill the needs of the business was the only reason it had not been considered. Expressed concerns include meeting accommodation needs, insurance issues, and the cost of employing someone from this community (many assumed another employee would be needed to help the employee). See **Figure 5** on page 9 that depicts perceived concerns vs. actual challenges in hiring workers with I/DD as documented by i4cp. Below are two interactions worth presenting that illustrate how perceptions effect employment from both the business and potential employee standpoint.

*At an Economic Development meeting in Kent County, a businessperson was intrigued by the idea of seeking employees from the disability community as a staffing solution in a call center. The perception was that the work could not be done by a person with a disability because the position required people with advanced degrees. However, someone using a wheelchair, with a visual impairment, or with autism, might have an advanced degree. “I never thought about it that way,” they said. A discussion of the possible advantages of hiring from the disability community followed, and led to a completely new perception. While this example is not specific to the I/DD community, it does illustrate how sharing the message about ability, rather than disability, can change perceptions and build awareness and understanding.*

*At an event in Dorchester County, a mother noted that her son has autism. She indicated that she wanted her son to be able to take advantage of services offered to the disability community, but the son was unwilling to self-identify. He had experienced bullying and was made fun of as he was growing up, and, therefore, he was adamant about not being labeled, fearing discrimination. He did not want to risk self-identifying out of concern that a “disability label” would shift the focus from his abilities, to his disability, thus affecting his job prospects.*

We have already seen changes in awareness over the course of this project among business and community leaders, state and local elected officials, and workforce leaders (**Appendix A**). Those made aware of the scope of this project have also become more aware of the abilities of people in

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<sup>5</sup> Job Accommodations Network (JAN).

the disability community and the talent people with I/DD have to offer. Hopefully, as this message continues to spread, it will lead to a wider understanding, acceptance, and integration of people with I/DD in the workplace and in the community.

Including people from the disability community in the workforce benefits all – this message, expressed by employers, should be widely shared, along with stories of workforce success. Administration and DSPs can share these stories of inclusion and how it benefits all concerned. Asking businesses to share their stories may improve the number of businesses creating opportunities for this underutilized population of potential employees.

### People with I/DD – leveraging an underutilized population of potential employees.

According to the i4cp report, hiring from the disability community can offer real benefits to a business. These benefits include broadening the pool of talent to have access to more potential employees who are often dependable, engaged, motivated, disciplined, detail oriented, and productive.

**“People with intellectual and developmental disabilities comprise an underutilized population of potential employees proven to be a positive influence on coworkers, customers, the community and a company’s bottom line.”**

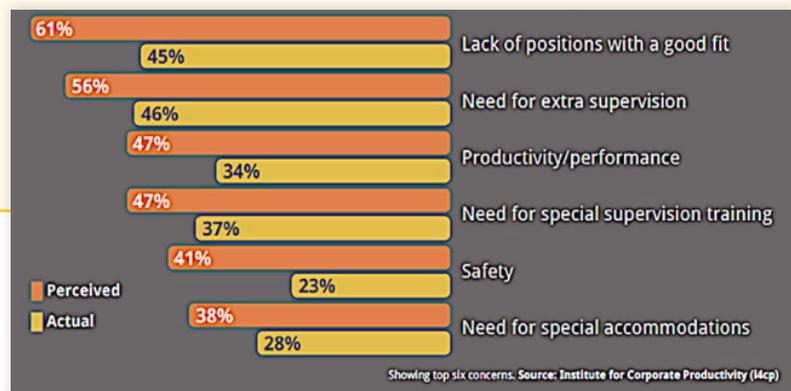
- Institute for Corporate Productivity

The local businesspeople consulted in relation to this project affirmed the variety of benefits of employing people with disabilities. Glenn Brown III, store manager of Starbucks, Cambridge, indicated that while hiring someone from the I/DD community has not always been a perfect experience, it has been good overall, and he has seen an increase in overall performance of the business by hiring a person with an I/DD. Glenn shared, “We have learned life lessons that we will carry with us throughout our lives. We are a living testament that proves inclusion is truly meant for everyone.”

When an employer is hiring, there is always a risk that a new employee will not work out; there are no guarantees. Sometimes an employee is not a good fit for the company. This situation is not unique to employees with I/DD, but good job matching and working to understand the needs of the business will lead to better outcomes for workplace satisfaction for both the employee and the business.

Employers also shared that improved communication and systems put in place for employees with I/DD can benefit all employees and result in a more efficient workplace, a result confirmed at the 2019 Neurodiversity in the Workplace National Conference.<sup>6</sup> Upper Shore employers have also experienced in general (though not always), that hiring dedicated and loyal employees from the disability community has a positive effect on the company’s

**Figure 5.** Perceived concerns vs. actual challenges in hiring workers with I/DD.



<sup>6</sup> Neurodiversity in the Workplace National Conference, November 2019.

culture. Bringing diversity and inclusion to the workplace often grows acceptance and tolerance among employees and customers. The following testimonial, shared by management at Headwaters Seafood in Easton, Talbot County, Maryland, illustrates just this:

*Giving people with disabilities equal opportunity for employment is an important part of the culture at Headwaters, a family owned business in Easton, Maryland. Supporting and encouraging their employees with disabilities is just the right thing to do, according to the owners. "I see no limitations for this young lady, and no one else should either," says Donna Wagner, who has supported employment for people with disabilities at other places she has worked as well. Clay Buritsch, who is part owner of the restaurant, notes that customers respond positively to the person they employ as she always greets them by name with a friendly smile. Staff members say it's "joyful" to be on a team that cares about their community so deeply that they give meaningful support to someone, which includes paying her a competitive wage just like her coworkers.*

**"I see no limitations for this young lady, and no one else should either."**

- Donna Wagner

**Figure 6.** Reasons organizations hire people with I/DD.



On the Upper Shore, most of the employers of people with I/DD interviewed were larger businesses that made hiring from the disability community a corporate priority. These large company franchises or outlets actually function in the manner of a small business in the community. One of the advantages of living in a small, rural area is that local businesses

are part of the fabric of their community, often sponsoring a sports team, supporting fundraisers, and participating in community life. National research shows that people with I/DD are changing company cultures in positive ways, and we should not overlook their skills, abilities, and contributions to the workforce. See **Figure 6** for nationwide reasons organizations hire people with I/DD that can be considered locally.

The specific needs of a business may make them uniquely qualified to hire from the disability community. People with a hearing impairment may tolerate noisy environments well; tasks that require extreme focus or repetitive movement can work well for people on the autism spectrum, so on and so forth. Since each person with I/DD will have different skills and needs, careful job matching remains the answer, but these examples provide a positive way to engage potential employers and to understand their needs and work environment.

*In an interview, a parent of a worker with I/DD shared that his child was most productive for a four-hour work shift. After that, productivity would decline, and the work environment was not as positive for either the employee or the employer. Knowing this information allows for placement of the employee for shifts of this length. Many part-time positions operate with four-hour scheduling windows. Match the employee's best productivity to an employer's established shift or negotiate with an employer who has not considered this option.*

## **Messaging and marketing – spreading the word.**

A common challenge among nonprofit organizations is defining a message and sharing it with relevant populations. The findings of this study support this conclusion regarding agencies serving the disability community in the Upper Shore area. Few agencies have marketing departments, teams, or even staff. However, business-facing staff can and should be carrying the message and performing as marketing ambassadors for the agency.

Despite the long-term existence of many of these agencies in the region, among the people interviewed during this project (with the exception of those in the field), public awareness and understanding about what these agencies do was quite low. The Arc Central Chesapeake Region (The Arc) has been here over 10 years, but at The Maryland listening session held in Cambridge, a parent (who also works as a professional caregiver), did not know that The Arc has an office in the area. Another agency has been in the area for over 50 years, but organization staff have encountered people who had no knowledge of the agency or the services it provides.

The marketing and outreach efforts of nonprofit organizations are always limited by funding and staff time, and as budgets tighten, fewer funds are available for these efforts, creating a declining communication spiral. As communication decreases, awareness wanes. Several agencies identified this as one of their challenges. Lack of community support can limit access to additional funding, so a marketing plan and awareness campaign will be essential to remedy this weakness.

In some Upper Shore agencies, administrative staff fill in for DSP staff due to callouts or staff shortages. It can be difficult for agencies to devote attention to messaging and marketing when they are focused on standing in for their DSP workforce. The urgency of hiring and training new people requires the bulk of their attention.

There are multiple agencies across the Upper Shore region providing similar services to people with I/DD. These agencies could be viewed as competition. However, all of them are working towards the common goal of supporting people with I/DD, improving their lives, and providing employment opportunities. Working together to push out collective messaging could benefit the whole industry by providing better service to the region's businesses. There is also the threat of under-delivering to businesses that have agreed to work with the disability community to fill their workforce needs. It is imperative that the collective Upper Shore agencies can offer enough talent to meet the needs of these partner businesses, as offering a solution and not being able to provide it will be detrimental to long-term relationships. Continued vacancies can restrict business growth and expansion, thereby creating fewer job opportunities for all.

It is worth mentioning that none of the research revealed any training or information to specifically help disability-focused service providers with their messaging or marketing, a need expressed by several local agencies. There are many websites that offer such advice to nonprofit organizations in

general, which of course includes service providers. The research did reveal a great deal of information about marketing to the disability community. Some marketers have clearly realized that making their products and services accessible to the disability community is a good (and profitable) idea. While these efforts reach people with disabilities, improving messaging to business is essential to stay connected to local communities and businesses.

### **Workforce practices – serving the employment needs of people with I/DD and businesses.**

Each of the provider agencies operating in the five counties of the Upper Shore has a workforce program, among the many other programs offered to the I/DD community. Each faces the same challenges in finding businesses to employ people with I/DD; indeed, this project seeks to address just that challenge. Fortunately, this challenge is not unique to the disability community; workforce agencies (e.g., DOL, Division of Rehabilitation Services [DORS], staff agencies) face the same challenges, and over the years, best practices and evidence-based strategies have been developed. These apply equally well to the disability community's workforce.

The workforce field's transition from the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) changed the focus of workforce services from serving the jobseeker to a



demand-driven system that works to support businesses. This approach offers businesses a greater role in finding the best employee for a position working in their business rather than simply allowing an employee placement.

Programs for people with disabilities have generally focused on getting that person “job ready.” The Maryland unemployment system requires that a person be “ready, willing, and able” to work. The same applies to employees with an I/DD. Getting a person with a disability “job ready” may involve months or even years of training to prepare that person to succeed as an employee. These efforts have proven to be a poor predictor of job success, as documented in the [“Job Placement for People with Disabilities”](#)<sup>7</sup>, of the One Stop Disabilities Resource Manual, written by the Institute for Community Inclusion. Focusing on “job matching” aligns the interests, support needs, personality, and skills of the person with a disability, with the needs of the job.

The relatively small number of people seeking employment in the Upper Shore community (prior to COVID-19) offered the opportunity for very specific, personalized job matching of skills and abilities to business needs. This opportunity will still exist in some form, including the opportunity to create better systems and processes that lead to job placements. This creates long-term employment that meets the needs of both the business and the worker. Where careful job matching has been done, the businesses and the workers are satisfied with both the job and the support provided by job coaches and agency staff.

While progress is being made on the Upper Shore, and partner businesses are becoming advocates for hiring from the disability community, there is still the challenge of long-held perceptions, the stigma or stereotype, and a simple lack of awareness that limits progress. In addition, there is a perception that agencies only deliver low-functioning employees, which leads most job placements to fall into what the industry refers to as the “4 Fs” (food, filth, flowers, and factories).

