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RespectAbility Report

One in five Americans has a disability, and 70% of working-age people with disabilities (PwDs) are not in the workforce. RespectAbility is confronting this reality by spreading awareness and working to improve the dignity, respect, self-worth, and income of PwDs. We are still a relatively new organization with a small budget and team, so we rely on highly strategic actions and partnerships to move our work forward.

Governor Markell of **Delaware**, as the chair of the National Governors Association (NGA), created an initiative called ***Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities***, which focuses on the unique employment challenges for PwDs and the role that state governments and businesses can have towards effectively advancing competitive, integrated employment. Building on this successful program, we believe that the best return on investment will be through the successful implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed in July last year.



Governor Markell (DE), Jennifer Mizrahi (CEO, RespectAbility) and RespectAbility board member Doc Sweitzer

The new law will continue to devote \$17 billion in public investments into the workforce system each year. Each state can choose to spend its money as it has in the past – which has largely failed our population – or they can adopt proven best practices. We are at the crossroads of hope and history and must ensure that the public investments go to best practices that successfully enable PwDs to become employed or start their own businesses.

WIOA can be transformational for PwDs and all of us who are working to increase employment opportunities for PwDs. Under Section 102 of the new WIOA law, each state must make a new “unified plan” that will increase employment numbers of PwDs and other underserved populations by March 2016. However, once the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and the U.S. Department of Education (DoED) approve those plans, they are largely locked in place for four years. So it is vital to quickly enable each state to create a plan that ensures that the money is spent on best practices. This is a highly complex process with multiple stakeholders and agencies in every state. RespectAbility is the only non-profit advocacy organization working nationally on these issues that has developed close working relationships with governors and their WIOA teams. So far, we have met with WIOA teams and leaders from all 50 states, including 40 governors, some of whom are likely presidential candidates. RespectAbility does not lobby; we educate.

Initially, none of the governors or states had the right data in a comprehensible format and were therefore unable to accurately assess their own performance metrics. It was too easy to hide failure under the rug and not even realize it. Typically, they looked largely at unemployment numbers alone. This is a major mistake, as most of the 14 million working-age Americans with disabilities that are outside of the workforce are not actively looking for work and thus are not counted in official

unemployment numbers. To correct this oversight, we created demographic and performance “dashboards” for each state. We distributed them to governors, as well as leaders of vocational rehabilitation agencies, Workforce Agencies, Boards, and professionals, disability advocacy organizations, and the press. These dashboards include the number of PwDs in each state broken down by age group, workforce participation rates, types of disabilities, and other useful information such as lists of federal contractors in the state. This performance data has never been shown segmented by state before, and it is now a key resource to those working on this issue.

The new regulations around Section 503 of the Rehab Act are another important tool. These new regulations set a 7% utilization goal for all federal contractors to recruit and hire PwDs in all job categories. However, governors and vocational rehabilitation did not have lists of the federal contractors in their states until we shared them. Now, as they look for employers to partner with them to place PwDs into jobs, they know which companies must now fill positions with PwDs. Indeed, many federal contractors are potential partners for WIOA. That is especially true when these companies are expanding and/or are on, or can be put on, public transportation routes.

We analyzed all 50 State of the State speeches to determine if the governors prioritized PwDs and employment. Although there is much more room for growth, four governors discussed hiring PwDs, and fourteen discussed PwDs in general -- a large improvement from years past. For example, in his State of the State Address, **South Dakota**'s Governor Dugaard announced that state agencies are partnering with rehabilitation services and school districts to provide worksites for the Project Skills Program, which provides paid work opportunities for students with disabilities. Gov. Dugaard also eliminated an employment disincentive in one of the state's Medicaid programs for those with disabilities who want to work.

As was mentioned above, WIOA is complicated, and numerous organizations, including Workforce Boards and Agencies, play a big role. As a result of continued meetings and contacts, we have built a database of nearly 650 key people who will be creating unified WIOA plans in each state, including people who work in the Workforce Boards and Agencies; vocational rehabilitation; state departments of transportation, education, and labor; healthcare; and human services, as well as the governors themselves. Many of them learned about WIOA for the first time from us! They would have been notified anyway, but advanced information has allowed them to plan ahead and avoid churning out the same failed programs. We shared this database with the DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (*ODEP*), Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and Janet LaBreck, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration at the DoED. That is because these key implementers of the new law did not have all the contacts they needed to share the new regulations and their own toolkits. We are continuously communicating with everyone on this list and sending out any updated information we receive.

