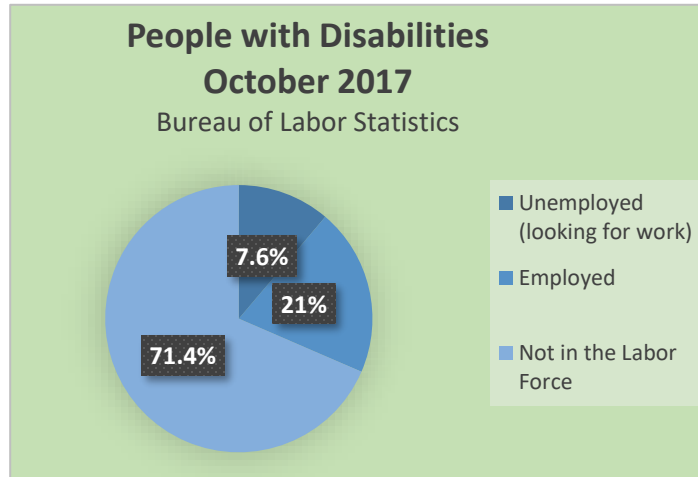


Partners With Business: A Model for Wisconsin Economic Development

The skills gap for Wisconsin employers across all sectors is well-documented. Job growth forecasts show new job opportunities in the areas of skilled trades, manufacturing, and construction. A talent shortage is among the top 10 critical human capital issues reported by companies nationally, along with a priority to improve the productivity of the workforce.

At the same time people with disabilities, including youth, remain an untapped workforce whose increased participation in the labor market, if properly trained, could have a significant positive impact on Wisconsin's overall economy. People with disabilities represent 9% of Wisconsin's workforce; yet their employment rate is less than a third the rate for workers without disabilities.

Even though 80% of people with disabilities say they want to work or want to work more hours, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in October 2017, **only 21% have jobs**, compared to 68.3% of people without disabilities.



The complete lack of participation in the workforce by people with disabilities (71%) is even more shocking than the unemployment rate. For Wisconsinites with the most significant disabilities – those who qualify for and require some level of publicly funded long-term supports for daily living - the employment rates hover at just 9% for working age adults.

Many of these people with disabilities want to work and businesses indicate they are interested in hiring, yet no one is making the connection.

Success in Dane County

Over the last five years, Dane County has used the Partners with Business model at 25 businesses of varying size with a reported cost-savings to government totaling up to 50% when compared to traditional employment supports that involve an outside publicly funded provider.

Today 890 Dane County businesses employ 841 people with developmental disabilities –who earned \$3.86M in 2014.

Economic Development Solution – Partners with Business:

Various funding streams and programs are available to Wisconsin employers to support the type of skill development that is necessary to ensure the workplace success of individuals with disabilities while they contribute to a business' bottom line.

The *Partners with Business* model helps an employer understand how to embed and support an employee with a disability naturally within the workplace, with the support of a co-worker when necessary. Some existing public funding streams will even reimburse the employer who enhances the wage and responsibilities of that "job coach" employee. *Partners with Business* is a cost-effective model that is less intrusive to the employer's flow of business (there are limited outside providers coming in to support the employee with a disability) and helps the employee with a disability acclimate to the job setting and culture by learning directly from a peer colleague.