



San Diego Imperial Office – SB 639 Community Conversation March 30, 2022, 3pm-5pm

The Community Conversation for the San Diego Imperial Regional Office was held on March 30, 2022, attended by 27 of the 54 people expected to attend (6 of whom were staff or interpreters).

The March 30, 2022, Community Conversation was supported with American Sign Language (ASL), and Spanish interpretation. Mary Ellen Stives, SCDD San Diego Imperial Regional Office Manager facilitated and used a PowerPoint presentation to guide the meeting. Suza Szewiola was a note taker.

The meeting included a series of questions with input on the topic areas listed below.

SB 639 Community Conversation Questions

Ice Breaker – “What has been your experience in your employment journey and what would have made it better”?

- No response

1. In a perfect world, with no funding (money) or other barriers, what would the future of employment look like for people with developmental disabilities?

- More exposure to more educational opportunities. College/education—that revolves around people’s interests. Getting education for that particular job.
- A program where everyone is empowered to have unique experience , determine their own pathway, through discovery and exploration. A time-limited program where the specialist will work to find wants and needs of the client (person-centered).
- Widespread knowledge/outreach about what happens to benefits if someone gets employment.
- Having access to assistive technology that provides workplace support. Ensure people know that these technologies exist and that they know how to use them.
- Employers would know that hiring people with disabilities creates a positive, diverse workforce where all walks of life are appreciated. They would know how to handle and provide reasonable accommodations. They would know the

resources available to help both employers and employees effectively communicate, research and implement reasonable accommodations.

- Everyone is working in a job which maximizes their potential and pays the bills, regardless of level of support.

2. What needs to be in place to help a person move from a subminimum wage sheltered workshop into a meaningful day based on their interests?

- Benefits planning (Medi-Cal, Medicare, housing, and cash benefits)
- Person-centered planning.
- Thought given to person's interests/concerns and their ultimate goal.
- Urgency of starting a conversation with service coordinator about it.
- Get away from placing those with disabilities into boxes.
- More outreach on other programs like paid internships.
- Education/Training for individuals to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for the career path they are interested in pursuing. Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE).
- A plan that addresses the workers concerns and interests. Steps to reach goals and accommodations and or technology that may be needed to perform essential and nonessential tasks.
- Creativity, interest, willingness to listen and try new things, a funding system that says a "like" setting is not good enough.

3. For people who want something other than work, what are the best options or ideas?

- Volunteering
- Education
- Recreational opportunities
- Making meaningful connections in community
- Encourage higher education and trainings on productive life skills
- Community exploration
- Peer support group/self-advocacy group.
- Classes or funding of hobbies and interests.
- Supports to create what is meaningful for/to them, in all aspects of their life.

4. For people who want to work, what services to support success?

- Look at individual needs
- Job coaching

- Assistive technology
- Better transportation (especially in the Imperial Valley)
- Extra funding/higher salaries for job coaches/on-the-job support
- Benefits planning/counseling or education about any potential changes to benefits when one begins on the journey to work.
- More services that are directed by the individual, and customized to meet their need.

5. Let's think about supported employment professionals - like job developers or job coaches. What additional skills or supports do they need to be successful in their roles?

- More training in how to interact with those with disabilities. Particularly knowing when to help or assist and when not to.
- Higher salaries—should be professionally paid.
- They should understand what resources are available for the client .
- There is a struggle to hire staff because it is treated as entry level position with low pay, when in fact it should be a professional level position with appropriate pay.
- Paying higher wages is key to having professionals increase their interest in the field. More hands-on training and experience is required for staff to be better qualified.
- They need to be able to communicate that benefits and work are not mutually exclusive. They need to understand the resources available in the community that can help their clients minimize any concerns about going to work. Resources include understanding reasonable accommodations in the workplace and how to help employers also find resources to provide effective communication when an employee requests reasonable accommodations.
- Employment professionals to be well-trained and paid well.
- Knowledge of best practices, hands-on training and technical assistance, performance tied to pay.

6. How can we encourage employers to hire people with disabilities to work at their companies?

- Share with employers about the positives of hiring a person with a disability. (Great work ethic, those of with disabilities have a lot of strengths). Emphasize that we are more alike than different.
- Demonstrate and emphasize the need to have a diverse work force.

- Have employers be open to having different ways to interview and candidates display their skills.
- Instead of interviews or resumes try observations/videos of them completing tasks, portfolios, etc.
- Conduct more disability sensitivity trainings.
- Recognition of employers who **do** hire those with disabilities.
- Building connections with companies and employers and invite them to engage with the disabled community.
- Emphasize the need to have a diverse workforce.
- Demonstrate how it will create a positive impact on their bottom line. Ensure we're being open, honest and transparent – not all jobs are for everyone – don't try to say that someone can do a job if they can't, and don't base your practice on the charity model.

7. Thinking creatively or outside the box, what kind of new programs should California develop for people with significant disabilities and or support needs?

- Expand availability of tailored day programs.
- One that helps them develop personal interests.
- I honestly don't think creating new programs is the answer. I think we need to listen to what is being asked for, by individuals, and help them meet those needs on an individual basis.

8. For a last question, please complete this thought: "Success will be achieved when..."

- People with disabilities can accomplish their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future without any barriers. When people stop assuming that we can't do something just because of our disabilities.
- There is more natural support from employers, less from service provider.
- Success would be measured by how the individual feels regarding their quality of life—their level of happiness and comfort with their employment and their attainment of career aspirations. Success would also be measured by employment rates.
- More people with disabilities are working and visible in their communities.
- Everyone is working in a job which maximizes their potential and pays the bills, regardless of level of support.