A recent example of our communication is our relationship with the new governor of **Arkansas**, Governor Hutchinson. We had met with his predecessor and asked him to help us connect during the transition. We first met with Gov. Hutchinson's new chief of staff on the sidelines of the recent NGA Washington Conference. During our conversation, we shared key data with him. The meeting went so well that the governor sought us out the very same day. As a result, Gov. Hutchinson and his chief of staff organized all the relevant stakeholders together for an “all-hands” meeting in Little Rock. In attendance were nearly 40 leaders from vocational rehabilitation, disability services, Career Education, the Arkansas State Legislature, the Department of Transportation, **Walmart**, and the governor himself.

We began our exciting relationship with Walmart because they are the single largest employer in 43 states, hiring 500,000 people each year. They have 53,000 employees in Arkansas alone. If the government were to partner with them to provide job coaches and tools for young PwDs coming out of school, Walmart alone could dramatically improve inclusion of PwDs into the workforce. The same is true of a number of key employers across the country.

Governor Markell of Delaware is one of our key allies. Since before 2012, when he became chair of the NGA, he has been one of the most impactful governors on this topic, and Delaware is one of the best states in the country in regards to hiring PwDs. *One of our webinars was led by Rita Landgraf, the secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services.* In fact, the workgroup in charge of implementing his **Better Bottom Line** initiative is the 2014 recipient of the Governor's Team Excellence Award. This award recognizes state employees for their efforts in producing tangible results in state programs. Working with seven agencies, the Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities Workgroup has accomplished many tasks in only a few years, including implementing training and placement programs, conducting state-wide surveys, and stream-lining a process that allows employees to self-disclose their disabilities to their employers.



Governor Markell (DE), Jennifer Mizrahi (RespectAbility), Philip Pauli (RespectAbility), Pilar Pastor (RespectAbility) and Elizabeth Taub (USBLN).

Back in August of 2013, we first met with Governor Walker of **Wisconsin** on the sidelines of the NGA meeting. He is likely to run for president and really understands the importance of employing PwDs. He implemented positive change right away and has met with us several times. Because of his leadership, **Project SEARCH** has expanded from two work sites to a total of twenty-seven in Wisconsin. Project SEARCH is a program that enables young people with intellectual and other disabilities to achieve 70% successful, sustained employment outcomes instead of the usual 15–30% from typical programs. Gov. Walker has now repeatedly visited employers who are doing better business because they are hiring talented PwDs. He recently announced \$600,000 in Wisconsin Fast Forward Grants to Train Workers with Disabilities. Also, he did a conference call for us that was attended by 300 people from across the country. This inspired other states to get on board.



Governor Walker (WI), Jennifer Mizrahi, and other disability leaders.

The changes led by Gov. Walker in Wisconsin have been so successful in getting PwDs into jobs and off public assistance that the federal government will send the state of Wisconsin \$4 million dollars as a “reward” for saving money in federal disability benefits. That money is then being re-invested in job coaches and transition services so that more PwDs in Wisconsin can find and succeed in jobs.

Many governors' offices did not know about Project SEARCH before we met with them. Recently, the head of Project SEARCH – who credits us with effective promotion of their breakthrough work –

let us know that the states of **Michigan, North Carolina, Illinois, New Jersey, Virginia, Florida** and **New Mexico** are all looking to expand their sites because of our outreach to them. Another state that is expanding is **Nebraska**. Before the end of his term, we cultivated a connection with Governor Heinemann, introduced him to the good work that Project SEARCH was doing in his state, and encouraged him to conduct site visits. His eventual visits to sites were recently highlighted in a presentation given by Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation in front of the entire audience at the CSAVR Conference. The precedent with Gov. Walker has played an important role in all this.

