

# **Closing the Disability Unemployment Gap**

## Examining Nonprofit Sector Strategies for Addressing Employment Disparities for Individuals with Disabilities



**Prepared for Uniquely the Same, Inc.**

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## **Disclaimer**

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other entity.

Furthermore, the judgments and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent those of Uniquely the Same, Inc. This report was simply conducted with their support to help discover new ways the organization could possibly begin to address the unemployment gap for individuals with disabilities. The recommendations in this report are just that—recommendations—and while they may inform Uniquely the Same’s strategy moving forward, they may not necessarily be reflective of that strategic vision.

## **Honor Statement**

On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. G. ...', with a stylized flourish at the end.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my client, Uniquely the Same, Inc. for their willingness and enthusiasm to have me explore policies and programs related to disability employment for this Applied Policy Project. Specifically, Cal Clark and Ida Blevins were instrumental in shaping this project and providing advice along the way as I began to explore this topic in depth. Their engagement and their desire to continuously impart knowledge and share their philosophy on employing individuals with disabilities through relationship and strengths-based approaches, served as the foundational understanding for this exploration. It meant so much to me to be working with individuals who motivated me through their kindness and inspired me through their vision. Because I was able to work with them, I never hesitated to suggest things that might have seemed outlandish at first because I knew they would always be open to discussing even the most surprising proposals.

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## Executive Summary

The U.S. has not updated or enacted any policy related to equal treatment and opportunities for individuals with disabilities—outside of school-aged children—since the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. This has resulted in an increasing unemployment gap between individuals with and without disabilities. People without disabilities have an unemployment rate for 9.3% compared to the unemployment rate of 3.7% for those with disabilities (Powell, 2018). As the American economy continues to grow and employment rates continue to improve for most Americans, employment reports from February 2019 show that these gains may come at the exclusion of individuals with disabilities whose job numbers have seen declines (Kessler Foundation, 2019).

This report explores how Uniquely the Same, Inc. (UTS) a disability advocacy nonprofit organization based in the greater Pittsburgh, PA area can actively work to reduce this gap in unemployment rates between individuals with and without disabilities. For the purpose of this report, disability as a multifaceted issue viewed as conditions a person faces because society has imposed certain standards upon them that cause other to interpret their functioning as abnormal (Amundson, 2000). There is an unemployment gap for individuals with all types of disabilities although the unemployment rate varies between types. This report specifically explores employment opportunities for all individuals with disabilities including: visual, hearing, ambulatory, cognitive, self-care, and independent living.

To solve the problem of the disability unemployment gap, this analysis considered ways to affect the demand for employees with disabilities as well as ways to increase the supply of well-prepared employees who have disabilities. Two program options approach the issue from the supply side and one from the demand side.

### SUPPLY

1. Advocate for the development of a career and technical education (CTE) center in conjunction with University of Pittsburgh
2. Enhance Status Quo Employee Consulting Services to Better Prepare Individuals with Disabilities for the Workplace

### DEMAND

3. Develop Employer Consulting Practice to Change Narratives around Hiring Individuals with Disabilities and Help Employers Develop Jobs Targeted at Individuals with Disabilities

To determine the most effective program for Uniquely the Same, Inc. to pursue, this analysis considered: how **effective** each program would be in reducing the disability unemployment gap by the number of people who would likely find employment as a result of the program, how **equitable** the program would be and how many different types of individuals with disabilities could it serve, what the **cost** of the program would be and how feasible it would be for UTS to implement it, and finally, what options for **sustainability and scalability** of the program were likely to exist. After that analysis, *this report recommends UTS pursue the problem by developing an employer consulting practice that would help train and educate employers and businesses, but also allow them to innovate and form unique positions targeted for individuals with disabilities.*

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## **The Problem**

The U.S. has not updated or enacted any policy related to equal treatment and opportunities for individuals with disabilities—outside of school-aged children—since the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. This has resulted in an increasing unemployment gap between individuals with and without disabilities. People without disabilities have an unemployment rate for 9.3% compared to the unemployment rate of 3.7% for those with disabilities (Powell, 2018). As the American economy continues to grow and employment rates continue to improve for most Americans, employment reports from February 2019 show that these gains may come at the exclusion of individuals with disabilities whose job numbers have seen declines (Kessler Foundation, 2019).

## **The Role of Nonprofit Organizations Attempting to Address the Problem**

As this trend in unemployment for individuals with disabilities continues, many disability advocacy organizations are attempting to tackle challenges of employment for individuals with disabilities. Uniquely the Same, Inc. (UTS) is one of those non-profit organizations. Based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, UTS has recently refined its organizational focus, shifting its efforts to decrease this unemployment gap in the Pittsburgh area and even more broadly across the United States through their extensive networks. Uniquely the Same, Inc. has the ability to utilize research from across the nation and world to become a national-model of a program employing best practices for closing the disability unemployment gap. This report will explore how UTS can best leverage their resources and existing partnerships to make a tangible change.

Currently, Uniquely the Same, Inc. is working to develop a network of supporters who believe in their mission of, “Understanding and addressing the core needs of individuals and families affected by disability or economic disadvantage.” The organization has a firm belief that communities are stronger when all members can work together and be celebrated rather than be isolated as individuals (Uniquely the Same, 2017). Thus far their employment programs have focused on one-to-one job coaching and placements in the greater Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania Communities (with anywhere from 1-10 individuals actively working with the UTS team to find meaningful employment), although there are over 600 people online who are part of their networks and about 20 who consistently join weekly remote programming where they discuss, among other disability related topics, job opportunities and employment strategies. UTS is now looking to expand its portfolio of services and wants to explore various program options related to employment (Clark & Blevins, 2019).

## **Background**

Individuals with disabilities tend to be among the poorest in the nation lacking opportunities to work or fearing that their necessary government benefits like Medicaid will be eliminated if they have even a small source of income (W Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2019). In poor communities, there is a higher concentration of individuals with disabilities than there is in middle- and high-income communities. Health outcomes and job prospects are also correlated with average income of a community. In the case of low-income communities, there is a greater prevalence of poor health outcomes and fewer job opportunities. If individuals with disabilities

are already more likely to have fewer job prospects and lower health outcomes than individuals without disabilities, their likelihood to also be living below the poverty line in low-income communities compounds their health and employment outcomes (McCoy, Davis, & Hudson, 1994). Considering these interconnected problems and their compounding effects, the employment discrepancy between individuals with disabilities and those without is a serious public policy problem.

## **Defining Disability**

The traditional way of thinking about disability is based on the Medical Model. Using this framework, disability is an inherent biomedical condition or abnormality in an individual that is naturally associated with disadvantages. In the 1970s disability activists started to conceive of people with disabilities as an oppressed minority only conceived as less capable than those without disabilities because of prejudicial opinions and policies. They began to demand civil rights like the rights won earlier by racial minorities and women. Once activists vocalized this oppression, the Social Model of disability emerged. This model makes disability an issue of social context that arises from the disabling ways in which certain kinds of human variation are dealt with in society (Amundson, 2000).

Today, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), considered *the* leading document on social inclusion of individuals with disabilities globally, “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN General Assembly, Article 1, 2016). This definition focuses on situational factors that may be disabling, which is a nod to the more widely accepted Social Model of disability (Miles, 1999).

The definition in the CRPD does not exclude or provide stringent factors to determine who falls under the category of “persons with disabilities.” This allows for more fluid self-identification and minimizes the emphasis on imposed definitions. Individuals with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world and the CRPD acknowledges both the extensive and fluid nature of disability. Globally an estimated 1 billion people, or fifteen percent of the world population, have disabilities (World Bank Group, 2019). In the United States, the American Community Survey estimates that 12.7-12.8 percent of people have disabilities (Kraus et al., 2018).

## **The Scope of Disability for this Report**

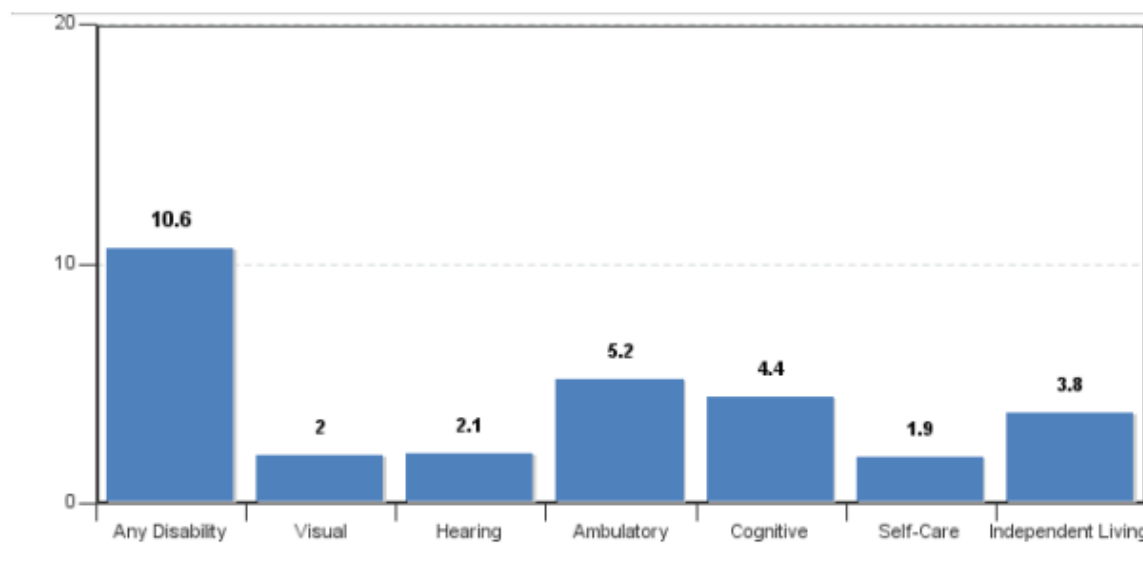
This report deals with disability as a multifaceted issue and seeks to address issues faced by all individuals with a disability. While mental health issues are incorporated into some disability statistics and are certainly a focus for UTS (Clark & Blevins, 2019), albeit not as prominently as other types of disabilities, this report primarily focuses on the following types of disabilities:



- **Visual-** disability that impairs sight functions
- **Hearing-** disability that makes it challenging to receive auditory inputs
- **Ambulatory-** physical or mobility disability that makes getting around and moving from place to place particularly challenging
- **Cognitive-** disability related to learning or cognition; might include intellectual disabilities or other neurodiverse individuals as well
- **Self-Care-** disability that makes daily tasks like dressing and bathing independently challenging; often includes developmental disabilities
- **Independent Living-** disability that prevents individuals from executing chores with ease, but does not necessarily mean these individuals could not execute tasks like going to the grocery store or doctor's office without the proper supports.

In the general population, ambulatory, cognitive, and independent living disabilities are the most prominent with visual disabilities affecting the lowest percentage of the population (W Erickson et al., 2019). For a complete breakdown of these statistics, see **Appendix A**. The overall percentage of individuals with disabilities in the working age population—age 21-64—is slightly lower than the general population of individuals with disabilities at 10.6 percent, but the overall trends of which disabilities are the most and least prominent within the working age subset (see **Figure 1**) match the trends in the greater population.

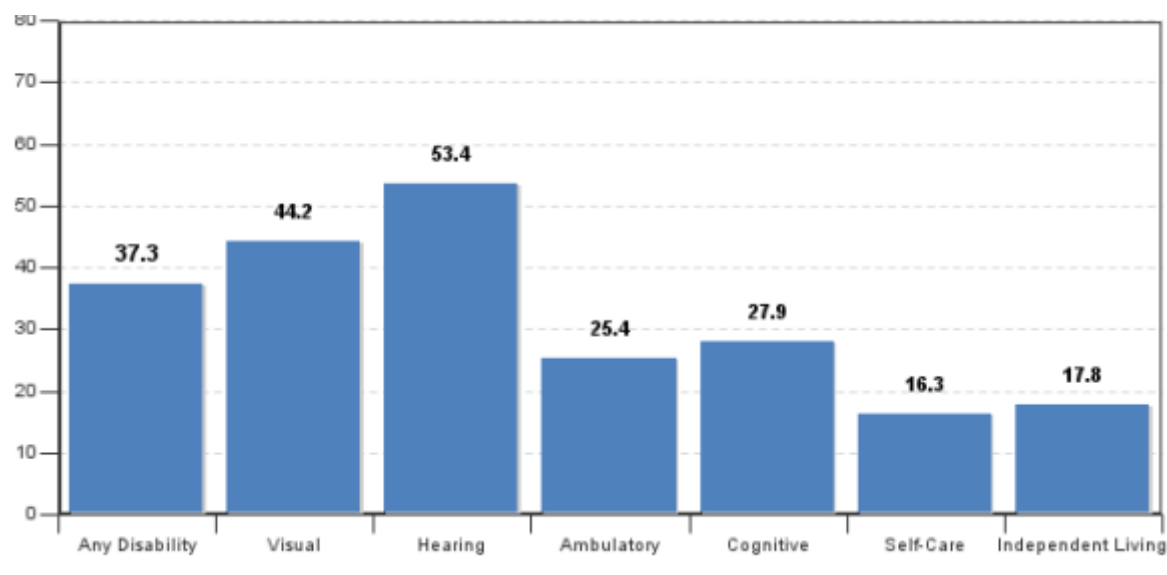
**FIGURE 1- Disability Prevalence Rates: Ages 21-64**



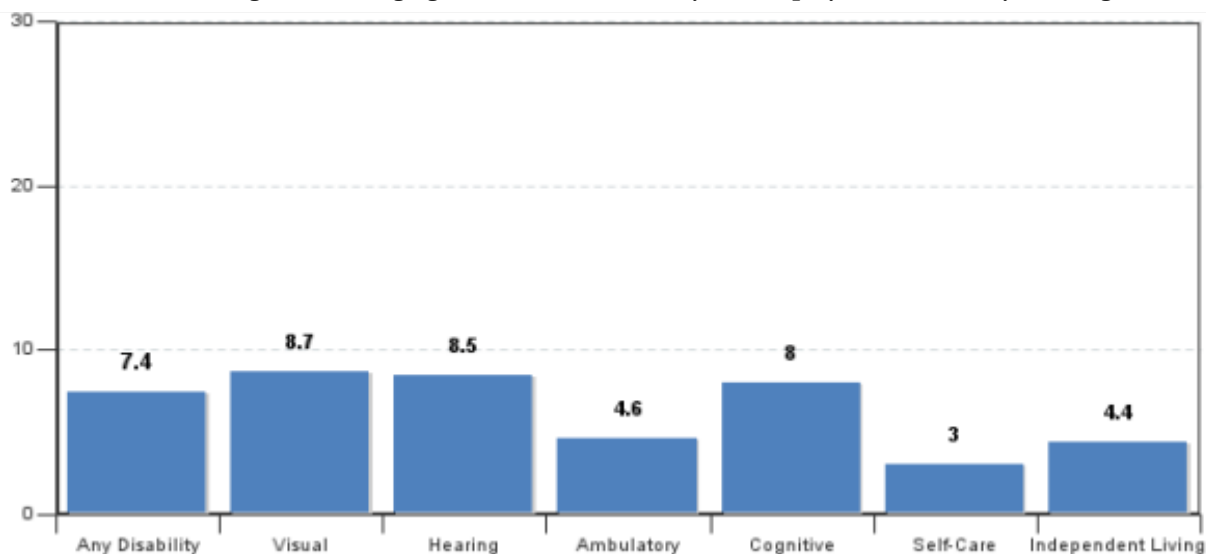
Visual and hearing disabilities together represent one of the smaller percentages of individuals with disabilities, but these individuals are also often the easiest to employ (see **Figure 2** for 2017 employment rates by disability). While these individuals may have the highest percentage of employment of individuals who have disabilities, they are still the most likely to be unemployed, but actively looking for work (see **Figure 3**). Those with ambulatory, self-care, and independent-living disabilities, are not only least likely to be employed, but also least likely to be looking for work (W Erickson et al., 2019). This could be because individuals with more severe disabilities simply are unable to work, or because their severe disabilities led them to face more discrimination in the job market, resulting in a cease of their job search (Hall & Parker, 2010).

Either way, focusing on increasing employment opportunities for more affected populations of individuals with disabilities is likely to result in the greatest decrease of the disability unemployment gap. See **Appendix B** for complete tables with employment and unemployment rate breakdown by disability type.

**FIGURE 2- Percentage of Working Age Adults with Disabilities who are Employed, by Disability Type**



**FIGURE 3- Percentage of Working Age Adults with Disability not Employed, but Actively Looking for Work**



### **Employment and Unemployment for Individuals with Disabilities**

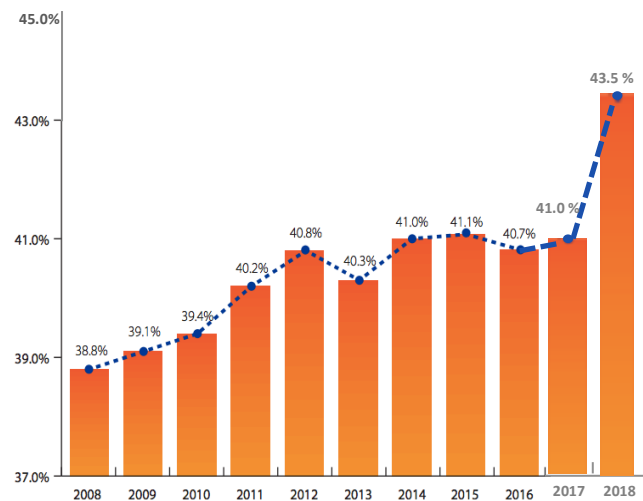
In the United States, among working-aged individuals, only 35 percent of individuals with disabilities are employed compared to 76 percent of individuals who do not have any sort of disability (Lauer & Houtenville, 2018). These numbers have remained largely stagnant over the past five years (Kessler Foundation, 2019) and this employment gap between individuals with and without disabilities is so pronounced and persistent that some scholars have begun referring

to the problem as the “disability gap” simply to refer to the disability employment gap, or less succinctly, the employment gap between individuals with and without disabilities (Ameri et al., 2018). In fact, this gap between employment rates for individuals with and without disabilities is even beginning to grow (See **Figure 4**).