Although there are exceptions, the majority of Upper Shore placements tend to rely heavily on these fields; this is not to imply that these positions are necessary unsuitable or bad for the employee. Current placements include good jobs that are really working for persons with I/DD. Starbucks, public school systems, Weis Markets, Royal Farms, Cracker Barrel, Washington College, the Inn at Perry Cabin, Bullock’s Market, Walmart, Ace Hardware, and others report successful placements. The positions range from teacher’s aide, maintenance, barista, and multiple positions in food services from dishwasher to cook, among others.

Moreover, many of the people that Upper Shore agencies support have historically worked in sheltered workshops, an option that is being phased out. The Ken Capone Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEA) was enacted to abolish the payment of subminimum wages to people with disabilities in Maryland by 2020.

*“The EEA will phase out ‘sheltered workshops’ that pay people as little as pennies per hour and require the Maryland Department of Disabilities and the Developmental Disabilities Administration to implement a 4-year transition plan to move individuals from segregated day programs to competitive integrated employment.”<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> One Stop Disabilities Resource Manual, Chapter 7, Job Placement for People with Disabilities.

<sup>8</sup> Disability Rights Maryland. *Maryland to Phase Out Subminimum Wage*.

This means that the role of agencies in placement assistance will increase greatly over the transition period, due to the need to locate new employment opportunities for the people they support. Traditionally, youth transitioning out of the school system may have obtained employment at a sheltered workshop. This will no longer be an option, potentially causing a surge of people seeking employment placement support from local agencies. The challenges of serving the employment needs of people with I/DD will be compounded by these changes.

Funding, budgets, laws, and regulations continue to impact the industry. There are a number of federal and state government agencies and departments that play a role (e.g., Maryland Department of Health [MDH], Developmental Disabilities Administration [DDA], DORS). The loss of the sub-minimum wage was identified as an area of concern by Upper Shore agencies and parents. According to the USDOL,

“The [Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#) provides for the employment of certain individuals at wage rates below the minimum wage. These individuals include student-learners (vocational education students), as well as full-time students employed by retail or service establishments, agriculture, or institutions of higher education. Also included are individuals whose earning or productive capacity is impaired by a physical or mental disability, including those related to age or injury, for the work to be performed.”<sup>9</sup>

This flexibility is now being phased out to make pay structures more equitable for people in the disability community. This is to be celebrated because it advances inclusion and access to integrated employment; however, the loss of this subsidy may make it harder to place workers. Similarly, the new higher minimum wage, while both welcomed and necessary, is impacting entire organizational structures and staffing for service providers and businesses alike.

Adapting to these changes will require developing a unified message among those serving workforce needs of people with disabilities. Each agency uses different terms for services and providers. These inconsistencies can make it difficult for someone outside the industry (business/employers) to understand what agencies do and how they do it. In an effort to improve the language being used, it would make sense to align with the terms and language being used at national and international levels (neurodivergent, neurodiversity and neurotypical are examples). This inconsistency in systems, processes, and terminology can lead to confusion for businesspeople and impact relationships. Creating systems that work for the business creates employment opportunities.

Additionally, inconsistent workforce practices within agencies can come from a variety of places. Each agency's funding, funding sources, and metrics dictate the services and programs developed and administered. Funding follows measurements, so agencies and organizations desiring funding must meet the measures to acquire/keep funding, which in turn determines who is supported and the type and quality of candidates offered.

Several Upper Shore agencies expressed that funding continues to be a challenge for them. The need to place people in jobs drives business engagement. Following the funding may also make it difficult to support people who could be placed in higher paying, more demanding jobs, because the funding limits the population served. Research in the workforce field indicates that sometimes metrics to be measured do not necessarily align with the purpose, mission, and goals of the organization, or they

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<sup>9</sup> U.S Department of Labor. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

deflect from the intent that the metrics were established to support. These metrics often drive the two apart and cause confusion for staff, the people supported, and the public.

If business engagement is improved, there is also a risk of under-delivering to businesses that have agreed to work with the disability community to fill open positions. At this time, one agency has twenty people available to work. Seventeen of them are working, a stellar success rate. That leaves three potential employees to match with available work opportunities. The number of available workers is similar in other Upper Shore agencies. It is important that the agencies can offer enough talent to meet the needs of these partner businesses. If a marketing campaign to increase employment opportunities is effective, an outcome may be that no one agency can provide a pipeline of workers when a business seeks an employee, creating a need for a coordinated effort across the region.

### **Transportation – bridging the workforce gap.**

The Upper Shore faces a two-fold issue regarding transportation. The challenges of getting to a job strain the resources and availability of DSPs, as DSPs often must drive the people supported to their jobs. While some public transportation is available in the form of [\*Delmarva Community Services \(DCS\)\*](#) buses, these buses offer limited schedules and travel to and from limited locations. In addition, services like Lyft, Uber, and private taxis, if available, are limited and expensive.

A committee in Dorchester County sought to address this issue but found that readily actionable solutions are difficult to find. Many caring people are thinking about addressing this issue, but the challenges of distance and cost are slowing progress towards a solution. Solving this challenge for the disability community will take the concerted efforts of both workforce and disability agencies and organizations, the people supported, and their families. It will be necessary to advocate for, lobby for, and build a better solution to the workforce transportation challenges faced by this geographically large and rural community.

The Kent Center has bridged this gap by providing transportation via agency-owned buses and vans that take the people supported to and from work. This is a great idea, but budgetary limitations make it difficult for each agency to provide this type of service sustainably. Pooling resources and making a regional disability community transportation plan could be a potential solution.

# Project Objective 2

## Decrease Employment Gaps for DSPs on the Upper Shore

The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities' [Report to the President 2017](#), describes the state of the DSP workforce as one of "crisis."

According to this report,

*"The direct support workforce is one of the highest in demand in the U.S. The expansion needed in this workforce is unlikely to take place without significant changes in how direct support professionals are recruited, trained and supported. The pipeline for people entering the Direct Support Profession is not keeping pace with the number of DSPs needed by Americans with I/DD and their families."<sup>10</sup>*

The report identified that factors affecting the situation moving forward include: high level of staff turnover, a growing demand for services due to the growth and aging of the U.S. population, and increased survival rates for people with I/DD. Additional factors include compensation for DSPs, including low wages, lack of paid health insurance and paid time off, the high stress and demands of the job, lack of training and preparation for DSP roles, and lack of professional recognition and status for skilled DSPs. Not only does the DSP crisis impact people with I/DD and their families, but it is also extremely costly to the human services system and the overall U.S. economy. The direct support workforce supports the families of people with I/DD in two ways as it pertains to workforce: by helping people with I/DD get jobs, and by providing necessary supports/services that enable their family members to work.

Interviews and research into the DSP situation in the Upper Shore region have not indicated that it is currently one of crisis, but there are critical issues that certainly require attention and action. The above factors outlined in the [Report to the President 2017](#)<sup>10</sup> are similar to those identified in interviews with local DSP workers, as well as agency staff and administration.

One factor that surfaced from research, and at a listening session hosted by The Arc Maryland, was the shift towards self-directed services, one-to-one. This move creates more demand for DSPs, as most of the DSPs interviewed supported from three to six people. Self-directed services changes this ratio to one-to-one. Adding this factor to the factors identified above will greatly change the supply and demand picture for DSPs. On a positive note, this will create more DSP job opportunities. However, more DSP job opportunities without the talent to fill them poses a dilemma.

### DSPs – who they are and what they do.

DSPs are the backbone of disability supports and services. The scope of a DSP's work is varied depending on the people they support, the supports and services those people need, and the

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<sup>10</sup> President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, *Report to the President 2017*.

**Figure 7.** What Is A Direct Support Professional?



personal goals and outcomes those people choose. DSPs require a broad skillset and must complete a number of state-mandated trainings, some of which must be renewed on a recurring basis. **Figure 7**, sourced from The Arc’s website, is intended to help depict the multifaceted nature of the role.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that a DSP must be ready to employ a variety of skills and to assume a number of significant responsibilities.

<sup>11</sup> The Arc Central Chesapeake Region. What is a Direct Support Professional?

DSPs help people with I/DD live, work, play, and thrive in the community. In Maryland, data on the number of DSPs supporting people with disabilities was not readily available. Using data to support the recruitment, development, and retention of this workforce is critical to disability services. However, the most recent national data (2013) in the [Report to the President 2017](#) indicates:

*“It is estimated that in 2013 there were about 880,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) Direct Support Professional positions allocated to providing assistance to the 1.4 million individuals with ID/DD receiving services under the auspices of state ID/DD program agencies.”<sup>10</sup>*

It is clear that more DSPs will be needed. At the time of this report, demographic data for the Upper Shore DSPs was not available to reference, however, interviews across the Upper Shore indicate that this data is worth investigating to better understand the local DSP workforce and to inform recruitment and retention efforts. While gathering data on the demographic information for DSPs was not a part of this study, research revealed national data worth highlighting (**Figure 8**) until local data becomes available.

**Figure 8.**

### Years of Experience

*This data is based on 3,971 survey responses*



Sources: PHI, Creating a Strong Direct Support Workforce. Payscale.com March 2020  
President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, Report to the President 2017

### Gender Breakdown

*This data is based on 1,666 survey responses*



**87% Women**  
**60% People of Color**  
**30% Black/African American**  
(from 2005-2015)  
**47 Median Age**  
**29% Immigrants**

**Female** 79.2%  
**Male** 20.4%  
**Prefer to self-define** 0.4%

**Anticipated growth in U.S. Labor Force: 2016-2026**  
**Women of Color + 6.3 million**  
**White Women + 384,000**

## Pay and compensation – creating a culture that values DSPs.

Upper Shore DSPs' most frequently cited challenge revolved around wages. Industry-wide, wages are similar to the wages offered by businesses like Target and Chick-fil-A, but the responsibilities of DSP positions are often far greater than those in other jobs, as is evident in **Figure 7**. Many DSPs indicated that they work multiple jobs and experience poverty. An agency shared that DSP staff often have complicated lives of their own that include financial issues; concerns for the people they support further complicate things.

Due to financial constraints, some DSPs do not have reliable transportation, which impacts their ability to do a job that necessitates driving a personal vehicle. This is supported by the national data from the [Report to the President 2017](#), "Low wages, scant benefits, limited training, and lack of career advancement opportunities have led over the past 30 years to the following nationwide results:"<sup>10</sup>

- Average DSP wages fall below the federal poverty level for a family of four
- Half of DSPs rely on government-funded and means-tested benefits
- Most DSPs work two or three jobs
- Average annual DSP turnover rates of 45% (range 18-76%)
- Average vacancy rates of more than 9%

**Table 2** below indicates the lack of wage growth in the personal care career field, with a growth rate (adjusted for inflation) of just \$0.45/hour increase over a ten-year period.