We first met with Governor Bryant of **Mississippi** in 2013. Within weeks, Gov. Bryant sent a key member of his team to work with us in Washington, and shortly thereafter, he declared his state “Employment First” for PwDs. Now we are working with his staff to achieve those goals. The next time we saw him, the governor pulled out his cellphone to show us a new app his team had implemented so people from anywhere in his state can find jobs right from their cell phones. Gov. Bryant has now held events on this topic, including a Governor’s Job Fair for PwDs. Then in April, Gov. Bryant held an event on opportunities for PwDs with former Florida governor, and likely presidential candidate, Jeb Bush. The event got extensive press, and we were able to connect directly with Jeb Bush. We have provided future presidential candidates and campaigns from both parties with information on jobs for PwDs. We are in regular touch with Jeb, including multiple times around his recent disability event.



Former Governor Jeb Bush (FL) and Jennifer Mizrahi.

“Thank you for this very valuable information.”– Jeb Bush, April 16, 2015

In December, Governor Bentley of **Alabama** honored Alabama businesses that employ PwDs during the 2014 Alabama Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities Awards Ceremony. RespectAbility has met with him several times, and we are currently working with his WIOA implementation team. He has a son with developmental disabilities who works in a public library, so Gov. Bentley deeply understands the importance of these issues.

Following the lead of Governor Markell and his team in Delaware, the governors of **Washington, Colorado, and Minnesota** are working to have their states become model employers of PwDs. Frankly, few states are doing any serious hiring due to budget restraints. However, they should set the right example by “walking the walk” and not just “talking the talk.”

There is not a single state where PwDs don’t face stigma, challenges, and massive gaps in workforce participation. But there are pockets of great progress. For example, in North and South Dakota, along with Montgomery County, MD, there are comparatively great employment outcomes for PwDs. Wonderful work is being done by the governors of Delaware, Wisconsin, **Iowa**, South Dakota, and other states. We are seeing real excitement from the governors of Washington, Colorado, Mississippi, **Utah** and other states, too.

In some states, however, the governors were very excited by these issues but were pulled away by other pressing needs. For Governor Nixon of **Missouri**, for example, the need to focus on Ferguson slowed the process down. Governor Christie of New Jersey was very enthusiastic about this work and

instantly made it bipartisan by bringing in the Democratic Speaker of the NJ Senate. However, bridge issues then took key staffers away from the project, and he has also been focused on the presidential cycle. However, in April, Gov. Christie acted on behalf of PwDs on a housing issue, and we hope exciting opportunities will emerge in New Jersey in the future.

OUR TOOLKIT ON BEST PRACTICES

To support our WIOA work we created—in cooperation with Best Buddies, National Association of Councils on Development Disabilities, National Council on Independent Living, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National Organization on Disability (NOD), and others—a toolkit to help states understand the best practices and put them in their unified plans.

This planning tool is a guide for governors, Workforce Boards and Agencies, vocational rehabilitation, and others. It contains proven actions they can take to increase integrated employment opportunities for PwDs, including how to use performance data, how to conduct analyses, and suggestions about best practices. It is a complementary tool to the work we did on statistics and planning data. Most of the recommendations are either quantitatively proven best practices or emerging promising practices. It is organized around the key recommendations from the NGA report *“A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities,”* which are:

- Making the best of limited resources
- Finding and supporting businesses in their efforts to employ PwDs
- Making disability employment a part of the state workforce strategy
- Preparing youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential, and providing employers with a pipeline of skilled workers
- Being a model employer by increasing the number of PwDs working in state government

The toolkit was distributed to RespectAbility’s email list of more than 25,000 contacts with interests in this area. This goes well beyond the core people working on the plans and includes PwDs, activists, media, Capitol Hill, and others. It was opened by 5,500 people with more than 700 click-throughs the first time alone. Since then, many other groups have put the tools on their own websites and distribution channels. For example, CSAVR, ODEP, National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), and others forwarded it to their lists. We have received excellent feedback as most of these groups are lacking useful information in regard to creating jobs for PwDs. Indeed, several state WIOA implementation teams have told us that they are going to use our tools as a starting point for doing their WIOA implementation process.

Partnering with Key Associations

Workforce Agencies and Boards: NASWA, NAWB, CSAVR, NAWP

With a tiny staff and budget, RespectAbility has to be very strategic. Thus, we are partnering with accredited national associations who have access to the partners we need at the state level. This is win-win as Workforce Boards and Agencies are well established and now have new mandates to serve and include PwDs. They do not yet have experience in these areas and need to learn quickly. Each subgroup has its own association, structure, annual meeting, and distribution systems. They were thrilled to learn our ideas and data, and many have invited us to speak in front of their groups.