While “disability gap” is becoming an increasingly referenced term, this report focuses on the unemployment gap between individuals with and without disabilities. The unemployment rate captures people who do not have a job, but who are available to work and actively looking for work. Using unemployment as the consistent measure throughout this report addresses the potential concern that the disability employment gap is a result of differing abilities that preclude many individuals with disabilities from obtaining gainful employment. United States employment rate for individuals with disabilities is calculated by dividing the number of individuals with disabilities who have a job by the total number of individuals with disabilities in the United States, not accounting for those individuals within the total population who will never be able to work. This measurement error might drive down the employment rate, but by looking at unemployment rates, it is easier to see the extent to which perfectly capable individuals with disabilities are actually being discriminated against in the job market.

If anything, unemployment rates might underestimate the unemployment problem for individuals with disabilities (whereas employment rates have the potential to make the problem appear more serious than it is) because one must be actively looking for work within four weeks of completing the survey and many individuals with disabilities have simply given up on the job search, citing a hopelessness and overall lack of understanding (Hall & Parker, 2010). Even if the unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities do not capture the totality of their struggle to obtain gainful employment, the unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is more than twice the rate for those without disabilities (U.S. BLS, 2018).

**FIGURE 4- Percent Difference in Employment Rate between Individuals with and Without Disabilities from 2008-2018**



## The Origin of the Disability Unemployment Gap

One study in Australia looked at over 900 disability complaint cases (where discrimination was reported and found credible in the hiring or actual employment process) under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (ADDA) to analyze patterns of discrimination and better understand employer policies and practices. The study determined that most employment discrimination was coming directly from employers themselves (not rooted in something like lack of accessible transportation to get to work). The study also identified why that discrimination primarily occurred. Researchers found that the discrimination was most frequently a result of employers misunderstanding: inherent requirements of the law, what qualified as reasonable

adjustments or qualifications, and acceptable human resource management practices (Taylor & Green, 2016).

While this study is helpful because it analyzed both complaints from individuals who were looking for jobs or already hired by employers, employment discrimination related to disability is vastly underreported so the conclusions Taylor and Green draw about types of discrimination or why employers might intentionally or inadvertently discriminate may be skewed (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006). Nevertheless, their suggestions that better awareness of laws like ADDA or the ADA in the U.S. and greater flexibility on behalf of employers can ameliorate many complaints of discrimination in the workplace or hiring process, lowering the barriers to gainful employment for individuals with disabilities (Taylor & Green, 2016).

Close to eighty percent of individuals with disabilities who are unemployed say they can and would like to work, but are unable to because of the extensive discrimination they face in the hiring process and with the lack of resources and supports that companies provide once they are hired to perform a specific job (Shapiro, 1993). Disability rights advocates have primarily used legislation to address these disproportionate statistics and evident employment discrimination.

### **Legislative Landscape Addressing the Disability Unemployment Gap**

The first wave of policies aimed at addressing discrimination of individuals with disabilities came in 1973 and focused on discrimination in public schools. The second major wave of civil rights legislation for individuals with disabilities came in 1998 when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was introduced in Congress. Signed into law by President Bush in 1990, ADA is the most widely known and recognized piece of legislation related to individuals with disabilities in the United States (Mayerson, 1992). This landmark piece of legislation attempted to make all aspects of society more accessible to Americans with disabilities especially by targeting employment law. ADA was controversial that previous civil rights legislation because instead of just requiring businesses to change their practices, it required businesses and communities to invest money in accessibility. The law officially took effect in 1992 and the country made some progress toward equality for individuals with disabilities (Shapiro, 1993).

On the surface, ADA was incredibly successful. So much so that international lawmakers started looking toward the United States for guidance and protocol for fully including, and celebrating people with disabilities globally. Using the framework of ADA, experts crafted a United Nations treaty with the goal of securing full and equal participation for individuals with disabilities in all aspects of society (Lord, 2015). Given the ways in which ADA dramatically changed the landscape in America, granting rights to an enormous portion of the population who were previously shamefully excluded from most facets of society, people were hopeful about the social and economic benefits ADA would bring.

### **Economics of the Disability Unemployment Gap**

Society's socially constructed notions of disability reduce economic output by reducing the sheer number of individuals who can theoretically contribute to a nation's productivity. This occurs not because individuals who have disabilities cannot contribute, but because society has written them off as incapable and unproductive (Banks and Polack, 2014). This loss in productivity is far more significant than many people initially assume. Estimates of GDP lost due to disability range from 1.72 trillion USD to 2.23 trillion USD. In other words, 5.35% to 6.97% of global GDP is lost

annually because there is a lack of global policy that focuses on developing capacity for all so that around the world individuals with disabilities can contribute to their local communities (Metts, 2004). In the United States alone, the disability community represents 56 million people—20 percent of the population—and accounts for a total disposable income of \$490 billion (including families and communities related to individuals with disabilities). These individuals will be far more eager to spend their money on products and services coming from companies that support inclusion and actively work to address the needs of individuals both through employment and through service provision (Kaufman, 2019).

Economists have also studied and valued the costs of inclusion. While most individuals acknowledge costs to families and society for failing to adopt policies that are inclusive of individuals with disabilities, most also assume that to include and help individuals with disabilities thrive would be cost prohibitive (Banks and Polack, 2014). Researchers discovered that the input costs to make the proper accommodations in schools and workplaces, in order to make healthcare more accessible, and more, are infinitesimal. When weighed against the global losses for neglecting this huge portion of the world population, the costs are negligible as the benefits far surpass them in value. For example, an analysis of 5 different case studies in South Africa where universal design principles (a design process that considers the abilities of everyone when creating spaces and planning communities) were used to make community centers and schools accessible only added 0.47% and 0.78% respectively to the total costs of the projects (Metts, 2004). Furthermore, companies that successfully incorporate candidates with disabilities into their organizations have seen 28 percent higher revenue and two times higher net income, according to a 2018 whitepaper on accessibility from Accenture (Stadtler, 2019).

## **Employment Discrimination**

Employment discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities is a well-documented problem. Discrimination in the employment sector stems primarily from engrained stereotypes about individuals with disabilities and their capabilities. This section explores that stigma around individuals with disabilities both in society and in the workforce, specifically discussing, discrimination at all facets of the job process from hiring, to the problem of underemployment (being hired below one's capability), to discrimination faced while actually working a job.

## **Understanding the Stigma around Disability**

The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (ADA) lowered barriers to entry into society for individuals with disabilities, but societal change takes time and ADA itself did not dramatically change the way individuals view people with disabilities enough. Barriers still persist. Increasing employment opportunities is one way of reducing those barriers because employment helps individuals forge connections. These connections expand the networks available to individuals allowing them to find more support in their current job, to find additional job opportunities, and to find greater life satisfaction through increased human connection generally (Chaplin & Hannaway, 1996).

There are still stigmas around individuals who have disabilities, but those who either have disabilities—or who self-report as having an understanding of, or friendships or familial relationships with people who have disabilities—rank significantly higher on tests that measure their acceptance of individuals with disabilities. Those who have consistent interaction with those

with disabilities also tend to expect more from people with disabilities and believe in their potential to achieve greater life outcomes than those who have limited to no interactions with people who have disabilities (Kapp, Gillespie-Lynch, Sherman, & Hutman, 2013). People without disabilities who are exposed to individuals with disabilities also personally benefit from the interactions. Having a diversity of brain functions in a community or group, and embracing that neurodiversity, is something that ultimately enhances communities (M. Robertson & D. Ne'eman, 2008). The workplace is one such community where neurodiversity adds value (Austin & Pisano, 2017).

## **Unemployment in Post-ADA America**

Many scholars examine whether or not ADA actually led to an increased appreciation of neurodiversity and other different physical abilities in the workplace through improved employment outcomes. While some studies measure a decline in employment after the passage of ADA (Stapleton and Burkhauser, 2003), certain studies also point out that while employment rates for individuals with disabilities declined after the passage of ADA, that decline almost exactly mirrored a decline in employment rates in the population of those without disabilities as well (Houtenville and Burkhauser, 2004). Other studies note that this decrease in employment of individuals with disabilities is likely a result of reclassification of individuals as 'disabled' who prior to ADA were not considered 'disabled' (Hotchkiss, 2004). Nevertheless, the rates of employment for individuals with disabilities remain low, while rates of unemployment remain high and even steadily grow (Lauer & Houtenville, 2018).

## **Hiring Discrimination**

Reducing barriers to employment and helping employers see the value of individuals with disabilities is still a challenge. Individuals fear disclosing a disability or requesting reasonable accommodations they are entitled to under law because of the deep-seated prejudice that many Americans still hold. While sometimes a person's disability may preclude them for effectively executing a particular job, there are many well-documented cases and experimental studies where a disability is unlikely to affect an applicant's productivity and the applicant is still discriminated against. For example, one study sent over 6,000 fabricated applications for a position where one third of cover letters disclosed spinal chord injury, one-third disclosed Asperger's syndrome, and one third made no mention of disability. Applications that disclosed disability received 26% fewer expressions of interest from employers (Ameri et al., 2018).