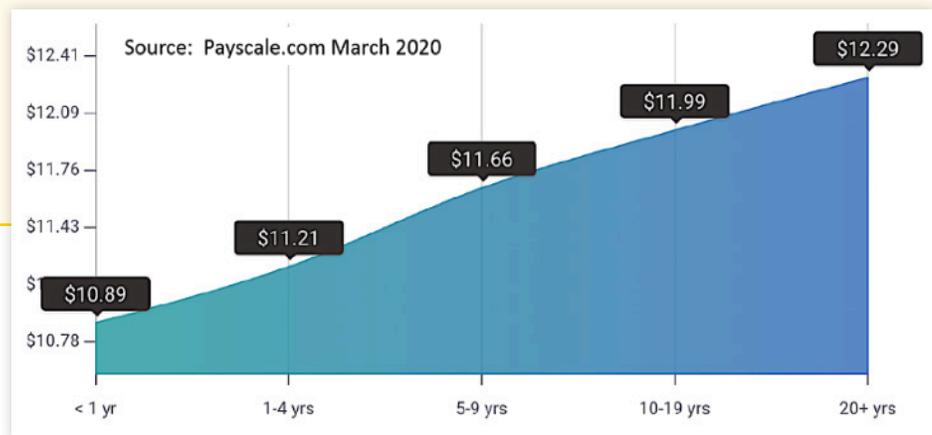
**Table 2.** Direct Care Working Median Hourly Wages Adjusted for Inflation, 2008 - 2018

AREA	OCCUPATION	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	GROWTH	%GROWTH
MARYLAND	PERSONAL CARE AIDES	\$11.91	\$12.04	\$11.91	\$11.80	\$11.70	\$11.68	\$11.50	\$11.69	\$11.85	\$11.91	\$12.36	0.45	0.04
	HOME HEALTH AIDES	\$12.73	\$13.21	\$12.91	\$12.20	\$11.94	\$12.08	\$11.93	\$11.94	\$12.14	\$12.26	\$12.93	0.20	0.02
	NURSING ASSISTANTS	\$15.59	\$15.26	\$14.89	\$14.47	\$14.30	\$14.22	\$13.95	\$14.21	\$14.51	\$14.57	\$14.53	-1.06	-0.07
	TOTAL	\$14.60	\$14.46	\$14.11	\$13.54	\$13.19	\$13.07	\$12.85	\$13.08	\$13.32	\$13.32	\$13.50	-1.10	-0.08

**Figure 9** to the right reflects the limited growth seen by DSPs local to the region over the course of a career in the field. The growth between less than one year and over 20 years being \$1.40.

Upper Shore DSPs indicate that the pay issues in the region mirror the national

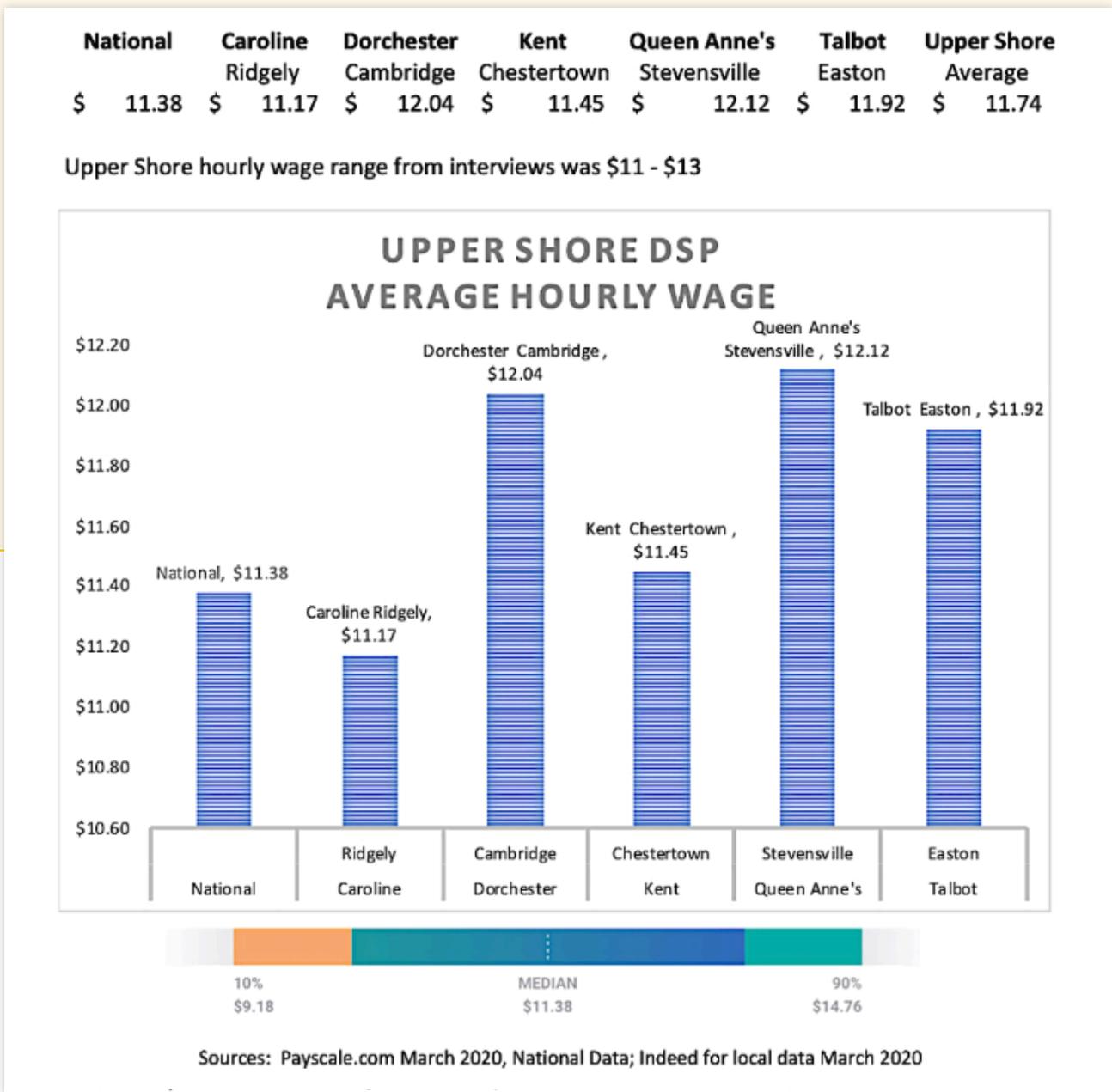
**Figure 9.** What is the Pay by Experience Level for DSPs?



data from 2017. **Figure 10** shows that wages are just a bit higher in 2020, with The Arc recently offering a pay increase to \$13/hour in an effort to retain and recruit DSPs. The towns selected for each county was intentional as provider agencies are located in these towns. Most DSPs work overtime (in some agencies this is mandatory), have second jobs, or receive some sort of public assistance. Some DSPs have left the field due to pay issues, as one can make more in another job, including in a nursing home with a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)/Geriatric Nursing Assistant (GNA) certification (CNA training is often free under WIOA). The responsibilities and skills required are similar.

Staff from several agencies indicated that with the recent increase in Maryland's minimum wage and the previously referenced repeal of sub-minimum wage, the people the DSPs support are actually making about the same wages as their DSP job coaches.

**Figure 10.** Direct Support Professional (DSP) Hourly Wage



In general, the DSP workforce on the Upper Shore consists of a dedicated group of people who care deeply about the people they support. However, pay has been a factor in turnover for DSPs - while they care about the people supported and find meaning in the job, they still want meaningful employment that provides the necessary income for their household. Understanding why DSPs choose this career is essential. Agencies can then develop strategies to recruit new employees who will be both dedicated to and satisfied with their career choice.

Over the course of the study, local DSP's shared what attracted them to the field and why they have remained in the field; these reasons are highlighted below:

- Not originally looking at this field, but has family members with I/DD.
- Had family members with I/DD supported by The Arc.
- Enjoys the work and enjoys helping others.
- Enjoys caring for person, feeling like "it could be me."
- Work for the satisfaction of caring for people, not for the money.
- Started as CNA but it was harder on the body.
- Volunteered when young. Knew what to expect.
- Came to industry from an *indeed.com* ad that read "if you care about people."
- Feel that it is their role to be a protector of others.

"Being a DSP isn't always sunshine and rainbows. There are days when everything goes as planned and you can only think to yourself, this must be a dream. Then there are days that you spend your 25-minute drive home in silence wondering if that cashier job at your local grocery store that pays \$15.00 an hour is still available. I found my first DSP job 6 years ago while browsing Indeed. After working as a Home Health Aide, this job looked like a walk in the park. Nobody prepared me for the adventure I had just chosen. Over the past 6 years as a DSP, I have had many unsuccessful days, but my successful days greatly outweigh those bad days.

I will never forget the day I had to help coordinate a talent show with people who have disabilities. A lady I worked with for 4 years had spent months practicing her song with her guitar teacher. She didn't know he would be there that day and her time to get on stage had come. She began playing her guitar and singing when she noticed him in the crowd. Her voice started cracking, her legs shaking, and nothing but fear could be seen in her eyes. She was so scared she would disappoint him during that 2-minute solo. I slowly made my way to the foot of the stage and knelt down to the ground, her eyes met mine and I sang the song with her as we would normally in practice. She slowly began to get her words back together and played her guitar better than I have ever heard in the weeks prior. It would have been easy to just let her walk off the stage and not finish her performance, but as a DSP my job is to help them live their best life and teach them how to overcome obstacles and challenges life throws at them.

I have found a lifelong career since becoming a DSP. Every day is a new adventure and chance to help someone reach all of their dreams."

- DSP in Talbot County

COVID-19 has shed light on the important role DSPs have in our community and specifically in the lives of people with I/DD and their families. The effects of COVID-19 have led to an awareness of who “essential” workers are and, hopefully, will lead to further discussions regarding compensation and recognition for this important workforce. Efforts are already in place to address these issues; the COVID-19 health crisis may accelerate them.

### **Career growth opportunities – creating professional identity and opportunities for recognition, wage growth, and advancement.**

It is widely recognized by the Upper Shore groups interviewed, as well as by the industry, that change is necessary not only in DSP wages and compensation, but also in recognizing DSPs as professionals. These goals can be attained through credentialing and certifications, which would provide a career pathway to advancement.

Upper Shore DSPs, as a group, were eager to learn more, develop their skills, and continue their careers in this field. DSPs cited a lack of advancement opportunity (career pathways) as a challenge, and some expressed interest in upward progression. One DSP mentioned an interest in progressing to a position providing input on decisions affecting the people supported.

Every agency and DSP cited the need for a DSP Standard Occupational Code (SOC). The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is leading a movement to create such an occupational code.

The Alliance has also transitioned from its portfolio-based certification program to the [NADSP E-Badge Academy](#)<sup>12</sup> offered through the platform Web Courseworks (**Figure 11**).

**Figure 11.** The NADSP E-Badge Academy



This program provides a mechanism for DSPs to receive recognition for acquired knowledge, skills and values. If this program is not already being used, it is worth investigating.

### **Holistic talent management – creating strategies for attraction, acquisition, retention, and transition of DSPs.**

In the recent tight job market, attracting and retaining good employees has been challenging; this is true for any employer. But the pay, compensation, and a lack of a professional identity and opportunities for recognition/advancement offer additional challenges to recruiting and retaining DSPs.

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<sup>12</sup> NADSP E-Badge Academy, Web Courseworks.

The [American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#)<sup>13</sup> estimates that,

*“Nationally more than one million new direct support positions will need to be filled by 2022. This growing demand combined with limited availability of training and education and increased expectations and requirements make it essential that there be increased investment in this vital workforce.”*

Upper Shore agencies do not have enough staff/qualified staff to meet the needs of the people supported. With fewer people entering the rural talent pool, running out of potential candidates is a challenge, unlike an urban area where new people are moving in and out all the time. This can lead to current DSP staff suffering burnout, leading to increased turnover and absenteeism, and employees leaving to take positions with fewer responsibilities or higher wages. Turnover, which includes not only the cost to recruit and replace a DSP, but also the opportunity cost of the position going unfilled, is expensive. The average cost of turnover for an entry-level position is approximately 50% of the annual salary. For a DSP earning \$11.00 an hour, replacement cost would be approximately \$12,000. Multiplying this figure by the number of vacant positions gives a quick picture of the impact of turnover. Physical and emotional effects cited included the possibility of injuries, compassion fatigue, and physical/mental stress. Mandatory overtime at several agencies was also cited as an additional stress point. In addition, the effects of COVID-19 on the DSP workforce remain to be seen. While more DSPs will be needed, the risks inherent in this career may become an important factor.