“I appreciated the frank discussion and your great ideas to help Nevada improve its programs for employment of people with disabilities.”

Shelley Hendren, CPM, Administrator,
DETR Rehabilitation Division Dept.
Employment and Rehabilitation Training

At the NAWB Conference, we were able to get Gov. Markell invited as the keynote speaker. In front of the entire audience

of 1400 people, he superbly explained the benefits of PwDs as a talent pool and highlighted our work. Prior to the NAWB Conference, we also gave 60 of their speakers background information regarding employing PwDs. At the conference itself, we led a side-session on our toolkit.

RespectAbility's president and CEO Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi spoke briefly at the NASWA annual meeting with their 160 leaders. In April, we participated at the Spring Conference of the CSAVR, where we distributed our state data and toolkit. Currently, one of our staff members is at the annual conference of the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals, where we have a booth with materials. At this conference we have partnered with **Nevada** Vocational Rehabilitation to organize site visits highlighting inclusive employment at **Pepsi** and **Office Depot**.

Congress, Federal & State Agencies

When RespectAbility started, it was disheartening to find that most disability organizations were working with only a few offices on the Hill (almost all from the Democratic Party), and that most Congressional offices had not even designated a staff person who would handle disability issues. Our fellows and employees went door to door for days on the Hill to find a point person for each office, and we have dramatically expanded our lists to more than 900 political and policy contacts on all sides of the aisle and with top political consultants. We have done this trip multiple times to keep our contacts fresh, as well as to give out timely resources and event invitations. We have broadly shared this list with our partners.

We testified to the NY Employment First Commission once - and twice to the DOL - on key factors regarding how the new WIOA law will expand jobs for PwDs. The testimony was based on our toolkit and highlighted three primary issues:

- 1) Stigma as a real obstacle and the need for plans and actions to reduce it
- 2) Breaking down barriers by demonstrating examples of successful inclusive employment
- 3) The need to promote replication of successful programs such as Project SEARCH

We will soon testify to the **California** Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities as well. Many people in the federal government are taking note of our progress and resources. Congress-people such as Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Pete Sessions, and Brad Sherman, for example, look to us for answers. We have ghost written op-eds for each of them on employment for PwDs. [One](#) has been published in *The Hill*, and another [one](#) was published in *The Los Angeles Daily News*. We have also reached out to highly influential conservative political leaders who have had no previous positive contact with disability leaders. We are working with the House Committee on Ways and Means and Chairman Paul Ryan's team as well.

We play the role of matchmaker between those who need facts about best practices and that evidence itself. The Congressional and workforce contacts we receive are of the appropriate staff members who work on disability issues. It is the first time that this information has been collected, organized, and used to build relationships. **Our email outreach has become so well respected that the insider publication Congressional Quarterly (CQ) recently featured it as model communication for briefing leaders.**

Disability and Data Organizations

We are working with dozens of groups, both in the for-profit and non-profit sectors, as well as our Board of Advisors and their affiliated groups. Our core partners are Workforce Boards and Agencies, ODEP, and our partners on the toolkit. However, we also highly value our partnerships with

I am always looking for succinct statistics to back up our efforts. I found ... your comments captured the challenges our consumers face as well as anything I've seen in print....I would like to print the statement and statistics [employment of PwDs in NY state] for distribution at next month's NY Association on Independent Living's 2015 Legislative Day in Albany when I will be visiting the offices of our area Assembly members and State Senators.

Michael I. Kochler, Independent Living, Inc.

performance metrics groups such as Mathematica Policy Research and the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability.

We share resources and lead webinars together. Additionally, Jennifer is a member of the Bipartisan Policy Council's task force on SSDI reform, and we are active members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Employment and Training Task force.

Employers

The United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN) is doing important work, and we frequently work with them. Jennifer went to California and Florida for the USBLN Annual Meetings to train their entire staff, and we are working closely with them on their efforts. Additionally, we started the #RespectTheAbility campaign with **Ernst & Young** and other companies. This campaign highlights the benefits to employers that look beyond the disability and imagine the possibility when hiring talented employees with disabilities. We have begun relationships with **Walgreens**, Walmart, Pepsi, Office Depot, **UPS**, and others.