## **Understanding Employer Hesitations to Hiring Individuals with Disabilities**

While the culture of acceptance for individuals with disabilities continues to improve, there are still many unspoken concerns employers have about hiring and promoting individuals with disabilities. These concerns are often related to costs and additional employer burden and they require an empathetic approach and continued education to dispel myths about individuals with disabilities (Peck & Trew Kirkbride, 2001). Once employers do hire individuals with disabilities, they report high satisfaction with their hiring decisions due to numerous measurable benefits. These include an ability to retain quality employees, an avoidance of hiring costs associated with high turnover, and increase company profitability. Furthermore, this fosters a company culture where employees report recognizing the value their employer places on both an employee as a human being and the inherent benefits of nurturing an inclusive workplace (Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman, Loy, & Batiste, 2011). Even if an individual with a disability is successful in obtaining

full-time or part-time work after navigating a challenging hiring process, it is still very common for individuals with disabilities to face lots of discrimination in the workplace.

There are many large companies leading the charge in inclusive hiring practices who can help share the benefits of inclusive employment including: Cisco Systems, Ernst & Young, IBM Corporation, Proctor & Gamble, SAP Software Solutions, S.C. Johnson, and Sodexo. However, getting employers to recognize that there are benefits to hiring individuals with disabilities is insufficient and not connected to actual hiring practices. Araten-Bergman (2016) conducted the first longitudinal study to measure the relationship between managers' attitudes toward hiring individuals with disabilities and their actual hiring practices. Attitudes had little measureable influence on actual hiring practice, but concrete indicators of diversity climate (i.e. the existence of a formal disability hiring policy and disability training for employees) were significant indicators of hiring practices. This indicates that education and awareness in addition to training for individuals with disabilities will not solve the current problem of underemployment for individuals with disabilities. While these are components of a successful career and vocational strategy for individuals with disabilities, organizations must focus on trainings and programs that help employers develop disability policies and standardize disability trainings even when they may seem futile given current employee demographics.

### **The Problem of Underemployment**

For those with disabilities who are in the minority and are employed, the gap in average annual earnings for people who have disabilities and individuals who do not have a disability widened. In the early 1990s that gap was around \$6,000, but in 2010 workers with disabilities were earning on average about \$9,000 less than (or slightly less than 70 percent of the median salaries for) their colleagues without disabilities (Bhattacharya & Long, 2015). Preliminary data tracking the salaries of men with disabilities after the passage of ADA showed that there was no change in their salaries after ADA; the lack of salary increases overtime is a contributing factor to increasing salary gap (DeLerie, 2000). This data is not parsed by industry, indicating that while salary gaps in industries themselves may not be as significant, individuals with disabilities disproportionately hold jobs in lower-paying service occupations or occupations related to production, transportation, and material moving. In 2017, individuals with disabilities were 5 percentage points less likely to work in management and professional related jobs than those without disabilities. Under-employment—the number of individuals with disabilities who hold low-skill, low-wage jobs and are not being employed at the degree to which they are capable—is perhaps an even bigger challenge for individuals with disabilities than simply their rates of unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

### **Discrimination on the Job**

Even if someone with a disability is able to secure a job, studies also report discrimination in the workplace that makes it hard for these individuals to maintain their job. One study found that people with disabilities reported wide-ranging disparities including: “lower pay and benefits, less job security, higher levels of supervision, lower participation in job and department decisions, and lower levels of company-sponsored formal training and informal training from co-workers” (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). This study also found that for companies where there were no attitude gaps between employees with and without disabilities toward their job and the company, that the key differentiator was consistently high ratings of the company's fairness and responsiveness. Based on that finding, companies that can create an understanding and

responsive workplace culture are better positioned to provide positive working environments for individuals with disabilities.

## **Policies and Programs to Increase Hiring and Productive Work Opportunities**

In the U.S., in the U.K. and other regions around the world, governments and non-profit, private organizations are failing to reach small and medium sized businesses with interventions to help decrease the ‘disability gap.’ Research on successful interventions to close the well-documented disability unemployment gap usually stops at shifting employer attitudes rather than studying the impacts of workplace cultural change programs and other programmatic interventions that go beyond attitudinal shifts and quick trainings. What does exist is primarily concentrated in European countries (Geiger, van der Wel, & Tøge, 2017). Most of that research is focused on the United Kingdom, which is currently focusing on halving the thirty-three percent employment gap (in 2016) between individuals with and without disabilities by 2020 (Quarmby, 2016). Before understanding what programs do exist to reduce the disability unemployment gap, it is important to understand what some of the implementation barriers have been.

### **Poor Incentive Structures**

In order to best close the unemployment gap for individuals with disabilities it is critical to understand why the gap is emerging. It is possible that policies like employment quotas for individuals with disabilities have actually disincentivized employers from wanting to hire more individuals with disabilities once they become compliant with the law. Most research points to employers actually being encouraged to hire more individuals with disabilities once they have individuals successfully working in their organizations (Hartnett, et al. 2011), but it is possible there are poor incentives on the supply side of the employment equation as well.

For example, the government currently sponsors a Ticket to Work Program, which allows individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits to keep their benefits for a trial period, while still working a new job to test whether or not they are capable of performing the duties of their new job (Ortega, 2019). In states all across the U.S. this program is largely undersubscribed, indicating that even with some attempt to reverse bad incentive structures to encourage people to work, a lack of education leads to low adoption rates and ultimately increased unemployment (Bertram, 2019; Ortega, 2019). This current reality matches earlier findings in a study that compared individuals who qualified and just barely qualified for benefits. The researchers found that the 1990s labor force participation rate of disability insurance beneficiaries would have been at most 20 percentage points higher had none of the beneficiaries received their disability insurance benefits (Chen & van der Klaauw, 2008). A later comparative study that examined the same sample found that among the estimated 23 percent of applicants on the margin of program entry, employment would have been 28 percentage points higher had they not received benefits. The effects are much greater for those with minor impairments who still qualified for insurance, but otherwise would have been considered highly employable (Maestas, Mullen, & Strand, 2013).

Since much of the United States government policy has actually discouraged individuals with disabilities from working and discouraged employers from hiring individuals with disabilities in



high numbers, UTS should look at programs that can work around these existing government policies and incentivize employees who have disabilities to continue searching for employment and employers, to hire qualified candidates even if they have a disability.

### **Government Sponsored Advocacy Campaigns**

In November 2017, the United Kingdom re-launched a campaign initially started in 2013 called Disability Confident, which encouraged employers to recognize the skills of people with disabilities and hire them. Operated by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Minister for Disabled People oversees this campaign. Joining Disability Confident provides employers with the skills they need to recruit, train, and develop individuals who have disabilities. By February 2018, three of the largest retailers in the U.K. had signed on to this campaign, effectively spearheading it and recruiting other organizations to follow suit (Southerland, 2018). This program has garnered a lot of support and resulted in many employers actively exploring how to hire more individuals with disabilities because of financial support from the government and effective sharing of best practices among employers who are part of the Disability Confident group (Butler, 2018). Some people critique it though, noting that it primarily attracts large corporations when sixty percent of the private sector labor force in the United Kingdom is employed by small and medium sized firms that lack the structure, capacity, and support to actively help close the disability unemployment gap. Additionally, the efficacy of programs like these—especially related to long-term job retention and not just hiring increases—remains largely unexplored because of their new nature and a lack of associated research (Quarmby, 2016).

### **Private Nonprofit Advocacy Campaigns**

In the United States these campaigns and support systems from employers are largely filled by the private sector. Non-profit organizations like the National Council on Disability and Disability:IN provide businesses with a wealth of tools and services to help increase the number of individuals with disabilities they are able to successfully employ. Without greater governmental support through grants and employee or employer training programs, aside from what they already do to ensure that corporations and businesses are in compliance with ADA, the onus is on business leaders to seek out these private, nonprofit organizations for best practices, research, and support. While the National Council on Disability and Disability:IN are still providing important services, large corporations disproportionately participate in their programs and small and medium sized businesses are often excluded .

### **Government Funded Education and Training Centers**

When there is involvement from the government in the United States it is primarily concentrated at the state and local level. At the national level there are often punitive lawsuits filed against states or localities for not upholding protections guaranteed under ADA, but while the federal government action has all been reactive since 1990, state and local action is proactive. For example, in 2018, the state of Maryland and University of Maryland partnered to open a center for career and technical education for individuals with disabilities. The goal of the center is to help prepare individuals with disabilities for successful careers (Hill, 2018).

Until very recently there was no causal research specifically analyzing the impact of career and technical education (CTE) on job outcomes for individuals with disabilities. A 2018 study looked at academic performance of those in CTE programs and compared individuals with disabilities

who participated in CTE programs and those with similar disabilities who did not. CTE did not significantly affect student performance on standardized measures of achievement. The study did conclude that CTE resulted in higher probabilities of attaining industry certificates and graduating from high school on time, which has been shown to lead to improved employment outcomes (Dougherty, Grindal, & Hehir, 2018). While this is the only study of its kind and more research is necessary to confidently draw conclusions, this is promising for policy makers.

There is significant opportunity for local and state governments to partner with nonprofits and even for profit corporations to open career and technical education centers to decrease the disability unemployment gap. One study that linked career and technical education centers to positive employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, analyzed a program where job coaching and person-centered job placement were also aspects of the curriculum (Robertson et al., 2007). This is not standard practice for CTE programs so future CTE programs should consider the benefits of additional programming models that include job coaching if they hope to significantly contribute to reducing the disability unemployment gap.