Several Upper Shore agencies indicated that funding limitations continue to be a challenge in the efforts to recruit and retain DSPs. Agencies would like to hire more DSP staff, but funding is a constraint. A desire for an opportunity to show what “a day in the life of a DSP” looks like was expressed at one agency, as it might serve as a catalyst for change. Filling a position for a DSP is not as simple as getting anybody to fill a job - DSPs have a direct impact on the quality of life of those they support. The following concerns and challenges with filling open positions were identified in project interviews and discussions:

- Pay rates are low; responsibilities are high.
- Quality of work (skills, work ethic, appearance) of candidates often does not meet needs/culture of organization.
- Expensive background checks are required.
- Lack of thorough vetting of employees causes high turnover rates that create instability for the people supported (the “just need a person to fill a position” approach).
- Increased need for DSPs as more people with disabilities move towards self-directed services (living alone, working, cooking, shopping). This requires individual care.
- Some applicants applying only as an unemployment requirement.
- Lack of quality applicants - not showing up for interviews, exhibiting unprofessional dress or manner, or failing to call when unable to come to the scheduled interview.

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<sup>13</sup> American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.



# Recommendations

## *Strategies and Best Practices*

The recommendations in this report have been modified to reflect the current COVID-19 crisis that will have long-term and far-reaching effects on the workforce picture in all industries. This is just one of many external factors outside of one's control that affect outcomes. Changes in the stock market, business closures, job loss, and other economic impacts are coming, and will have an effect on workers with I/DD and on the DSP workforce.

While strategies may need to be adapted to a new reality, the opportunities to build strong relationships and to be a champion of inclusion for the disability community will still exist. It remains essential to continue to push for and provide local, regional, and rural data for this community, so strategies to access and use this data have been added. Rural data has just started to become available and remains difficult to access. This data is essential to making informed decisions, so the people who contributed to this report, who are dedicated to advocating for the disability community, can inform their efforts.

## Project Objective 1: Increase Inclusive Employment of People with I/DD

### Awareness and perceptions – understanding the disability community

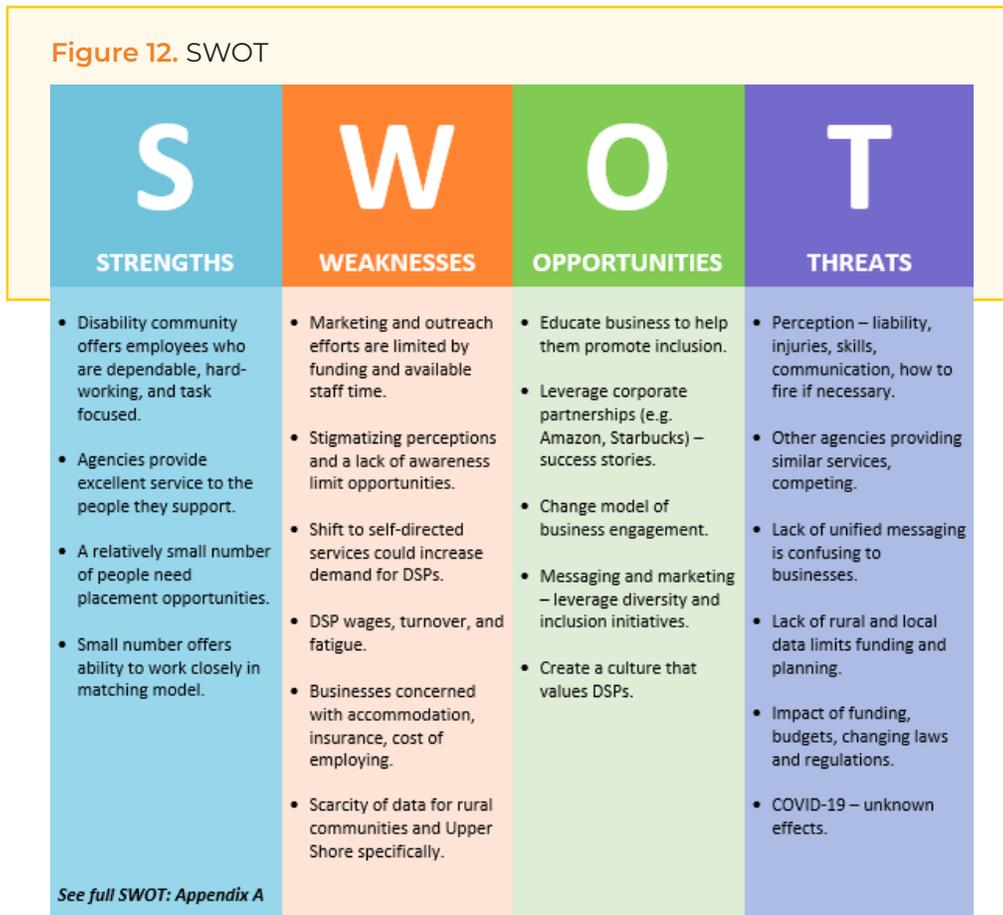
One of the two primary aims of this report is to increase meaningful and equitable employment opportunities for people with I/DD on the Upper Shore. To achieve this goal, as well as any of the other goals for this project, it is necessary to “understand the network and complexities of employment in rural communities and create awareness of the employability of the I/DD community,” as described in the project’s scope of work. Achieving this understanding and awareness is so deceptively simple that it is often overlooked in favor of visions, missions, and “selling.”

However, experience indicates that the best practices for growing networks and building awareness is not selling, but sharing information about the mission. The scope of this project resonated with the businesses, government agencies, and organizations contacted, creating an ever-widening circle of people to share it with. Many people shared a name of someone to talk to, passed contact information on to someone who later reached out, or shared their own story. It truly is all about relationships and growing a network of advocates. The recommendations and strategies that follow support a holistic approach to creating awareness about, and understanding of, this community, in order to achieve the aims of the project.

### RECOMMENDATION 1

#### **Gather and utilize local and rural data – a necessary tool.**

Challenges identified in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis (**Figure 12 and Appendix A**) included a lack of specific data from rural areas, the age of existing data, the short time frame, and small sample size for gathering data. Despite the time and sample size limitations, the data gathered locally was quite valuable and is supported by state and national data. More research is clearly in order.



While at this time, sharing local agency data with the following groups has not been requested, establishing a connection with them may offer agencies the opportunity to do so in the future. Both groups expressed an interest in hearing about the data needs of the rural communities and a willingness to provide that data. This may offer an opportunity to create more projects that gather, share, and archive local data.

## Strategies

### **Collect and share more, and better, rural data.**

1. Access rural data from the two groups who presented at the [2019 Disabilities Statistics Compendium](#)<sup>14</sup> on February 11, 2020. Currently, these groups are the primary sources for rural data.
  - UNH, Megan Henly, PhD, Institute on Disability, UNH, Durham, New Hampshire.
  - University of Montana, Catherine Ipsen, PhD, Rural Director and Director of Employment Research, Research & Training Center (RTC) on Disability in Rural Communities, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.
  - University of Montana, Lillie Greiman, RTC: Rural.
2. Explore opportunities to establish a repository for local data.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### **People with I/DD - leverage an overlooked, underutilized population of potential employees for Upper Shore businesses.**

We have established that hiring from the disability community offers real benefits to a business. Supporting and implementing diversity and inclusion strategies leads to better community integration for the disability community. This gives Upper Shore agencies opportunities to offer value-added services.

## Strategies

1. **Communicate** the real benefits that employing a person with I/DD can offer.
2. **Offer** value-added services such as input to help a business make application and interviewing systems and processes more accessible to people with a disability.
3. **Closely match** skills and abilities of people with I/DD to requirements of the job. Often job descriptions do not match the job tasks. This disconnect makes it hard to match the skills of a person with I/DD to the tasks listed, which often are not indicative of the actual tasks the employee will perform.
4. **Collaborate** with employers to develop processes that work for people with I/DD. These processes may differ from what the businessperson is accustomed to. Workforce development research has shown that helping businesses understand the communication needs of the person with I/DD creates a more positive work experience for both employer and employee.

John Elder Robison, Keynote speaker at the Neurodiversity Conference, explained why it is important to communicate clearly what an employer needs to a person with I/DD. Giving this employee a list of tasks to perform may prove difficult for them to execute; singular tasks work better to avoid confusion and give the employee a path to perform the task well.

**“Neurodiversity is the idea that humanity is by nature neurologically diverse – we have different ways of thinking that are founded in structural brain differences – and that diversity is essential to our success as a species.”**

**- John Elder Robison, Neurodiversity Scholar in Residence at The College of William and Mary**

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<sup>14</sup> 2019 Disability Statistics Compendium Conference, February 2020.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

#### **Change the model of business engagement.**

Utilize a business-first approach to understand and identify the needs of the business. Seek to achieve the best employment matches.

#### Strategies

- 1. Train** business-facing staff across all agencies in business engagement. Businesses need to know, “What’s in it for me?” Identifying and understanding the needs and the language of businesses in the community will lead to better and more productive conversations with employers. Utilizing a [\*“consultative sales process”\*](#)<sup>15</sup> pioneered by Saturn Corporation is a proven strategy that has been used across a broad range of industries.
- 2. Market** how utilizing the abilities of people with I/DD can be an opportunity to address unique workplace needs (e.g., focus, reliability, enthusiasm). Lead with the ability, rather than the disability. Employers often cannot see past a disability. It may also allow a business to meet diversity and inclusion goals in a manner that had not previously been considered.
- 3. Stop** trying to convene businesses – this leads to employer fatigue. Data from the 2013 Maryland Statewide Business Services Networking Summit<sup>16</sup>, which explored over 100 businesses’ needs for business services, indicated that almost 70% of employers expressed fatigue. Over 300 agencies were contacting them to place employees.
- 4. Develop** strategies to meet the needs of business. Listen, tour, observe, get to know the skills needed. Do job matching rather than job placement. Businesses want and need talent but may have exhausted all of their historically utilized avenues. Hiring people with I/DD may offer them an opportunity to find new employees in places never before considered.
- 5. Collaborate** with other agencies. No one agency can fill all the businesses’ workforce needs. Reach out to other agencies and share information to meet the needs of business. Identifying the needs of the business and working together to get the best match to the abilities of people with I/DD is positive for everyone.
- 6. Serve** as a trusted resource to business regarding the disability community. Move from transactional engagement to a real relationship that is mutually beneficial. Offer to assist businesses with their procedures and communications. Help them to update job descriptions, consider scheduling options, and communicate in a way that helps both the businesses and the people with I/DD to have successful working relationships. Bringing a diversity and inclusion perspective is a value-added service which builds positive relationships.
- 7. Identify** emerging and sustainable markets for employment opportunities. Many of these new fields are in the growth stage of their business cycles and may be more socially conscious and intentional about having diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. This mindset can offer people with I/DD long-term employment stability. Consider the possibility of entrepreneurship. Several business owners with disabilities were keynote speakers at the 2019 Neurodiversity in the Workplace National Conference. Families and communities are sometimes willing to work together to create a business that offers meaningful long-term employment.

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<sup>15</sup> Cleaning and Maintenance Management, *The Five Steps in the Consultative Sales Process*.

<sup>16</sup> Statewide Business Services Networking Summit 2013.

8. **Increase** the number of people who self-identify as having disabilities. This will allow for a larger talent pool across the spectrum within each category to meet the needs of businesses. As more businesses see the value and share their success stories, job placement numbers will increase.
9. **Celebrate, promote, and share** success stories from people with I/DD and their employers to build an ever-wider network of participants. This does not require a great deal of funding, only designated staff time to manage it. Utilize free or inexpensive digital platform posts and videos, if budgetary concerns limit print advertising. Digital marketing efforts make it easier to target the audience and simplifies tracking of the results of each outreach effort.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4

##### **Messaging and marketing – spread the word leveraging diversity and inclusion initiatives.**

Encouraging and training leadership, staff, and businesses to share stories is the best way to spread the word. This is easier said than achieved. The one thing almost all nonprofit organizations have in common is that employees wear multiple hats and are busy doing their jobs, especially when there are staffing shortages. It is easy to forget to share the message as we interact daily with customers and the community. Public awareness and understanding of what service providers do is minimal. Excelling at getting the word out to those who know the organization and care about it will share the message without prompting.