The private sector is a key partner. Companies need real talent and PwDs can deliver it. Employers, including Walgreens, EY, **AMC**, Walmart, **SAP**, Pepsi, and others, have shown that employees with disabilities are successful, loyal, and productive to the bottom line. PwDs bring unique characteristics and talents to workplaces, which benefits employers and organizations. When we find the right jobs for the right people, it can and does increase the bottom line for companies.

But we need to be realistic – the most impactful way to begin to break down barriers against hiring PwDs is by working directly with larger companies that hire regularly, have in-house HR, are government contractors (particularly those with access to public transportation), have in-house corporate councils, and have established diversity policies. It is vital to do more public opinion research of key hiring managers in private sector companies, as the messages need to be stronger.

Presidential Election 2016 – Iowa and Early Primary States

We want employment for PwDs to be a top issue for the next president of the United States – no matter who he or she will be. Jennifer has been able to speak one-on-one about jobs for PwDs with possible presidential candidates Former Gov. Jeb Bush, Gov. Scott Walker, and Gov. Chris Christie, and we are reaching out to the others. We are hoping to gain funding for major non-partisan outreach during the political cycle.

At the Conservative Political Conference in Washington, D.C., we gave our press release about presidential candidates to media representatives. We also did press releases about Hillary Clinton's launch (which omitted people with visible disabilities) and an event with Jeb Bush (who is already

working on disability issues as we mentioned above). We are already Tweeting and Facebooking the campaigns. We have key contacts for each campaign and will be contacting all of them with data in the weeks ahead.

For the upcoming election and campaign season, we are focusing on Iowa, the first caucus state, as well as the early primary states of Nevada, **New Hampshire** and **South Carolina**. RespectAbility and our partners will engage heavily with the media and the candidates' teams during their visits to these early states. We are currently establishing close partnerships with Iowa disability groups;



Hillary Clinton and Jennifer Mizrahi.

organizations that are implementing successful vocational training, transition, and placement programs; companies that are successfully employing PwDs; and other stakeholders. We have already identified 160 potential partners in Iowa and will work closely with the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Service to choose and conduct site visits of best practices that can be used in our efforts. In each instance, we will look for models that can be easily replicated in other areas. We are already following all of these groups on Twitter. One of the best examples of inclusive employment is the Walgreens distribution site in Anderson, South Carolina. We have already

spoken with them multiple times about inviting presidential candidates to come see their work.

To create effective messaging and prepare for this strategic communications campaign, we are planning to lead focus groups with Iowa employers and other key stakeholders to find out what they think about inclusive employment, who they will listen to, and what facts they need to know in order to want to become inclusive employers. We will also have to learn what training and tools they feel they need to succeed. We plan to hold at least four focus groups around the state. Leaders from the disability community across Iowa will be invited to watch the focus groups live or over the internet. Once potential messages have been developed from the focus groups, we will buy "add on" questions to polls nationally so we can test and refine these messages. Once effective messages have been established, we will begin the focused outreach stage of the campaign.

Focus Groups, Polls, Messaging, and Outreach

RespectAbility is very committed to utilizing the most effective messages in our work. To do so, we need to improve standard, professional, and proven messages via strategic communications. So far, we have led focus groups in the Washington, D.C. area on employment issues and have done both online and phone polls. Due to a close relationship with ODEP, we have just been given the results from their public opinion research over the years, which significantly expands our knowledge.

Until now, our focus groups have included Hill staff and think tank members, key stakeholders to our work, PwDs who are looking for work, and providers/family members of PwDs who are helping their loved ones look for work. These focus groups in turn assist us by clarifying how our polls should be organized. For example, in the run-up before the vote on WIOA, our focus groups of Hill staff members were critical in framing messages to leaders on employment for PwDs.

After several focus groups, we brought in Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg and Republican pollster Whit Ayers to conduct polls of voters on disability employment issues. PwDs, demographically-speaking, are swing voters who want candidates to have real plans on expanding their opportunities into jobs and independence. Our limited polling thus far has helped us find winning messages that can help us frame the conversation about competitive integrated employment and independence for PwDs, and we are leveraging these results throughout the presidential campaign season. It gave the disability community the capacity to reframe their messages, and it was very well received by those in the

disability community before the vote on WIOA. Ultimately the law passed the House 415-6 and the Senate 95-3. We need to do more research when we can afford it.

