

Strategies for Reemployment of Dislocated Workers with Disabilities

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What are the experiences of people with disabilities in finding new jobs after being displaced from previous employment, within the context of the current economic downturn (2007-2009)? *The Great Recession and Serving Dislocated Workers with Disabilities: Perspectives from One-Stop Career Centers and Rapid Response Coordinators* (Heidkamp & Mabe, 2011) investigated how displaced workers with disabilities -- not people reentering the workforce following a job loss due to a disability -- used public local and state workforce services to help them find new jobs.

Researchers reviewed existing literature and collected data from staff in 16 states' One-Stop Centers, including Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) and Rapid Response Coordinators. The study was conducted by the NTAR Leadership Center (National Technical Assistance and Research Center to Promote Leadership for Increasing Employment and Economic Independence of Adults with Disabilities) at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

During the period 2007-2009:

- Nearly 7 million people were displaced from jobs they held for at least three years (BLS, 2010).
- For the total number of people employed, the number of individuals with disabilities decreased by 9% from 2007 to 2009 (Kaye, 2010).
- Almost a third of the displaced workers with disabilities were considered "long-term unemployed," after a period of unemployment lasting 6 months or more (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010). ■

Findings

The literature review identified few strategies designed to help people with disabilities find work after being displaced. The strategies most used with dislocated workers -- with or without disabilities -- included occupational training, job searching, or a combination, which resulted in varying outcomes regarding success at returning to work and level of earnings.

These findings emerged from the interviews and surveys. ■■■■

1. DPNs report that One-Stop Career Center staff are serving greater numbers of older workers and older workers with disabilities; many have lower educational levels and/or a range of chronic health conditions.
2. DPNs report that One-Stop staff are serving greater numbers of people with hidden disabilities (such as learning disabilities), many of whom are reluctant to disclose their disability.
3. One-Stop staff are seeing greater numbers of people with mental and behavioral health problems, such as substance abuse and engagement in domestic violence.
4. Rapid Response staff typically seek to identify workers with disabilities at downsizing firms planning large layoffs.

5. DPNs and vocational rehabilitation staff occasionally participate in Rapid Response activities, but DPNs are not routinely a part of Rapid Response teams.
6. States have adopted a variety of strategies, such as targeted job fair outreach, to determine whether their customers have a disability.

Observations & Conclusions

The implications of these findings relate to the role of state and local employees, the need for greater cross-agency cooperation, and highlight the characteristics and needs of displaced workers with disabilities. ■■■■

1. Disability resource experts can help One-Stop staff serve dislocated workers with disabilities.
2. More research is needed on strategies to encourage One-Stop customers to disclose their disabilities without feeling stigmatized.
3. The One-Stop system needs to build stronger connections with the mental health/behavioral health system.
4. Dislocated workers with literacy deficiencies face significant challenges in upgrading their skills.
5. Older workers make up a disproportionate share of dislocated workers; there is a significant need for dedicated resources to serve older dislocated workers.

Glossary

Disability Program Navigator (DPN): ■ The role of the DPN is to “to better inform people with disabilities about the work support programs available” at the One-Stop Career Centers. The DPN Initiative was established in October 2009 and is funded through the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA).

— Source: www.doleta.gov/disability/new_dpn_grants.cfm

Dislocated worker is an individual who: ■ Has been terminated or laid off, or has received a notice of termination or layoff from employment;
■ Is eligible for or has exhausted unemployment insurance;
■ Has demonstrated an appropriate attachment to the workforce, but not eligible for unemployment insurance and unlikely to return to a previous industry or occupation;
■ Has been terminated or laid off or received notification of termination or layoff from employment as result of a permanent closure or substantial layoff;
■ Is employed at a facility where the employer has made the general announcement that the facility will close within a 180 days;
■ Was self-employed (including employment as a farmer, a rancher, or a fisherman) but is unemployed as a result of general economic conditions in the community or because of a natural disaster; or
■ Is a displaced homemaker who is no longer supported by another family member.

— Source: www.doleta.gov/programs/general_info.cfm

Displaced Workers: ■ Persons 20 years and over who lost or left jobs because their plant or company closed or moved, there was insufficient work for them to do, or their position or shift was abolished.

Source: www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#D

One-Stop Career Centers: ■ Designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof, such as training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services. One-Stop Centers were established under the Workforce Investment Act (1998). Learn about different careers, find career information, and locate career resources through the Career One Stop website: www.careeronestop.org

Source: www.dol.gov/dol/topic/training/onestop.htm

Rapid Response Services: ■ Rapid Response is a pro-active, business-focused, and flexible strategy designed to respond to layoffs and plant closings by quickly coordinating services and providing immediate aid to companies and their affected workers. The Workforce Investment Act (1998) established Rapid Response to provide services to laid-off workers, employers, and to workforce development professionals through the One-Stop Career Centers. State Rapid Response Coordinators: www.doleta.gov/layoff/rapid_coord.cfm

Source: www.doleta.gov/layoff/rapid.cfm

Source ■ Heidkamp, M., & Mabe, W. (2011). *The Great Recession and serving dislocated workers with disabilities: Perspectives from One-Stop Career Centers and Rapid Response Coordinators*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, NTAR Leadership Center.

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About the NTAR Leadership Center: Founded in 2007 under a grant/contract with the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labor, the NTAR Leadership Center's mission is to build capacity and leadership at the federal, state, and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment and economic self-sufficiency for adults with disabilities (Heidkamp & Mabe, 2011, p. 19). Learn more about the NTAR Leadership Center: www.ntarcenter.org

About the KTER Center: The Center on Knowledge Translation for Employment Research (KTER Center) aims to identify the best available evidence related to the employment of Americans with disabilities and investigate why and how individuals use (or do not use) research evidence. The KTER Center contributes to a better understanding of how research evidence can most effectively be translated into new or improved policies, employment opportunities, and support systems. Learn more about the KTER Center: www.kter.org

Available online: <http://www.kter.org/index.php/ktactivities/dissemination>

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