#### Strategies

##### **Create consistent, unified, and positive messaging.**

This is essential to growing public awareness and “moving the needle” on job matching success.

1. **Define** the brand and create a consistent, unified, and positive message. Articulating the message is essential to growing public awareness, building buy-in, and creating community awareness and support. A great deal of research and many resources are available to help nonprofits define their mission and create a brand. One of the best resources to start the process is Simon Sinek’s [“How Great Leaders Inspire Action”](#) Ted Talk.<sup>17</sup>
2. **Share** the defined message by creating an onboarding process for new employees and training for current employees. While most nonprofits have vision and mission statements, few employees can articulate them, which makes it difficult to promote the brand.
3. **Communicate** the message in all marketing, outreach, and education efforts. The team can and should serve as marketing ambassadors for the agency.
4. **Develop** a collaborative regional marketing strategy that promotes and benefits all agencies in the Upper Shore region. Pooling resources offers greater visibility in the community. Capitalize on and emulate those who have created a successful messaging campaign that has resonated with the public, like that of [“Autism Speaks.”](#)<sup>18</sup>
5. **Create** professional marketing materials with identifiable rural community members and businesses, keeping in mind the audience being addressed (businesses, people with I/DD and their families, community stakeholders). Remember who, what, when, where, why, and how when creating messaging. Ask, “What’s in it for them?” “Do they have a need for what is being offered?” “Why would they want to attend this event?”

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<sup>17</sup> TED, Simon Sinek, *How Great Leaders Inspire Action*.

<sup>18</sup> Autism Speaks.

**6. Tell the story** of what people with disabilities can teach us. Be a champion of community inclusion locally and regionally. Keep diversity and inclusion front and center. Communities thrive when building on this concept; it is what makes a community unique. More people are looking at such factors as diversity and inclusion when making decisions about where to live.

## RECOMMENDATION 5

### **Workforce practices – serve the employment needs of people with I/DD and business.**

Create a positive community and business image. Money and metrics can have a direct impact on the results, determining who is served, services provided, programs offered, and available workforce opportunities. Perception is reality – if the businesses perceive that people with I/DD cannot meet the needs of the business, it becomes more difficult to serve the needs of both groups. Working to change perceptions serves to keep agencies relevant and engaged.

### Strategies

#### **Speak in business language to be relevant to business.**

**1. Develop** uniform language across industry/region to avoid confusion when communicating with businesses. Work together to create a language that refers to service providers, persons supported, and business-facing staff by consistent titles. **Figure 13** lists the terminology encountered. Each uses a different term for a person or position within an agency.

**Figure 13.** Examples of Inconsistent Terminology

<u>Business Facing Staff</u>	<u>People In Services</u>
• Job coach	• People receiving services
• Employment specialist	• Call by their names
• Business Services Representative	• Individuals we serve
• Supported employment specialist	• People we support
• Job developers	• People they serve
• Supported employment team	• Participants
• DSC = life area leader	• Individuals
• Career Consultants	• Clients

**2. Communicate** in the language that business uses. Understand their needs and learn important terms (e.g., return on investment [ROI], bottom line, turnover, retention).

### Strategies

#### **Be present in the business community – get a seat at the workforce table.**

A representative for the disability community should be involved in every Upper Shore workforce meeting and discussion. Too often, this community does not have a voice in workforce decisions. In addition, the disability community is not “top of mind” when businesses are seeking workforce solutions. The most often-heard comment from businesspeople was “I never thought of that.”

- 1.** Create strong working partnerships that offer opportunities to “spread the message.”
  - a.** Chambers of Commerce – businesses with workforce needs often approach the Chamber first. Be a member and attend their functions to take advantage of networking opportunities. Take advantage of services offered like Constant Contact or e-mail blasts. It is important that partners understand the message and can be a part of marketing efforts.

- b. American Job Centers – connectors of business and jobseekers to jobs, training, and funding. These partners offer connection to businesses in need if it is clear that the talent matches the needs of a business or program.
- c. WIOA partners – connection to resources, training, and funding. This includes the Upper Shore Workforce Development Board, DORS, Department of Social Services (DSS), and more.
- d. Economic Development – new and existing businesses approach them with workforce needs. Increase awareness of organization resources and how these resources can be beneficial to local businesses.
- e. Other service provider agencies – it is important to work collaboratively as no one agency can meet the workforce needs of all businesses.

## **Project Objective 2: Decrease Employment Gaps for DSPs on the Upper Shore**

While initially it was noted that DSP positions available on the Upper Shore are generally well-filled, gaps did exist, often due to funding restrictions; this, however, can fluctuate, and may also be impacted by COVID-19 – something that should be investigated further. Several agencies' staff also noted a lack of suitable, available talent to fill DSP positions. As the number of people with I/DD increases, the need for more DSPs also grows. In addition, as more people with disabilities turn to self-directed, one-to-one services, a greater number of DSPs will be needed.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

#### ***Pay and compensation – create a culture that values DSPs.***

Create a culture where all staff (particularly DSPs) understand a DSPs' role, its importance and contribution, and its impact in the community.

#### **Strategies**

##### ***Address pay issues – the number one concern for Upper Shore DSPs.***

Every DSP, agency administrative staff person, and team member interviewed identified pay as the number one issue affecting recruitment and retention. The [Report to the President 2017](#)<sup>10</sup> confirms that this is a major issue not just on the Upper Shore, but throughout the nation. While the data in this report is from 2017, it remains relevant to the current situation.

1. **Seek** additional funding and revenue sources.
  - a. **Grow** awareness and support for the mission through better messaging and marketing that encourages donations and planned giving. This not only increases revenue, which gives leverage when requesting funding, but also allows the agency to ask for community support for legislative actions.
  - b. **Educate** the community about the value of DSPs and the ever-increasing need for people to fill this important role.
  - c. **Build/grow** an Upper Shore coalition among agencies to advocate for higher wages, certifications, and recognition for DSPs as a profession. Leverage the DDA mandated Community of Practice (CoP) group. This group of agency representatives meets regularly. Some agency professionals, who expressed an interest in creating such a group, may not be engaged in the existing group. This offers the opportunity to grow the existing group into a larger, more active team focusing on action and advocacy.

2. **Create** professional identity and opportunities for recognition and wage growth.
  - a. **Work** with local and state legislators to advocate for higher wages, professional standards, and an occupational code for DSPs.
  - b. **Develop** an Upper Shore model leading to credentialing or certification of staff that leads to higher wages. Seek out existing models and best practices from organizations that are reaching for the same changes, such as the NADSP E-Badge Academy or the New York Career Gear Up model (**Figure 14**). A full description of this program is archived in the [Report to the President 2017's Appendix D](#), pages 57-58 as well as this report's **Appendix D**<sup>10</sup>.

**Figure 14.** New York Career Gear Up Credential Model and Framework



- c. **Leverage** efforts to enact legislative changes through professional associations or legislative groups such as the [NADSP](#)<sup>19</sup>, whose mission is to “elevate the status of direct support professionals by improving practice standards; promoting system reform; and advancing their knowledge, skills and values.”

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### **Build career growth opportunities – creating professional identity, opportunities for recognition, wage growth and advancement.**

While pay issues were the most-frequently cited concern for Upper Shore DSPs, career growth opportunities (or the lack of them) were also a major concern. There is no clear vision of a career pathway to advancement or growth within the field. The strategies below, applied at the local level, are equally applicable on a national scale.

#### Strategies

1. **Communicate** clear organizational pathways that allow staff to move vertically and horizontally within the organization.
2. **Encourage** staff to get involved in professional trainings, conferences, and organizations. Questions to address: Can staff go to conferences? Is there a system to get their duties covered while at a conference? Are these paid for by the agency? Answering yes to these three questions sets the organization on a path to accomplishing this strategy.
3. **Look** for shining stars within or around the organization to mentor and groom for higher level positions. This leads to better succession planning; as staff leave, others have been prepared to move up and efficiently fill vacancies while building staff loyalty.

<sup>19</sup> National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP), *Establish a Direct Support Professional Occupational Code*.

- 4. Push** for a DSP SOC. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not have a specific occupational category for DSPs who provide supports for people with I/DD. The lack of this designation limits funding and resources. Join the movement to establish a DSP SOC through the USDOL's Bureau of Labor.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

#### **Practice holistic talent management – creating strategies for attraction, acquisition, retention, and transition of DSPs.**

The anticipated future demand for DSPs will require thoughtful and intentional recruiting, acquisition, and retention strategies. DSPs are part of the same talent pool staffing nursing homes, private companies providing in-home care, and other nonprofit agencies, so there are many choices available. Although this is a low-paying job, the people employed as DSPs in the Upper Shore region are caring people who are proud of the work performed, which is often overlooked and under-appreciated, but the pay received does not reflect that pride. The [Report to the President 2017](#) supports this local finding:

*“In the U.S., workers often feel value, respect and status based on their rate of pay; however, DSPs’ wages are so low that they do not bring forth the sense of value and respect this highly skilled profession deserves.”<sup>10</sup>*

Getting the right people in these positions requires that we recognize the value the DSP workforce brings to our organizations and the community.

#### Strategies

##### **Refine attraction, acquisition, retention efforts, and transition of DSPs.**

- 1. Recruit** by appealing to reasons why people join the profession and remain in it. Upper Shore DSPs frequently cited feelings of caring, giving, making a difference, and a sense of family as the reasons for entering this profession. Use ads that invite people like the Indeed ad that read, “if you care about people” as reported by one Upper Shore DSP.
- 2. Target** people, groups and populations.
  - a.** People who have family members that have a disability may be more likely to consider being a DSP as a career.
  - b.** Demographic groups whom research has shown are already filling these positions. In addition, the U.S. Census anticipates that most population growth in the coming decades will be linked to new Asian and Hispanic/Latino immigration.<sup>20</sup> Not only will this provide more job candidates, but people with I/DD in these populations will need caregivers who speak their language.
  - a.** People who know someone who has a disability. If one can identify and relate, that person may want to be a part of the solution to many of the workforce challenges.
- 3. Share** how advocacy efforts and the industry are changing to improve the lives of DSPs and the community. When working on wages, credentialing, certifications, and advancement opportunities, be sure to share the stories.

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<sup>20</sup> PHI National: *Creating a Strong Direct Support Workforce*.

4. **Create** a plan that includes strategies and messaging for each stage of the work cycle (attraction, acquisition, retention and transition). Describe what should happen at each stage. This includes succession planning internally.
5. **Recruit** DSPs at community events while informing the public about the organization’s mission, activities, and efforts to support people with I/DD within the community.
6. **Take the time** to recruit and screen well. Finding the right staff creates a better work environment, experience, engagement, and results in longer-term employees. Do not simply fill an open position with any candidate.
7. **Bring** education into the conversation. Introduce K-12 to these careers and work with them on training or apprenticeship opportunities. Attend career fairs and partner with Career and Technology Center staff.
8. **Present** DSP positions as an entry point to a nursing career, in the manner of a CNA/GNA.

### General Recommendation: Adapt to a changing workforce world

Opportunities always hide within challenges. The coming economic crisis creates a changing workforce climate, along with everything we “know” about work, how it is performed, and who does it. How services and products are delivered will change as well.

#### Strategy

##### **Create plans to adapt to impacts from external factors.**

Address factors that are out of our direct control that will have an impact on workforce processes. While not a part of this study, the current COVID-19 crisis is a massive external influence. Planning for emergencies is essential and cannot be ignored when considering a multidimensional approach to workforce development.