Now that we have the partnership with ODEP, we will work to advance better research on what will work with employers themselves. Their research indicated an area we had missed: many HR managers do not feel competent to hire PwDs. The DOL has some funds to help resolve this if the proper research can be done first by outside parties and budgets. This is needed because of the complicated way the government can operate. Once we develop the correct messages, we will include this new knowledge in our resources, PR campaigns, and mailings.

Webinars and Social Media

One of our main resources is free webinars on best practices for employment of PwDs and other disability-related issues. These webinars are all on key topics, including evidence-based best practices, inclusion, transition services, job coaching, housing options, and how science is changing the future for PwDs. All of the target decision makers, including leaders working on WIOA plans and implementation, have been invited to these events. Every webinar is accessible to those with physical disabilities, and we provide relevant materials before and after each one. As many as 500 people have joined us live for each webinar. When they are completed, they are posted on our website, in emails, and on our YouTube page for public usage.

Our webinars and conference calls have included:

- September 4, 2014: Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin: *Employment First Policies and Jobs for People with Disabilities*
- October 7, 2014: Jennifer Laszlo-Mizrahi and David Stapleton David Wittenburg of Mathematica: *Implementation of WIOA: Lessons from Research on Employment*
- November 7, 2014: Cristopher Broyles, Web Accessibility Program Manager for ASPA/DCD at HHS: *How to Make your Documents and Presentations Accessible to Individuals with Disabilities?*
- November 14, 2014: Pollsters, **Republican Whit Ayres, PhD and Democrat Stan Greenberg PhD: Campaign 2014: Results of New Bi-Partisan Poll of Voters with and without Disabilities on Disability Issues**
- December 4, 2014: Julie Anne Hensler-Cullen, RN, MSN, Director of Education, Quality and Advocacy at MossRehab. MossRehab, part of Einstein Healthcare Network (which repeatedly ranks among the nation's top 10 rehabilitation hospitals) and Hensler Cullen of MossRehab advocating for persons with physical disabilities: *Disability Etiquette*
- January 13, 2015: Rita Landgraf, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services: *Implementing the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the National Governors Association's Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities: Lessons from the Front Line*
- February 19, 2015: David Scott, Director of Sales at the award winning Embassy Suites and the Courtyard by Marriott Hotels in Omaha-La Vista, Nebraska and Valentini Kalargyrou, Ph.D., an Assistant Professor of Hospitality Management in the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics at the University of New Hampshire: *Best practices and success in inclusive employment in the hospitality sector*

This month we are presenting a webinar on our *Disability Employment First Planning Tool* to provide the information states need to create the best WIOA plan required. 320 people from all over the country have already registered, including people from NOD; voc. rehab; the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs; offices of U.S. Representatives; offices of U.S. Senators; offices of state Departments of Human Services, Education, and Health; and other state and national disability-related offices. Other future webinars include topics such as website accessibility, government hiring in Montgomery County, MD, Project SEARCH, and youth employment with **Bridges to Work**.

As stated previously, we recognize social media as a valuable resource. We already have nearly 25,000 email subscribers, over 22,000 Facebook “likes,” and almost 3200 Twitter followers. So far, we conducted three Twitter chats. Our online presence is further strengthened by a YouTube channel, comments on online articles, and articles we write ourselves.

News Media, Hollywood, Schools & Society

We continuously push out information to the national media about positive benefits of inclusive employment and policy developments. Dozens of op-eds and news pieces on disability employment issues have been published, including:

- *USA Today* (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/09/25/jennifer-laszlo-mizrahi-on-disabilities/2860765>),
- *GOVERNING* magazine June cover story (<http://www.governing.com/topics/mgmt/gov-american-disabilities-act-compliance.html>),
- *Philadelphia Inquirer* (http://articles.philly.com/2014-11-29/news/56543664_1_speech-language-pathologist-disability-bosses),
- *Des Moines Register* (<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/iowa-view/2014/02/16/iowa-should-help-disabled-find-work/5540743>),
- *Journal Sentinel* (<http://www.jsonline.com/news/opinion/jobs-for-people-with-disabilities-is-vital-for-wisconsin-b99178519z1-238969011.html>),
- *Bloomberg* (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-02/disabled-recruited-from-walgreen-to-amc-seeking-diversity>),
- *Huffington Post* (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jennifer-laszlo-mizrahi>), and
- *Nonprofit Quarterly* (<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/philanthropy/25975-the-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-unprecedented-opportunities-for-philanthropists.html>)
- We inspired a [segment](#) on CNBC and have been interviewed for articles such as [this](#) one from Pew Charitable Trusts.