## **Overview of Potential Programs to Address the Disability Unemployment Gap**

Considering all the data and information related to past policies and programs that various nonprofit entities and governments have implemented in order to reduce the disability unemployment gap, this report explores three options that Uniquely the Same, Inc. could pursue in line with their strategic vision.

### **Program 1: Advocate for the development of a career and technical education (CTE) center in conjunction with University of Pittsburgh**

Under this option for action, Uniquely the Same would be a behind the scenes partner in a partnership model with the University of Pittsburgh and other disability advocacy organizations in the region. Together all the partners would advocate for and help individuals with disabilities find jobs and successfully train for gainful employment, but UTS would not implement the program or run the program itself. Rather, University of Pittsburgh would primarily be responsible for the career and technical education elements of the center, choosing professors and the curriculum structure; however, as a partner in the program UTS could have a significant say in the program. UTS would need to advocate for job training and coaching as part of the services offered through this career and technical education, since CTE programs with this additional service have been most successful in securing employment opportunities and retention in the long-run for individuals with disabilities (Robertson et al., 2007). Other institutions like the University of Maryland, a few colleges in the University of California consortium, and the University of Florida have developed similar training programs.

### **Program 2: Enhance Status Quo Employee Consulting Services to Better Prepare Individuals with Disabilities for the Workplace**

This program is based off of a well-tested model that many organizations around the United States and internationally use to help close the disability unemployment gap. In Pittsburgh, this model already exists through Bender Consulting Services, a consulting firm that trains individuals with disabilities and then provides them with employment opportunities at various

job sites across the region (Bender, 2019). Best Buddies is another organization with an international jobs coaching program involving one-to-one employment coaches for individuals with disabilities to help them succeed in the workforce. Both of these organizations have partnerships with employers, but work primarily with the employees to find a good job to fit their skill set. The actual one-to-one job coaching involves skills like interview preparation, self-advocacy, public speaking, and computer skills training among other skills that vary based on the individuals and their strengths. This model is successful in the U.S. (Best Buddies, 2019), and in the United Kingdom (Leonard Chesire, 2019).

Uniquely the Same, Inc. is already doing some one-to-one job coaching work, but it is limited to a few clients each year and not all have retained their jobs (Clark & Blevins, 2019). Pursuing this option would expand the services UTS already provides by hiring more job coaches and expanding the client base in Pittsburgh.

### **Program 3: Develop Employer Consulting Practice to Change Narratives around Hiring Individuals with Disabilities and Help Employers Develop Jobs Targeted at Individuals with Disabilities**

Multiple studies on workplace discrimination (both for individuals with disabilities *and* for individuals who identify with other marginalized groups) point to employer attitudes as the true barrier to social inclusion (Geiger et al., 2017). This alternative seeks to address employer attitudes among other structural barriers, like actual jobs available on the job market, and have UTS transition its focus from individuals with disabilities to employers to help them redefine their business models and inclusion strategies to focus on hiring individuals with disabilities. UTS would develop an employer consulting business, to help employers design businesses specifically around skills and needs of those with disabilities rather than trying to match the skills of someone with a disability into an already existing organization and have the employer have to make accommodations. For example, there is a shredding company in Western Pennsylvania called Keystone, which provides shredding and document destruction services performed solely by individuals who are blind or who have significant visual impairments. The organization has successfully existed since 1947 and continues to develop new enterprises for individuals with vision related disabilities (Keystone, 2019).

Under this program, Uniquely the Same, Inc. would: partner with organizations that already exist like Keystone; consult with entrepreneurs looking to begin their own businesses tailored to the needs, skills and talents of individuals with disabilities; and work with businesses of all sizes to implement training and teaching programs to help make the businesses more accessible and inclusive, changing the narrative around hiring individuals with disabilities.

### **Evaluative Criteria**

Uniquely the Same, Inc. is attempting to leverage its position as a nonprofit organization, not constrained by government contracts and funding, and with a substantial private donor base, to measurably reduce the disability unemployment gap. The unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is more than double what it is for individuals without disabilities and UTS wants to pursue strategies and programs that will reduce the gap between those two rates. As an organization based in the greater Pittsburgh area, they will focus their programs and services

there, but hope to move to be able to eventually scale programs to Pennsylvania and even nationally. All potential strategies and programs that Uniquely the Same, Inc. may pursue will be evaluated across four different criteria: **effectiveness, equity, scalability/sustainability, and cost**. These criteria will all be weighted in terms of their importance within UTS's strategic vision.

Of primary importance is any intervention's **effectiveness** in actually closing the unemployment gap between individuals with and without disabilities. In addition to effectiveness, UTS next cares about **equity** and ensuring that any programs or organizational policies serve the needs of all individuals with disabilities, not just focusing on the most employable individuals who may have a minor physical disability instead of a severe intellectual one. In order to produce change that has a lasting impact, UTS must consider the **scalability and sustainability** of any program and it must clearly outline a communication mechanism that makes any partnership-based alternatives feasible for the partners as well, because it is only through partnerships that their programs are likely to be maintained. While of least concern to UTS, **cost** is also important because it will be used to determine whether or not a proposed alternative is feasible given administrative implementing constraints.

### **Effectiveness in Closing the Disability Unemployment Gap**

At the core of this criterion is whether or not any programmatic approach Uniquely the Same, Inc. employs will meet its intended goal of reducing the unemployment gap and helping individuals with disabilities find and retain meaningful jobs. Since almost no programs actually measure their overall effectiveness, it is difficult to estimate this number, and even more challenging to determine the reduction in the unemployment gap. In this case, there will be estimates of the number of additional people with disabilities who are employed in the greater Pittsburgh region as a result of UTS's programs.

- **Low (1):** A program that is not effective will begin by employing 0-10 people in the first year of operation.
- **Medium (3):** A program that has medium effectiveness will be able to employ 11-29 individuals within the first year of operation.
- **High (5):** A program that is highly effective can employ at least 30 individuals with disabilities in the first year and continue expanding in future years.

The retention of individuals in these jobs is equally important and should be tracked by UTS in the long term, but for the immediate effectiveness of the program, it is important to get people into jobs. Once individuals with disabilities are employed, they do typically remain at their job (Hartnett et al., 2011).

### **Equity**

Some individuals with disabilities have a significantly easier time finding gainful employment than others, particularly those who are on the Autism spectrum and really skilled with numbers and detail (Austin & Pisano, 2017), or those who have physical disability that require minimal accommodation like a vision or hearing impairment (W Erickson et al., 2019). Uniquely the Same, Inc. cares about employing people with all types of disabilities and deeply believes there can be meaningful work for everyone. For this reason, it is critical that programs are expansive and can serve the needs of all individuals with disabilities who are looking for some form of work

(Uniquely the Same, 2017). Ultimately, there needs to be balance of individuals with different types of disabilities benefitting from these programs, with a particular emphasis on individuals who may require a few more accommodations or a complete envisioning of the types of jobs provided. The following question will guide this analysis: Do the services tangibly help people with all types of disabilities or are they targeted solutions that only help ‘the most employable’ individuals with disabilities find jobs?

- **Very undesirable (1):** In this condition, the program implemented only serves one form of disability (e.g. only services for people with Autism).
- **Undesirable (2):** The program serves on one larger disability category, but does not seek to serve individuals beyond that (e.g. only serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, only serves individuals with physical disabilities).
- **Neutral (3):** The program is open to any individuals, but outreach is focused on the most ‘employable’ individuals (i.e. those who already have higher rates of employment like those with hearing or auditory disabilities).
- **Desirable (4):** Only focuses on the most challenging groups of individuals to employ (e.g. those with self-care disabilities).
- **Very desirable (5):** Focuses on and serves all individuals with disabilities without consideration of ostensible employability. This is the most desirable outcome instead of only focusing on those hardest to employ because individuals who have higher employment rates with specific disabilities also have higher unemployment rates meaning that while they may be employed at greater rates, there are still more of them looking for work, so a program needs to consider *all* individuals with disabilities (W Erickson et al., 2019).

## Long Term Scalability and Sustainability

While Uniquely the Same, Inc. is focused in Pittsburgh, their ultimate vision rests on programs that can be scaled nationally. An estimate for the sustainability and scalability of these programs is developed by studying regions beyond Western Pennsylvania to see what services already exist, where there are great needs, and generally what the reception to programs related to disability advocacy would be. This will allow for a determination of whether or not this program might be successfully scaled to other regions of the country.

Additionally, UTS is a small organization that needs a scalable and sustainable model that will survive without the organization’s current leadership. Since consistent, reliable employment is one of the strongest ways that individuals with disabilities can be integrated into their communities on a long-term basis, finding a program that enhances community partnerships and brings many individuals to the table will increase accountability and ultimately the likelihood of success (Hohman, 2019). Programs and education to work initiatives like Impact21 in Australia that involve extensive collaboration across industry, education, disability employment services, media, government, and the not-for-profit sector successfully demonstrate this partnership model. This program only focuses on individuals who have Down syndrome, but successfully demonstrates how adults, families, employers, educators and support services can work together to enable people of all abilities to make a valued contribution in the workplace and community. Thus, the sustainability of any program will be measured by the number of partners UTS could form within the first year of any program’s implementation.