1. **Create** and implement a strategic plan that contains emergency preparedness and continuity of operations information.
2. **Study** and understand factors that will have direct and indirect influences on the services the agency provides. Factors include:
  - a. COVID-19 and other emergencies
  - b. Changes in stock market
  - c. Trade
  - d. Business closings
  - e. Job loss
  - f. Economic impacts
  - g. Disasters – natural or man-made
  - h. Storms, flooding, sea level rise, and climate change
  - i. Emerging markets
3. Understand effects of unemployment and how it affects recruiting efforts.
  - a. One agency indicated an uptick in the availability and hiring of DSPs during the Great Recession of the late 2000’s. National data supports this phenomenon. According to the [Report to the President 2017](#):

“When unemployment rates are lower, it is more difficult to fill vacancies. During and immediately following the Great Recession, with unemployment rates hovering around 10 percent, most service providers experienced substantial relief from the pressure of high vacancy rates. As economic conditions have improved and general workforce participation has decreased (from 66 percent of all residents 16 years and older in March 2007, to 63 percent in March 2017), employers of DSPs have felt the workforce crunch more than ever.”<sup>10</sup>

- b. Unemployment rates also affect the availability of employment opportunities for people with I/DD. [\*The Disproportionate Impact of the Great Recession on Workers with Disabilities\*](#) indicates,

“Between October 2008 and October 2009, the number of employed working-age adults with disabilities declined by 13.6 percent, more than three times the 4.2 percent drop among working-age adults without disabilities. As shown in Figure 1\*, there was a substantial decline in employment, for both those with and without disabilities, between October 2008 and January 2009, after which the levels held more or less steady until July, though perhaps improving a little over the summer of 2009 (suggesting seasonality, which will be explored in the next section). Beginning in August, however, a large decline in employment is apparent only for workers with disabilities, dropping significantly from 5.2 percent below the initial level in July to 12.0 percent below the initial level in August, and then further declining in the subsequent two months.”<sup>2</sup>

- c. Plan and watch for changing market conditions as an indicator of coming workforce opportunities and challenges.
- d. Be aware of the cyclical nature of employment and unemployment rates.

### Coalition Recommendation: Broaden the scope

One of the objectives of this project was to establish a diverse coalition of thought leaders from each county. Its purpose would be to increase awareness and understanding of Upper Shore challenges and opportunities within the disability field that would lead to an informed approach to meeting those challenges and opportunities. While the idea of a coalition was presented to and discussed with persons encountered throughout this project, a coalition was not formed. Fully defining the purpose and objectives of the coalition as well as a concerted effort to recruit for the coalition would be necessary to form the cohort. This report should help inform next steps if a coalition is to be established or if other existing groups are to be leveraged.

### Strategy

#### ***Build on existing groups serving this purpose.***

1. **Revise** the scope and definition of the coalition to meet this objective. The thought leaders sought for this coalition include members of the advisory board for the Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board, whose membership must be at least 51% from the business community. Instead of trying to create a new, disabilities-focused coalition, the Upper Shore might be better served by joining these groups to promote an inclusive approach that integrates the disability community into the workforce community.
2. **Build or revitalize** an Upper Shore coalition of agency leaders. Many agency administration staff expressed excitement about collaborating. This Upper Shore coalition differs from the CoP group, which is for the entire Eastern Shore of Maryland.

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\* The "Figure 1" referenced is from the report "The Disproportionate Impact of the Great Recession on Workers with Disabilities."

- 3. Identify** groups whose purpose and mission aligns with and supports those of the disability community. Collaborating with these groups can help spread a positive message and bring awareness to challenges and opportunities. Think differently – while the Maryland State Police (MSP) would not appear to be an obvious choice for a coalition member, each year MSP sponsor the Polar Bear Plunge and raise both awareness and a great deal of money (over \$3M this year) to benefit Special Olympics. Guy Fieri and Tom Brady's [Best Buddies International](#)<sup>21</sup> program is dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of people with I/DD. Connecting with groups such as these could offer an opportunity to gain coalition members. Consider local chapters of Shriners, Wounded Warriors, Autism Speaks, and others. These members could bring new energy to exploring workforce opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

As this report is written in early 2020, it is clear that the Upper Shore region will be impacted by pressing social and economic issues the country is currently facing. While the outcomes of these forces are not yet known, the systems improvement and relationship building strategies offered herein are still relevant.

A catalyst for this project was a message heard often from businesses that they cannot find workers. While this applies to potential employers of people with I/DD, it applies equally to the attraction and retention of DSPs.

This study revealed that decreasing employment gaps as it pertains to DSPs on the Upper Shore is a daunting challenge that will not be quickly or easily remedied. Creating a system of holistic talent management will require thoughtful and intentional recruiting, acquisition, and retention strategies. Foremost among these strategies is addressing pay and overall compensation issues. The lack of a SOC, strained agency budgets, and the historically lower wage rates offered in the region are all factors contributing to this issue. A changing perception of “essential workers” as defined by the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis may accelerate this process, as it brings attention to the value of this sometimes overlooked and underpaid workforce.

This study also revealed that agencies and staff provide excellent service by putting the needs of the people they support first. Ironically, this can actually be counter-productive to understanding employment in rural communities and promoting awareness of the employability of people with I/DD. Communicating what is in it for the business is key to creating more employment opportunities for the people in the disability community.

Building the model described in this report, one that puts the needs of business first, not only addresses this issue, but also achieves the project goal to increase employment of people with I/DD. This is not to say that this model ignores the needs of the worker; starting with the needs of the business creates a process that creates positive results for both employer and employee.

Creating an awareness of the advantages of employing people with I/DD, an express aim of this study, is a process. It creates an ever-widening circle of awareness about workforce opportunities for people with disabilities on the Upper Shore, building on enthusiasm and positive results to create even more

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<sup>21</sup> Best Buddies International.

employment opportunities (**Figure 15**). Utilizing it will create more workforce opportunities for the I/DD community by establishing a holistic workforce model for the Upper Shore that is both inclusive and diverse. Such new concepts often come more slowly to rural communities, which can be an advantage, offering time to study and use strategies learned from early adopters.

Looking at workforce only through the lens of disability (and more specifically I/DD) narrows the focus. Broaden the view to imagine an inclusive, holistic workplace where people with disabilities are an integrated part of the workforce. Making this community's voice heard in policy and decision making at Federal, State, and local levels can lead to achievement of this view.

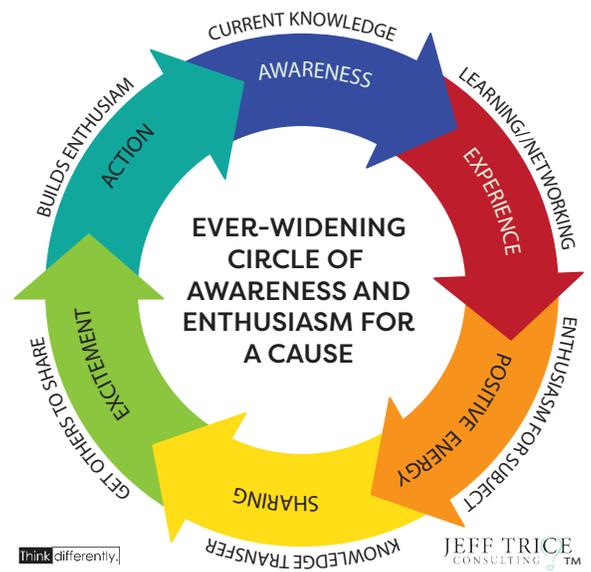
According to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities' [Report to the President 2017](#),

"In the United States, people with intellectual and related developmental disability (ID/DD) live, participate in and contribute to their communities as friends, neighbors, co-workers, voters and taxpayers. These individuals have a wide range of limitations, and many have lifelong needs that require ongoing assistance from others. People with ID/DD have substantial and lasting mental or physical impairments that are evident at birth or in the developmental period and require assistance and support in areas of learning, language, self-care, making decisions, independent living and finding and keeping employment."<sup>10</sup>

This statement from a national report applies locally. It also underlines the importance of the organizations that support people with I/DD. This project brought exposure, conversation, and awareness of the advantages of inclusion to the Upper Shore region's business, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and communities.

Creating a paradigm shift in the definition of diversity and inclusion, and sharing that message, could expand opportunities for people with I/DD on the Upper Shore. The process of gathering local data scratched the surface and started a conversation about inclusion. Much more work needs to be done to promote awareness, acceptance, and eventually, achieve true inclusion.

**Figure 15.** Ever-Widening Circle of Awareness and Enthusiasm for a Cause



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## APPENDIX A – SWOT Analysis Methodology

### GOAL

Conduct assessment of Upper Shore via Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis.

The SWOT assessment required at least three (3) key stakeholders from each of the five (5) counties to provide input. This goal was exceeded; participants are listed below.

### BACKGROUND

The Arc provides supports and services to people with I/DD on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and in Anne Arundel County. The Eastern Shore has unique challenges due to its rurality. The Arc, with funding from a RMC FY2020 MAERDAF grant, aims to develop strategies to serve as a mutual benefit to human service providers to decrease employment gaps as it pertains to DSPs and increase inclusive employment of people with I/DD.

### OBJECTIVES OF SWOT

- Research and analyze employment trends in the five counties of the Upper Eastern Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot). This would include a comprehensive approach towards increasing employment to meet the critical need for DSPs and increase meaningful and equitable employment opportunities for people with I/DD.
- Understand the networking complexities of employment in rural communities and create awareness of the employability of people with I/DD.
- Form partnerships with businesses in the five counties, developing a network aimed at helping people connect, share resources, and build capacity in the region. These partners will establish a coalition of thought leaders to participate in a needs assessment and collaborate in a partnership capacity.

### CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

- Lack of specific data for rural areas.
- Age of all data; much is not current.
- Short time frame to gather information from local resources.
- Sample size is statistically small (but quite valuable, as data gathered locally is supported by state and national research data).

### METHODOLOGY & SWOT PROCESS

Two strategies were used to gather information to achieve the goals of this project.

Primary data collected:

- Five (5) listening sessions, one in each of the five counties.
- In-person and phone interviews with:
  - The Arc
  - Benedictine School
  - Caroline Center
  - Chesapeake Center
  - Kent Center
  - DSPs and administrative staff across agencies listed above
  - Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) staff

- Dorchester County Department of Social Services (DSS)
- Maryland State Senator Addie Eckardt
- Maryland State Delegate Johnny Mautz
- Dan McDermott, Executive Director, Upper Shore Workforce Investment Board, and staff
- Mike DiGiacomo, Executive Director of the Governor's Workforce Investment Board
- Kelly Schulz, Maryland Secretary of Commerce
- Jim Rzepkowski, Assistant Secretary, Division of Workforce Development & Adult Learning at Maryland Department of Labor (MDDOL)
- Economic Development and Chamber Directors across all five counties
- Businesses across all five counties
- Citizens within all five counties
- Local government staff across all five counties
- Parents/caregivers across all five counties
- Business facing staff across all five counties
- Questionnaires:
  - DSPs
  - Businesses
  - Business-facing staff
  - Parents and caregivers
  - Service providers/agencies
- Conferences and meetings:
  - Shore Economic Development (SED) Talks, Chesapeake College
  - Neurodiversity Conference, national conference in Linthicum
  - Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) Maryland meeting, Chesapeake College
  - 2019 Rural Maryland Summit with RMC
  - The Arc Maryland Listening Session, Cambridge
  - Maryland Economic Development Association Winter Conference
  - Annual Disability Statistic Compendium, Washington, District of Columbia (D.C.)
  - Dorchester County Chamber Annual Meeting, Cambridge

This project process advocated for and brought awareness about this project to a large group of Upper Shore stakeholders and citizens, in an effort to share information about the employability of persons with I/DD (as well as persons with other disabilities) and the contributions people with I/DD can offer to their communities.