Because of our articles and PR efforts, more people outside of the disability community are starting to pay more attention to this demographic group. Another way we attempt to educate society is through the entertainment industry. This industry is vital to influencing Americans’ attitudes. Our two key partners are Murray Siegel and Jonathan Murray. Siegel assisted us with our [PSA](#) with TJ Lavin. Lavin also came to the Hill to participate in our event alongside Gov. Markell, Rep. Sessions, and Paralympic gold medalist Matt Cowdrey, which attracted dozens of Hill staffers. Jonathan Murray is a prominent contributor to the inclusion of underrepresented groups on reality television. With both of their help, we have repeatedly sent letters to 300 of the most powerful decision-makers in the television and movie industries asking them to include more PwDs in their work. A recent mailing went out to leaders in the entertainment industry with ties to disabilities, and it included our [op-ed](#) about the *Theory of Everything* movie, our [op-ed](#) on the *Michael J. Fox Show*, and a cover letter about reducing stigma against PwDs via the media.

Sadly, however, our Hollywood and media outreach has been significantly shortchanged since our staff and resources are so small. Given our limitations, we have chosen to focus on the time-limited and unprecedented opportunity that WIOA presents to our cause. With more funds and the completion of the WIOA plans, we will focus more on cultural influences and fighting stigmas.

We at Caltech want to be the destination for the most talented students (and faculty and staff), all inclusive.

Thomas F. Rosenbaum, President, California Institute of Technology

Still, we have made elite private schools a priority because numerous studies have demonstrated that a disproportional number of America's top CEOs and leaders hail from a small group of elite high schools which are feeder schools into Ivy League universities and other institutions. These schools routinely do not

include PwDs in their student bodies or faculties. Students entering these schools in 2015 will be our future business leaders, yet will have had little to no contact with PwDs during their formative years, impacting attitudes and presumably future hiring and other practices. We have consistently contacted the top 97 private schools around the country regarding inclusiveness in their schools. Several have responded with goals of improvement. The messages utilized in our mailing came from our focus groups and polls, and we hope to cause change in this area of society as well. Jennifer was also recently able to speak with the president of CALTECH about STEM education for PwDs, a key concern of federal contractors with 503 requirements including **IBM, Lockheed Martin and Boeing.**

Going forward

We have started the process to get the certification that will allow us to fundraise on our own in all 50 states. That will take several months but is in progress. We have received funding from key partners such as the Milbank Foundation, the Poses Family Foundation, the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, the Schwartz Foundation, the Ruderman Foundation, and the UJA-Federation of New York. But we need much more support to keep up with the demands of our employment and stigma reduction work.

It is important to note that we intentionally recruit young leaders with disabilities to work with us. We have utilized and developed the talent of dozens of young leaders in our first 20 months of existence. We currently have five fellows on our team. This summer we will have ten fellows. However, we have only three full-time paid professionals on our staff. Our new policy and practices leader, Philip Pauli, is extremely talented. And our new communications director Lauren Appelbaum, who will start in eight weeks, is a significant talent who previously worked at NBC with Chuck Todd and Andrea Mitchell, as well as with Jennifer over a period of years. Hillary Steen is a recent college graduate who is highly organized. Jennifer is still working as a full time volunteer. We must now sign a longer lease for more permanent space, have more staff, and increase project funds. Our temporary sub-let ends in



RespectAbility's Fellows, Staff and CEO.

September and we will have to sign a real lease and move before then.

We are delighted at all we have been able to achieve to-date. For additional information, please contact Jennifer Mizrahi, President and CEO of RespectAbility. We look forward to partnering with you in the future!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Mizrahi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Mizrahi
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