- **Very unlikely (1):** Once UTS stops supporting the program, individuals with disabilities will not be able to benefit from the services.
- **Unlikely (2):** It is possible that other community partners might be able to step in and carry on the programmatic initiative, but it is highly unlikely that this would occur based on the partnerships formed through the program.
- **Neutral (3):** This program will almost certainly be sustainable in Pittsburgh, but is unlikely that it will spread to other parts of the country and help reduce the disability unemployment gap beyond the region.
- **Likely (4):** With some funding and continued support from UTS, this program will expand beyond the geographical bounds of Pittsburgh, while still sustaining a strong program in the local region.
- **Very likely (5):** With little to no support from UTS, this program would remain in place and continue to serve individuals with disabilities both within Pittsburgh and beyond.

## Cost

Whether or not any proposed alternative could be accomplished with the resources that Uniquely the Same currently has (enough staff and supervisors), or could currently access within a year, is also critical to a program's success. Cost matters here, but UTS has access to a wealth of resources that makes expansion well within reach. This organizational flexibility means that feasibility is tied to community partners and how realistic implementing any proposed programs is for them. Therefore, embedded in this criterion is the need for Uniquely the Same, Inc. to consider the resources of other partners and their willingness to prioritize employing individuals with disabilities.

- **Prohibitive (1):** Any program that would fall into this category is beyond the bounds of what Uniquely the Same, Inc. has at its disposal or is capable of fundraising.
- **Burdensome (3):** This program is something that Uniquely the Same could go fundraise for, but ultimately it would pose an administrative burden to do so, or may involve outside grants that UTS does not want to apply for because of certain restrictions related to faith or other organizational principles.
- **Feasible (5):** This program is something that Uniquely the same could easily execute and that would require limited to no fundraising.

## Program Evaluation

This evaluation applies **effectiveness, equity, cost, and scalability/sustainability** to three potential programs Uniquely the Same, Inc. could implement to work towards reducing the disability unemployment gap. These criteria will all be weighted in terms of their importance within UTS's strategic vision. The full evaluative matrix is in **Appendix C**.

### Program 1: Career and Technical Education Training Center

Under this option for action, Uniquely the Same would be a behind the scenes partner in a partnership model with the University of Pittsburgh and other disability advocacy organizations in the region to create a career and technical education training center. Uniquely the Same, Inc. Would specifically serve as the job coaches as part of the services offered through the center.

## Outcomes Matrix for Program 1

TABLE 1

	Evaluative Criteria				Totals	
Program Option	Effectiveness (*0.4)	Equity (*0.3)	Scalability & Sustainability (*0.2)	Cost (*0.1)	Total Point Value	Weighted Total
<b>Program 1: CTE Center</b>	Medium (3)	Neutral (3)	Very Likely (5)	Feasible (5)	16	3.6

### Effectiveness – Medium

While there is a plethora of research around career and technical education programs, the results are largely mixed (Dougherty et al., 2018; Hill, 2018; Robertson et al., 2007; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2015). Most of these results examine centers that target both high school students and post-secondary students, one study looked at the differences between the two student groups and found that participating in specific occupational concentrated training for two years post high school, on obtaining and retaining employment (Wagner et al., 2015). This suggests that a program where there are specific job coaches, who can place individuals in specialized course based on their strengths and employment plan, would be highly effective. However, these programs do take a long time to roll out and while it is likely that with the University of Pittsburgh partnership, the center would quickly expand, at least in the short term, the center would have to develop relationships with employers and train individuals receiving their services (AUCD, 2019). It is unlikely that this model would be able to help more than 50 individuals with disabilities find employment in a year so it is ranked at medium effectiveness.

### Equity – Neutral

Career and technical education programs often target specific individuals with disabilities—those who with just a little more skill development could be very successful in a plethora of job placements, although other students with more severe disabilities are not recruited, most programs do not preclude them from participating (Calvert, 2012). Other models around the U.S. of CTE programs opened in conjunction with universities and other community partners are able to place individuals across the spectrum of disabilities, but again their target and focus remains limited (Hill, 2018). Uniquely the Same, Inc. could leverage its relationships with other service providers in the area who work with individuals with more severe disabilities, Furthermore, CTE programs are primarily targeted at younger individuals who have yet to enter the workforce, or who are attempting to make a career change early on in their professional careers (Calvert, 2012). Since a program like this would be technically open to any individual with a disability, but the providers would primarily be best equipped to help ‘the most employable’ individuals, it would be neutral in terms of equity.

### Scalability and Sustainability – Very Likely

Since UTS would not be the primary partner on this project, their service to this initiative is not essential in the long-term, although it would be critical to have their one-on-one job coaching and training skills to launch a successful program, with the backing of other institutional funders and the University, this program is very likely to be sustainable and serve as a model for other states around the country interested in decreasing the disability unemployment gap.

### **Cost – Feasible**

The cost for this program is actually likely the highest of the three programs costing well over \$100 million (APS, 2019), However, Uniquely the Same, Inc. would likely serve as a service provider at the training center and actually receive funding for providing their services through this partnership model. The only concern for UTS related to this policy option is how they might become constrained by the type of funding they receive (i.e. would it be government grant funding), but since UTS would not have to fund the project directly—solely serve as a programmatic partner, this might even result in cost savings for the organization and is very feasible given their current budget.

### **Program 2: Enhance Employee Consulting Services**

This program is based off of a well-tested model that many organizations around the United States and internationally use to help close the disability unemployment gap and it would simply expand the employment consulting services Uniquely the Same, Inc. currently provides to its clients.

### **Outcomes Matrix for Program 2**

TABLE 2

<b>Program Option</b>	<b>Evaluative Criteria</b>				<b>Totals</b>	
	<b>Effectiveness (*0.4)</b>	<b>Equity (*0.3)</b>	<b>Scalability &amp; Sustainability (*0.2)</b>	<b>Cost (*0.1)</b>	<b>Total Point Value</b>	<b>Weighted Total</b>
<b>Program 2: Employee Consultation</b>	Low (1)	Very Desirable (5)	Very Unlikely (1)	Feasible (5)	12	2.6

### **Effectiveness – Low**

Since this is ultimately the status quo option, it can be assumed that even with the intention of enhancing the employee consulting and job coaching, that employee placement numbers would match UTS's current numbers. Given the small client base and the amount of time Uniquely the Same, Inc. spends with each individual to do job coaching and mentoring work, they would not be able to find meaningful employment for more than ten unemployed individuals with disabilities (Clark & Blevins, 2019). This program ranks low at least in the short term, although it should be noted that by scaling up rapidly, the impact could be greater.

### **Equity – Very Desirable**

Person centered one-on-one employment coaching is one of the only solutions to reducing the disability unemployment gap where the literature has found a strong impact on individuals with severe disabilities. Specifically if an individual with a disability is in a training program or has some other type of institutional support and backing like a high school public school system, if they can engage with an employment opportunity while still receiving those supports, they will be more likely to retain employment and find new jobs after exiting the program (Certo & Luecking, 2006). Uniquely the Same, Inc. already follows this model where they work with an individual throughout the majority of the employment process, continuing to reevaluate responsibilities and work on skill development. Furthermore, UTS accepts all clients and under their current model, those who have been turned away by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and cannot find



other organizations willing to provide them with services, will often turn to UTS for coaching and support (Clark & Blevins, 2019). Since an expansion of UTS's current programs would continue to focus on and serve all individuals with disabilities without consideration of ostensible employability, it is a very desirable program in terms of equity.

### **Scalability and Sustainability – Very Unlikely**

This program itself would not continue to exist without Uniquely the Same, Inc., but it does certainly have the possibility of being sustainable with a strong UTS. The partnership opportunities for this type of program are limited, because there are so many other similar programs operating in the region (Bender, 2019; Best Buddies, 2019). These other regional programs would likely still be around and the UTS program could easily scale, but it likely would not catch on in the form of a UTS program since every region has its own unique job coaching and employee consulting services for individuals with disabilities (Habeck, Kregel, Head, & Yasuda, 2007). In their current form the UTS employee consulting services are not scalable, so a lot of work would need to be done to bring them to a point where this would be a possibility. It is very unlikely that continuing to use this program model—and even expanding it—would position UTS to sustain and scale their program the way they hope to do.

### **Cost – Feasible**

Right now, UTS is primarily funding their employee consulting services through volunteer hours. In some cases, organizations charge individuals to receive job coaching, but most organizations provide the services free of charge and obtain government or other foundation grants (Bender, 2019; Best Buddies, 2019). While nothing is currently coming out of their budget, any expansion would require some additional investment on the part of Uniquely the Same, Inc. An individual supported employment program in the UK specifically focusing on individuals on the autism spectrum operated on a scale similar to that of UTS. In the first year of its launch its costs were \$84,000, and it was able to help eight individuals find gainful employment. In the second year of operation, services extended to eighteen individuals, but costs did not rise at the same rate, totaling to \$110,000 (Mawhood & Howlin, 1999). These present value costs may provide some insight into what Uniquely the Same, Inc. would need to budget on the low-end for an expanded program. This would assume the hiring of one-two job coaches while still relying on volunteer services that are used to meet current program demand. Since this is such a low cost to the organization and most aligned with what it currently does, it would be very feasible to implement this program organizationally and administratively.