This includes over 289 contacts:

- 53 businesses across five counties
- 10 DSPs
- 7 business-facing staff from agencies
- 27 service provider and agency staff members
- 180 community stakeholders including state and local elected officials
- 12 parents and caregivers

Secondary data:

- Internet research
- Neurodiversity Conference materials, notes, and discussions
- 2019 Disability Statistic Compendium data, resources and discussions

While researching and analyzing the national data is both necessary and useful, local information gathered from the primary sources provides much more relevant information and offers an opportunity to use a strategic and collaborative approach. This approach was essential to building positive relationships, and increasing awareness of the project, as well as growing awareness about the disability community at large. The availability of secondary sources with relevant local information is limited.

## **STRENGTHS**

- Hiring from the disability community offers some real benefits to a business. These benefits include getting employees who are dependable, hard-working, and task-focused. Some businesses have discovered that when they hire employees with I/DD, they need to better communicate processes and workflows. When they do this, it improves communication and systems for all employees and results in a more efficient workplace. They have also found that hiring employees from the disability community has a positive effect on the company culture. Bringing diversity and inclusion to the workplace also grows acceptance and tolerance among employees and customers.
- Agency customers include both internal and external (businesses, people with I/DD and their parents/caregivers, DSPs). Agencies do a good job of helping the community they serve. They provide excellent service to people with I/DD by putting their needs first.
- The relatively small number of people served in this community offers the opportunity for very specific, personalized matching of skills and abilities to business needs. This offers the opportunity to create better systems and processes that lead to job placements that create long-term employment that meets the needs of both the business and the person with I/DD.

## **WEAKNESSES**

- A common challenge among nonprofit organizations is getting the word out about what they do. The findings of this study support the same conclusion regarding agencies serving the disability community in the Upper Shore area. Despite the long-term existence of many of these agencies, public awareness and understanding of what they do is quite low. Marketing and outreach efforts are limited by funding, and as budgets tighten, fewer and fewer funds are available for these efforts. This creates a communication spiral that can limit access to additional funding.
- While progress is being made, and partner businesses are becoming advocates for hiring from the disability community, there is still the challenge of long-held perceptions, the stigma or stereotype, and simply a lack of awareness that limits that progress. In addition, there is a perception that agencies only deliver one type of employee, which leads most job placements to fall into what the industry refers to as the “4 Fs.”
- Prospects include people with I/DD's parents or caregivers, DSPs, and businesses. Each may have a variety of objections to utilizing services.
  - For people with I/DD's parents, this may include not utilizing an agency, as they have taken on the role that the agency would fill. The impact of “Employment First,” the recent repeal of sub-minimum wage, and the increase of minimum wage were identified as concerns for this group.
  - The most frequently-cited DSP challenges were around wages. Industry-wide, wages are similar to the wages offered by businesses like Target and Chick-fil-A, but the responsibilities in these

positions are far greater. The lack of advancement opportunity (career pathways) was also a challenge. In addition, the physical and emotional efforts faced in DSP positions can lead to injuries, compassion fatigue, and increased turnover among these service providers.

- Businesses are often simply not aware or lack an understanding that the disability community may be a solution to their workforce challenges. Concerns include meeting accommodation needs, insurance issues, and the cost of employing someone from this community (many assume another employee will be needed to help the employee).
- A scarcity of data for rural communities has been identified in the course of this study. While conclusions can be extrapolated from statewide data, the lack of local data dictates that more data capture and sharing would benefit the entire community.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- It is clear that the need for more and better conversation with businesses and the public is overwhelming. The message that including the disability community in the workforce can bring benefits to all parties, something heard from quite a few of the employers, should be widely shared. This offers the opportunity to share stories of workforce success. Administration and staff have the opportunity to share what they do, why they do it, where the agency is located, and how it benefits all concerned, not just the people they support. Asking businesses to share their stories with other businesses may improve the number of businesses giving this “untapped workforce solution” a try. Building corporate partnerships has proven to be successful in future job matching efforts. Success begets success.
- Changing from a job placement process to a matching process will improve results. This is the same process that should be happening in any talent acquisition process. The only placement that works is one where the right fit has been determined by matching business needs with the person’s needs, skills, and abilities. Businesses want to be pleased and satisfied with their hiring decisions, as do the workers and the agencies. This allows for long-term employment relationships for all parties involved.
- Changes in awareness have been observed as businesses and the community at large were engaged about this project. People are becoming more aware of the disability community and the talents they can offer to an employer. As more people spread the message, better understanding, acceptance, and integration will be present in the workplace and communities.
- Another opportunity available to agencies includes offering assistance to businesses with reviewing job descriptions and offering input to make application and interviewing systems and processes more accessible to the disability community, as well as the community at large (value added service). Utilizing these strategies to create inclusive hiring practices could also aid the agencies with attraction, acquisition, retention, and transitioning of their own staff.

## **THREATS**

- Business perception and beliefs around liability, injuries, skills, communication, how to fire if necessary, and accommodations. A businessperson may not want to consider an employee from the disability community as a workforce solution, perceiving that it may cause them additional problems, thus causing their existing challenges to compound. This is generally caused by a lack of information, understanding, or awareness.
- There are multiple agencies across the region providing similar services that could be viewed as competition. All are working towards the common goal of assisting this population, improving their lives and providing employment opportunities. Collective, unified messaging would benefit the whole industry.

- Inconsistent workforce practices exist among agencies, since they often operate in silos, working on their own programs and projects in ways that make sense for that organization. This inconsistency in systems and processes can lead to confusion as families try to evaluate and choose an agency to work with, how services will be delivered, and how potential employees decide who they may want to work for.
- Inconsistent workforce practices within agencies can come from a variety of places. Funding, funding sources, and metrics often dictate what and how services and programs are developed and administered. These do not necessarily align with the purpose, mission, and goals of an organization. They often drive the two apart and cause confusion for staff. Changing laws, regulations, and directives have the same effect.
- There is a lack of a unified message among the parties serving workforce needs of the disability community. Agencies use different terms for services and providers. These inconsistencies can make it difficult for someone outside the industry (business/employers) to understand the process. In an effort to improve the language being used, it would make sense to align with the terms and language being used at national and international levels (e.g., neurodivergent, neurodiversity and neurotypical).
- Other challenges include weak messaging, few data collection systems, and the lack of a data repository. Rural data in particular is inconsistent, extremely difficult to access, and yet critical when seeking funding.
- Funding, budgets, laws, and regulations continue to impact the industry in both positive and negative ways.
- There is the threat of under-delivering to businesses that have workforce needs and have agreed to work with the disability community to fill them. It is imperative that the agencies can offer enough talent to meet the needs of these partner businesses, as offering a solution and not being able to actually provide it will be detrimental to long-term relationships. Continued vacancies often restrict business growth and expansion, therefore creating fewer job opportunities for all.
- Businesses often lack understanding of how this untapped workforce solution can check many of the boxes that they have been asking for: improved attendance, higher production, greater profitability, a diverse and inclusive culture, and better overall results.
- Business and community resistance. It is always easier to do things the way we have always done them. Trying something perceived as new and challenging takes everyone out of their comfort zones.
- The logistics of providing workforce services for the disability community in a rural area, with little public transportation and often long distances to travel to a job, offer additional challenges. The average commuting pattern is 40 miles in rural Maryland. This limits employment opportunities for this population, especially in higher skill level positions.
- Service providers may not have enough staff/qualified staff to meet the needs of the people they serve. This can lead to current staff suffering burnout, increased turnover, and people leaving to positions with fewer responsibilities or higher pay.
- Businesses and their existing staff may not know or understand how to communicate with people with varying forms of disabilities.
- Other considerations impacting workforce opportunities for this community are employment and unemployment rates, poverty rates, and labor participation rates overall and for this population. Employment rates are generally lower, unemployment rates are generally higher, poverty rates are generally higher, and labor participation rates are generally lower compared to the population at large. Nationally, 38% employment rate overall with a 26.9% poverty rate among the disabilities community in the latest 2019 study from Disability Statistics Compendium conducted by the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire (UNH).

## APPENDIX B – Summary of Recommendations

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Project Objective 1: Increase Inclusive Employment of People with I/DD

##### RECOMMENDATION 1

###### ***Gather and utilize local and rural data – a necessary tool.***

Challenges identified in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis included a lack of specific data from rural areas, the age of existing data, and the short time frame and small sample size for gathering data. Despite the time and sample size limitations, the data gathered locally was quite valuable and is supported by state and national data. More research is clearly in order.

While at this time, sharing local agency data with the following groups has not been requested, establishing a connection with them may offer agencies the opportunity to do so in the future. Both groups expressed an interest in hearing about the data needs of the rural communities and a willingness to provide that data. This may offer an opportunity to create more projects that gather, share, and archive local data.

##### RECOMMENDATION 2

###### ***People with I/DD – leverage an overlooked, underutilized population of potential employees for Upper Shore businesses.***

We have established that hiring from the disability community offers real benefits to a business. Supporting and implementing diversity and inclusion strategies leads to better community integration for the disability community. This gives Upper Shore agencies opportunities to offer value-added services.

##### RECOMMENDATION 3

###### ***Change the model of business engagement.***

Utilize a business-first approach to understand and identify the needs of the business. Seek to achieve the best employment matches.

##### RECOMMENDATION 4

###### ***Messaging and marketing – spread the word leveraging diversity and inclusion initiatives.***

Encouraging and training leadership, staff, and businesses to share stories is the best way to spread the word. This is easier said than achieved. The one thing almost all nonprofit organizations have in common is that the employees wear multiple hats and are busy doing their jobs, especially when there are staffing shortages. It is easy to forget to share the message as we interact daily with customers and the community. Public awareness and understanding of what service providers do is minimal. Excelling at getting the word out to those who know the organization and care about it will share the message without prompting.

##### RECOMMENDATION 5

###### ***Workforce practices – serve the employment needs of people with I/DD and business.***

Create a positive community and business image. Money and metrics can have a direct impact on the results, determining who is served, services provided, programs offered, and available workforce opportunities. Perception is reality - if the businesses perceive that people with I/DD cannot meet the needs of the business, it becomes more difficult to serve the needs of both groups. Working to change perceptions serves to keep agencies relevant and engaged.

## Project Objective 2: Decrease Employment Gaps for DSPs on the Upper Shore

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

#### ***Pay and compensation – create a culture that values DSPs.***

Create a culture where all staff (particularly DSPs) understand a DSP's role, its importance and contribution, and its impact on the disability community.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

#### ***Build career growth opportunities – creating professional identity and opportunities for recognition, wage growth, and advancement.***

While pay issues were the most-frequently cited concern for Upper Shore DSPs, career growth opportunities (or the lack of them) were also a major concern. There is no clear vision of a career pathway to advancement or growth within the field.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

#### ***Practice holistic talent management – creating strategies for attraction, acquisition, retention, and transition of DSPs.***

The anticipated future demand for DSPs will require thoughtful and intentional recruiting, acquisition, and retention strategies. DSPs are part of the same talent pool for nursing homes, private companies providing in-home care, and other nonprofit agencies, so there are many choices available. Although this is a low-paying job, the individuals employed as DSPs in the Upper Shore region are caring people who are proud of the work performed, which is often overlooked and under-appreciated, but the pay received does not reflect that pride.

## Other Recommendations

### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATION**

#### ***Adapt to a changing workforce world.***

Opportunities always hide within challenges. The coming economic crisis creates a changing workforce climate, along with everything we “know” about work, how it is performed, and who does it. How services and products are delivered will change as well.

### **COALITION RECOMMENDATION**

#### ***Broaden the scope.***

One of the objectives of this project was to establish a diverse coalition of thought leaders from each county. Its purpose would be to increase awareness and understanding of Upper Shore challenges and opportunities within the disability field that would lead to an informed approach to meeting those challenges and opportunities. While the idea of a coalition was presented to and discussed with persons encountered throughout this project, a coalition was not formed. Fully defining the purpose and objectives of the coalition as well as a concerted effort to recruit for the coalition would be necessary to form the cohort. This report should help inform next steps if a coalition is to be established or if other existing groups are to be leveraged.