### **Program 3: Develop Employer Consulting Practice**

Under this program, Uniquely the Same, Inc. would: partner with organizations that already exist like Keystone; consult with entrepreneurs looking to begin their own businesses tailored to the needs, skills and talents of individuals with disabilities; and work with businesses of all sizes to implement training and teaching programs to help make the businesses more accessible and inclusive, changing the narrative around hiring individuals with disabilities.

## Outcomes Matrix for Program 3

TABLE 3

	Evaluative Criteria				Totals	
Program Option	Effectiveness (*0.4)	Equity (*0.3)	Scalability & Sustainability (*0.2)	Cost (*0.1)	Total Point Value	Weighted Total
<b>Program 3: Employer Consultation</b>	High (5)	Very Desirable (5)	Neutral (3)	Burdensome (3)	16	4.4

### Effectiveness – High

Employers who do use outside tools and resources in effort to adopt best practices within the organization for recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities are consistently doing a good job at recruiting, retaining, and advancing employees with disabilities (EARN, 2019). This is likely a result of overall employer investment in the hiring process of individuals with disabilities which has been shown to impact company culture and in turn employee satisfaction positively (Erickson, Schrader, Bruyère, Vanlooy, & Matteson, 2014; Kaye et al., 2011). As long as UTS is successful in getting organizations to participate in their trainings and adopt some of their suggested company policies to help make the hiring practice more inclusive, this initiative can be successful because focusing on the demand side of employment has—on a small scale—already proven to be very beneficial (Saleh & Bruyère, 2018). One study found that employer incentives to have previously injured employees returned to work, dramatically improved the number of employees coming back to work and positively impacted company culture (Chan, Strauser, Gervy, & Lee, 2010).

Not only is hiring a significant number of people with disabilities important, but it is also important for those individuals to have high retention rates in their job. When working with employers, it is critically important to help them foster a culture that minimizes workplace exits, but programs that focus on the demand side of employment and therefore help foster positive and beneficial workplace culture and more successful in increasing employee retention than programs that focus on job coaching with an employee (Habeck et al., 2007). Approaching the problem of the disability unemployment problem from the demand side of employment has been proven to be effective and with a few critical partnerships with various sized employers, Uniquely the Same, Inc. can amplify their efforts employing over thirty individuals with disabilities in the first year of this program. They would not need to dramatically expand their client base, but each client would have the capability to employ anywhere from 1-10 individuals with disabilities depending on the company size. As such, the projected effectiveness of this program is high.

### Equity – Very Desirable

Similar to program two, which largely mirrored Uniquely the Same, Inc.’s current operating model, this program would also allow for UTS to maintain control over the program and decide how to structure conversations with employers, and how to structure their focus on specific skills and jobs that may suit specific individuals with disabilities that are typically more challenging to employ. Research shows that individual companies and organizations that work directly with a community service provider to help with actively hiring more individuals with disabilities are three times more likely to hire those with disabilities than companies and organizations that have

no such community partnerships (Erickson et al., 2014). This same study also identified specific organizational practices like internship programs, among other things, to give employees who otherwise would not have the chance to work the chance to carve out strategies in the workplace. Employing these proven practices through an employer-consulting model would allow all individuals with disabilities to find a niche in an organization. Therefore, this program has a very desirable level of equity for individuals with disabilities.

### **Scalability and Sustainability – Neutral**

The success of this alternative is contingent upon UTS's ability to attract clients and engage community members who also have the capacity to offer employment to individuals with disabilities. Studies out of Vanderbilt University examine faith-based communities as a promising mechanism for this relationship formation (Carter & Bumble, 2018). This is where Uniquely the Same, Inc. has begun its relationship process with potential employers and as Carter and Bumble (2018) argue, the built in networks that already exist within these faith based communities bring more people to the table, in a much faster manner. While Uniquely the Same, Inc. has been leveraging faith based communities to find clients for its services by thinking about how to supply the market with more individuals with disabilities who are ready to work, the more promising and sustainable avenue is actually on the demand side of the employment equation (Saleh & Bruyère, 2018).

In this specific case, UTS would work with employers of small and medium sized business clients who employ the majority of the population and for the most part want to employ individuals with disabilities, but lack the resources to do so or the knowledge of programs that are helping employers make their businesses more inclusive of those with disabilities (SBA, 2018). While leveraging existing networks in the Pittsburgh region to position employers to create jobs within the organizations specifically targeted at individuals with disabilities will likely persist without UTS, the popularity of this reverse model of employer consulting to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities remains to be seen. There are organizations like the Employer Action Resource Network on Disability Inclusion or the Job Action Network, which both provide services nationally to employers seeking more inclusive hiring practices. These organizations might indicate positive reception to employer consulting services in the employer community nationally where more personal ties and connections cannot be leverage to form an employer client base, but still services provided by these organizations are underutilized (EARN, 2019). Ultimately, evidence and UTS's current networks in Pittsburgh, suggest that this model would be sustainable in the region, but its scalability is highly uncertain and thus it is ranked as neutral for this criterion.

### **Cost – Burdensome**

This is an entirely new program that Uniquely the Same, Inc. would undertake and it would certainly require more funding to launch the services than their traditional funding sources provide. Depending on how many staff members UTS wanted to hire to expand their capacity rapidly, the costs of this program could be anywhere between \$150,000 - \$500,000 annually. While this would require raising more money, it is not a raise that would prohibit the organization from functioning; an enhanced donor outreach strategy would allow the organization to continue at its current operating levels and additionally add this new employer consulting program (Clark & Blevins, 2019). The cost is ultimately burdensome, but with that additional effort this program is something UTS could implement.

## Recommendation

Two recommendations for potential programs presented in this report addressed the supply side of the labor equation, targeting individuals with disabilities and their job skills, and the third recommended program option focused on demand, targeting employers. Any of these options will have some effects on reducing the disability unemployment gap, which is ultimately the most important way to evaluate all the program options. What Uniquely the Same, Inc. is currently doing with limited one-on-one job coaching and placement does have an effect already so these programs were considered as strategies for UTS to expand its impact.

## Program Benefits and Drawbacks

Each program option has beneficial elements and other elements that make it less desirable. See **Table 4** for a comparison across alternatives.

**TABLE 4: Comparison of Benefits and Drawbacks Across Proposed Programs**

	<b>Positive Elements of the Program</b>	<b>Negative Elements of the Program</b>
<b>Program 1: Career and Technical Education Center</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Institutional partners help ensure longevity</li><li>• The cost to UTS would likely be positive since they would be paid for services and not have to provide start up capital</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less flexibility to adhere to the UTS mission statement or guide the vision of the program</li><li>• Program might end up serving only a select few with disabilities</li></ul>
<b>Program 2: Enhance Employee Consulting Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This enhancement would require limited fundraising on the part of UTS and keep costs low</li><li>• UTS retains full autonomy and can use data from the work they have already one to enhance their services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This program would not likely be sustainable without UTS</li><li>• So many other organizations do something similar – it's not a very unique solution</li><li>• Currently this model is not serving a large group of people and increasing the program reach in the short term would be a challenge – UTS has to continue job coaching with each individual with limited phase out</li></ul>
<b>Program 3: Develop Employer Consulting Practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High long term sustainability with this program because employers effectively become responsible for their culture and no longer need services</li><li>• Quick scaling opportunities at least locally as more and more companies find out and at UTS leverages their networks</li><li>• Targets many different types of individuals with disabilities and employs many of them</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This program is the most costly to Uniquely the Same in the sort run</li><li>• Questionable wide adoption by other organizations beyond the Pittsburgh area where UTS does not have strong ties</li></ul>

## **Evaluating Numerical Values for each Program Option**

Program 1 and Program 3 both rank the same with raw scores of 16 (See **Appendix C**) and might seem like equally attractive options. While on the aggregate level they appear to be equivalent, their strengths are very different. Therefore, when evaluating them as programs, Uniquely the Same, Inc.'s priorities must be considered. For example, participating as a community partner in building and teaching at a career and technical education center (Program 1) is a very low cost option to UTS and is something that will be very sustainable and scalable. On the other hand, developing an employment consulting practice (Program 3) is of higher cost to UTS and would require lots of outside fundraising, but it is more effective in closing the disability unemployment gap by employing more individuals seeking jobs and it is more equitable because UTS will have the freedom to work with clients to encourage the development of various jobs over others. Since effectiveness and equity are most important to Uniquely the Same, Inc., once all of the criteria are appropriately weighted, Program 3 emerges as the most optimal with a score of 4.4 out of 5 in comparison to 3.6 out of 5, Program 1's weighted score. Enhancing the current model of employee consulting for individuals with disabilities (Program 2) ranked the lowest both in raw and weighted scores and will not be discussed more in this section.