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## APPENDIX D – Career Gear Up New York Model



### KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS OF THE NEW YORK DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL (DSP) CREDENTIALING MODEL

1. Multi-tiered credential with a hybrid model of learning methods. The Credentials must be achieved in sequence, beginning with DSP Credential I. Proposed training opportunities include on-line training, interactive classroom learning and work-based learning opportunities—
  - a. DSP Credential I includes 50 hours of training: 20 hours on-line, 10 hours classroom training, and 20 hours of work-based learning
  - b. DSP Credential II includes 100 hours of training: 40 hours on-line, 20 hours classroom training, and 40 hours of work-based learning
    - Includes a specialization emphasis in one of four areas: Supporting Older Adults, Behavioral Support, Autism Spectrum Disorders, or Complex Medical Needs.
  - c. DSP Credential III (Mentor) includes 40 hours of training: 12 hours on-line, 8 hours classroom training, and 20 hours of work-based learning.
    - Includes an emphasis on person-centered planning, as well as preparing mentors to support other learners through credentialing.
  - d. Frontline Supervision and Management Credential includes 40 hours of training:
    - 20 hours on-line, 5 hours classroom, and 15 hours work-based learning. It may be completed after achieving the DSP Credential
2. Valid, recognized competency-based skills and knowledge requirements. These are the identified outcomes that will be assessed across the credential program. The competencies used as the basis of the credentialing program are —
  - a. New York State DSP Core Competency Goals
    - Putting people first
    - Building & maintaining positive relationships
    - Demonstrating professionalism
    - Supporting good health
    - Supporting safety
    - Having a home
    - Being active and productive in society
  - b. National Frontline Supervisor (FLSs) Competencies. These also used in NADSP's Credentialing for Frontline Supervisors
    - Direct support
    - Health, wellness, and safety
    - Participant support plan development, monitoring, and assessment
    - Facilitating community inclusion across the lifespan
    - Promoting professional relations and teamwork
    - Staff recruitment, selection, and hiring

- Staff supervision, training, and development
  - Service management and quality assurance
    - Advocacy and public relations
    - Leadership, professionalism, and self-development
    - Cultural awareness and responsiveness
3. Voluntary enrollment at employer's discretion. DSPs will not be mandated to complete credentials in order to serve as a DSP. DSPs must satisfactorily complete their employer's required probationary period before beginning credential training. Additionally, DSPs must complete the following years of service to qualify for credential assessments —
    - a. DSP Credential I Assessments may be completed only after the DSP has clocked at least 1 year of full-time employment as a DSP.
    - b. DSP Credential II Assessments may be completed only after the DSP has clocked at least 2 years of full-time employment as a DSP.
  4. Incremental annual enrollment growth targets over five years —
 

Annual targeted growth —

1st Cohort = Yrs. 1 & 2 = 3 percent of DSPs statewide

2nd Cohort = Yrs. 2 & 3 = add 2 percent of DSPs statewide

3rd Cohort = Yrs. 3 & 4 = add 5 percent of DSPs statewide

4th Cohort = Yrs. 4 & 5 = add 5 percent of DSPs statewide

5th Cohort = Yrs. 5 & 6 = add 5 percent of DSPs statewide
  5. Employers will receive rate incentives to cover educational costs and increased DSP wages. Employers will be awarded these incentives if they meet per-determined enrollment thresholds (e.g. 3 percent, 5 percent, 10 percent). Wage incentives will be awarded to DSPs with successful completion of assessments at each credential level.
  6. Individuals with disabilities will be involved in on-line, classroom, and work-based educational components.
  7. Program governance will be overseen by an independent, third-party credentialing program body. This will be a newly established governing body who will provide recommendations for curriculum and assessment at each level of the credential —
    - a. Assessment will include on-the-job skill demonstration by the supervisor or skill mentor (initial, proficient and advanced levels), response to scenario testing (initial and proficient levels) and written test (advanced and specialized levels).
    - b. The governing body will also provide guidance on curriculum by identifying required instructional criteria for approved instructional programs.
    - c. A Request for Proposal could be released by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to determine credentialing organization.
  8. A Board of Directors will guide and inform the governing body. The Board of Directors will include DSPs, FLSs, provider organizations, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members, content experts and individuals with expertise in credentialing/ certification and instructional design.
  9. A Grandperson Clause will allow experienced DSPs and FLSs chosen by their employers to be assessed for the credential without coursework. Such experienced DSPs and FLSs must complete the probationary period at least two years prior to the implementation of the credential program.
  10. Completion of continuing education requirement of 36 hours every three years in order to keep the credential active. Certified DSPs and FLSs submit qualifying activities to the governing body. Acceptable continuing education units are those whose topics are directly aligned with the content of the New York DSP Core Competencies published by OPWDD. This requirement applies to newly certified DSPs after they renew their registration for the first time.
  11. Overall evaluation of credentialing program on service quality. Program effectiveness will be monitored on a statewide and organizational level using longitudinal indicators, such as retention rates, injury rates, and reduction of avoidable hospitalizations.

## APPENDIX E – Acronym & Term Dictionary

Acronym/Term	Definition
<b>4 Fs</b>	Food, filth, flowers, and factories
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act
<b>BLS</b>	Bureau of Labor Statistics
<b>CNA</b>	Certified Nursing Assistant
<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>D.C.</b>	District of Columbia
<b>DCS</b>	Delmarva Community Services
<b>DDA</b>	Developmental Disabilities Administration
<b>DORS</b>	Division of Rehabilitation Services
<b>DSP</b>	Direct Support Professional
<b>DSS</b>	Department of Social Services
<b>EARN</b>	Employment Advancement Right Now
<b>EEA</b>	The Ken Capone Equal Employment Opportunity Act
<b>FLSA</b>	Fair Labor Standards Act
<b>FTE</b>	Full-time equivalent
<b>GNA</b>	Geriatric Nursing Assistant
<b>I/DD</b>	Intellectual and Developmental Disability
<b>i4cp</b>	The Institute for Corporate Productivity
<b>ID</b>	Intellectual Disability
<b>ID/DD</b>	Intellectual Disability or Developmental Disability
<b>JAN</b>	Job Accommodations Network
<b>K-12</b>	Kindergarten through twelfth grade
<b>LAUS</b>	Local Area Unemployment Statistics
<b>LMI</b>	Labor Market Information
<b>MAERDAF</b>	Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund
<b>MDDOL</b>	Maryland Department of Labor
<b>MDH</b>	Maryland Department of Health
<b>MSP</b>	Maryland State Police
<b>MT</b>	Montana
<b>NADSP</b>	National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals
<b>PHI</b>	Formerly Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute
<b>RMC</b>	Rural Maryland Council
<b>ROI</b>	Return on Investment
<b>RTC</b>	Research & Training Center on Disabilities in Rural Communities
<b>SED</b>	Shore Economic Development
<b>SOC</b>	Standard Occupational Code
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
<b>The Arc</b>	The Arc Central Chesapeake Region
<b>U.S.</b>	United States
<b>UNH</b>	University of New Hampshire
<b>Upper Shore</b>	Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties
<b>USDOL</b>	United States Department of Labor
<b>WIA</b>	Workforce Investment Act
<b>WIOA</b>	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This project, Multidimensional Approach to Workforce Development, looked at workforce opportunities for the disability community and Direct Support Professionals (DSP) in Maryland's Upper Shore region. The research was conducted over a six-month period, followed by the development of the report. The entire project spanned October 2019 through June 2020.

The scope of this project included:

- Researching and analyzing employment trends in the five counties of the Upper Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot), as well as creating a comprehensive approach towards increasing employment to meet the critical need for DSPs and increasing meaningful and equitable employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).
- Understanding the network and complexities of employment in rural communities and creating awareness of the employability of people with I/DD.
- Forming partnerships with businesses in the five counties, and developing a network aimed at helping people connect, share resources, and build capacity in the region. They will establish a coalition of thought leaders to participate in a needs assessment and collaborate in a partnership capacity.

This project was a joint effort led by The Arc Central Chesapeake Region (The Arc), funded by The Rural Maryland Council (RMC), and facilitated by Jeff Trice Consulting. The findings in this report are based on data and information gathered from interactions with nearly 300 contacts and an in-depth study of supporting materials by Jeff Trice Consulting.

## ABOUT THE ARC CENTRAL CHESAPEAKE REGION

The Arc is a nonprofit, community-based provider, dedicated to promoting respect, creating opportunities, facilitating services, and advocating for equal rights for all people with I/DD. As an affiliated chapter of The Arc United States, guided by the same core values, but operating independently toward a unique vision and mission. The Arc has been providing supports and services to people with I/DD in Anne Arundel County for almost 60 years and in Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties for nearly 15 years. The Arc's core service areas are intended to be holistic and address the many facets of life:

- Children, Youth, and Their Families: The Arc helps connect families to resources they need to feel confident and capable of helping their children thrive.
- Living Options & Services: The Arc believes in matching the person's personality and lifestyle to find the best living options; we believe in finding safe, affordable, and accessible housing.
- Day Services: Community-based Day Services help build experiences and skills that nurture continued growth and independence, from health and wellness to self-advocacy, the arts, money management, and personal development.
- Workforce Development: The Arc works with each person one-on-one to find a job they are passionate about, where they will earn a competitive wage.

At the direction of the President & CEO, Jonathon Rondeau, The Arc has been undergoing an organizational transformation driven by a robust 2018-2022 Strategic Plan focused on three priority areas: (1) provide seamless support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the arc of their life through meaningful and impactful programs; (2) sustain a valued, engaged workforce that feels a sense of purpose in their roles and supports the community at large; and (3) build a strong foundation for The Arc to grow and thrive through the changing landscape of disability support services. The Arc's leadership team brings a wealth of diverse experience and expertise under a common vision to drive the organization in this strategic direction.

## ABOUT RURAL MARYLAND COUNCIL

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) brings together citizens, community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to collectively address the needs of Rural Maryland communities. We provide a venue for members of agriculture and natural resource-based industries, health care facilities, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, for-profit and nonprofit corporations, and government agencies to cross traditional boundaries, share information, and address in a more holistic way the special needs and opportunities in Rural Maryland. Our goals are to:

- Encourage healthy, connected communities throughout Rural Maryland through convening of stakeholders, education, public relations, and advocacy.
- Support the development and growth of vibrant economies in Rural Maryland.
- Foster stewardship of Maryland's natural resources.
- Maximize RMC outreach, resources and mission through financial and organizational development.

As a collaborative partnership, the RMC operates in a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory manner. Policymakers and managers from stakeholder agencies and organizations at all levels of government and the private sector are valued participants. Where practical, the decision-making undertaken by the RMC is made by reaching consensus.

RMC's vision is a future where all of Rural Maryland is prosperous with thriving resources, vibrant economies, and healthy, connected communities.

## ABOUT JEFF TRICE CONSULTING

Jeff Trice Consulting takes a holistic approach to helping organizations and people achieve optimum results-by thinking differently, looking at things from a new perspective, and having new conversations. We help build connections, grow relationships, and create a positive energy that gets people talking.

Jeff brings people together for thought-provoking conversations that ignite big ideas, change perspectives, and fuel new and exciting decisions. He's passionate about finding opportunities that lie within challenges, exploring what's true, and breaking (or leaping or going around) barriers to achieve successful outcomes.

Jeff's background in workforce development, economic development, and business ownership positions him to help organizations create measurable, real-world change, achieve better outcomes, and make critical decisions when facing defining moments.



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The Arc Central  
Chesapeake Region