## **Focusing on Demand for Employment of Individuals with Disabilities**

By focusing on the demand for employing for individuals with disabilities, UTS has the opportunity to change the narrative around social inclusion. If UTS is successful in working with employers to demonstrate all the social and economic benefits of both hiring and catering their businesses to individuals with disabilities, then instead of trying to cater the skills of an individual who has a disability to fit the mold of the job, organizations who value diversity and who value hiring individuals with disabilities will then be creating jobs specifically tailored to these individuals with disabilities instead. By focusing on demand, UTS can work to shift the paradigm around disability employment, trying an innovative strategy that has not been tested very much. The reason enhancing a consulting practice for individuals with disabilities did not emerge to the top is likely because this is the way society has been approaching the problem of the disability unemployment gap for a while. The thought was that by simply training individuals with disabilities, they would suddenly be prepared for the job market; however, they still faced immense discrimination and even employers who did want to hire individuals with disabilities, did not know how to do so fairly and with the proper supports so that an individual could excel in a role. If UTS works with employers instead of employees, UTS has the opportunity to dramatically change the narrative around hiring with disabilities and work toward reducing and closing the disability unemployment gap.

## **Final Recommendation**

This report recommends that Uniquely the Same, Inc. pursue the only demand-focused strategy and develop an employer consulting practice to change narratives around hiring individuals with disabilities and help employers develop specific jobs targeted at individuals with disabilities and their unique skills.

## Implementation Strategy

Uniquely the Same, Inc. should ultimately shift its employment consulting strategy over to one that focuses primarily on working with employers. While this shift should happen as soon as possible in order to actually begin providing services, UTS can begin using its networks (Carter & Bumble, 2018) to develop their brand and get employers about the services they will be able to provide. While in this process of relationship development with more employers, UTS would not have to cease its one-to-one career coaching and employee consulting practice. In fact, it should phase those individual client services out using anyone currently receiving services from UTS as some of the first potential employees at organizations who wish to take part in Uniquely the Same, Inc.'s program.

Once UTS does begin to introduce its services to employers, there should be two main areas of focus:

1. **EDUCATION AND AWARENESS:** Dispelling myths about the costs of inclusion for people with disabilities, educating employers and their employees about disabilities through workshops and trainings, engaging employers in service activities where they can serve alongside individuals with disabilities and breakdown barriers, and other activities that would all be packaged as programs that UTS could come run for an organization (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Hartnett et al., 2011; Peck & Trew Kirkbride, 2001).
2. **PROACTIVE INNOVATION:** This includes at a minimum helping organizations develop better hiring practices that are more open and inclusive of individuals with disabilities and being a service provider who they can come to in order to better understand new technologies to make accommodations in the workplace. This could also involve working with an organization to workshop a particular job that someone with a disability may be particularly skilled to fill if the organization expressed interest in diversifying their workforce, but needed help to begin that process.

## Implementing Partners

Bender Consulting Services is already operational in the Western Pennsylvania region and has a vast client base who come to Bender for job skills training and job coaching and end up with internships that sometimes turn into fulltime offers through the program (Bender, 2019). Since Bender Consulting Services still focuses on the supply side of the disability unemployment problem, UTS, with its new focus on demand would be the perfect complement to this already established organization in the Pittsburgh area.

## Concerns about Overlapping Services

It is very possible that some of the services between Bender Consulting Services and Uniquely the Same, Inc. will overlap. In fact, it is near impossible to have a successful employment consulting business without being at least aware of what people are doing to help both the supply and the demand problems related to unemployment for individuals with disabilities. In the case of Bender Consulting Services, part of the job-coaching program involves placements at job sites, which means that the organization does have a relationship with employers. This overlap is okay, but it should be noted that the demand and supply distinction when it comes to disability employment is not as binary as it may appear. Nevertheless, it is still appropriate for an organization to have a mission guided by addressing the issue on one side of that equation.

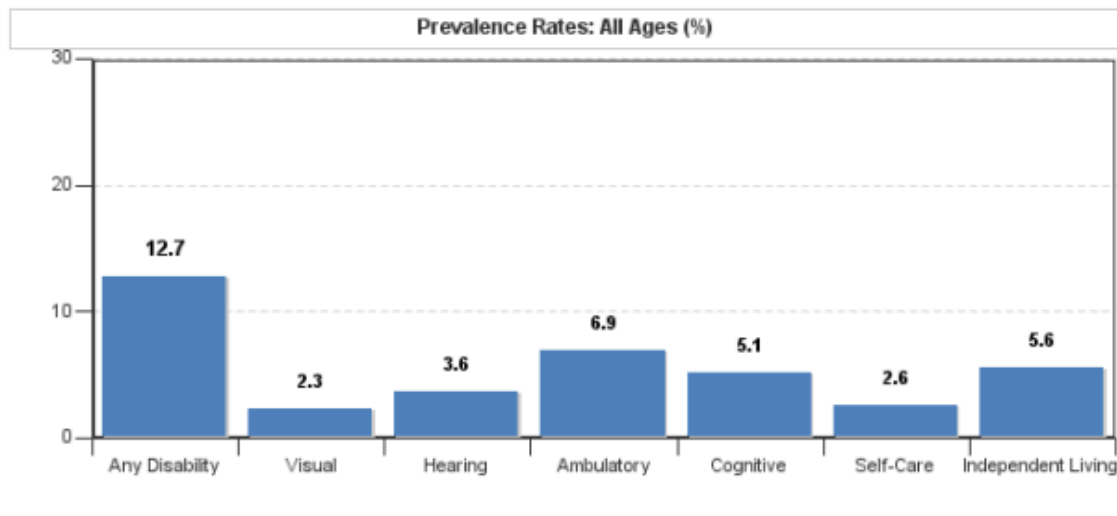
## **Long Term Goals**

In the long term, Uniquely the Same, Inc. could pursue options of becoming a fiscal sponsor (providing start up capital to or sharing its nonprofit status with) and project incubator for organizations that want to build a business model around individuals with disabilities in mind. Using Keystone shredding as a venture or other well-known organizations like Bitty and Beau's Coffee Shops in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia that were founded to hire individuals with Down Syndrome for jobs (Wright, 2019) as examples, UTS, could help generate more uniquely innovative business models like these. In the long run as many jobs—often jobs that may have been great skill matches for individuals with disabilities—are taken over by automation, businesses built around the unique skills of individuals with disabilities will be necessary to build thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to productively contribute.

## Appendix A: Percentage of Individuals with Disabilities by Types of Disability

(W Erickson et al., 2019)

### Prevalence of disability among non-institutionalized people of all ages in the United States in 2017\*



Disability Type	%	MOE	Number	MOE	Base Pop.	Sample Size
Any Disability	12.7	0.05	40,714,800	156,310	321,823,700	3,118,647
Visual	2.3	0.02	7,543,000	71,090	321,823,700	3,118,647
Hearing	3.6	0.03	11,524,400	87,320	321,823,700	3,118,647
Ambulatory	6.9	0.04	20,898,200	115,810	302,104,600	2,955,036
Cognitive	5.1	0.03	15,391,000	100,280	302,104,600	2,955,036
Self-Care	2.6	0.02	7,935,500	72,870	302,104,600	2,955,036
Independent Living	5.6	0.04	14,592,000	97,770	260,869,300	2,581,685

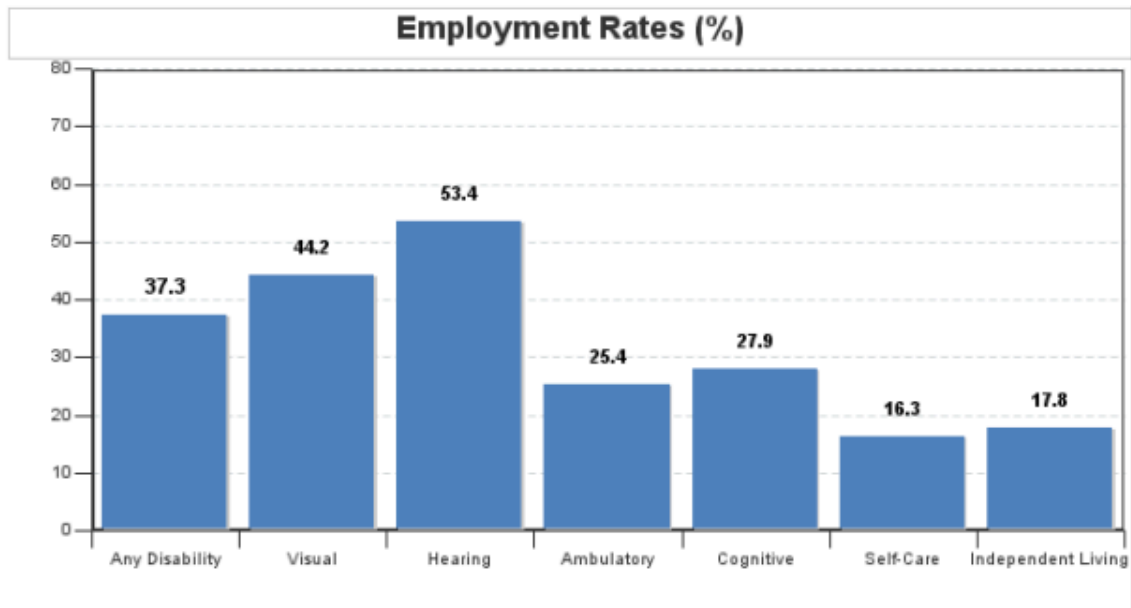
\* **Note:** Children under the age of five were only asked about Vision and Hearing disabilities. The Independent Living disability question was only asked of persons aged 16 years old and older.



## Appendix B: Employment and Unemployment Rates by Disability Type

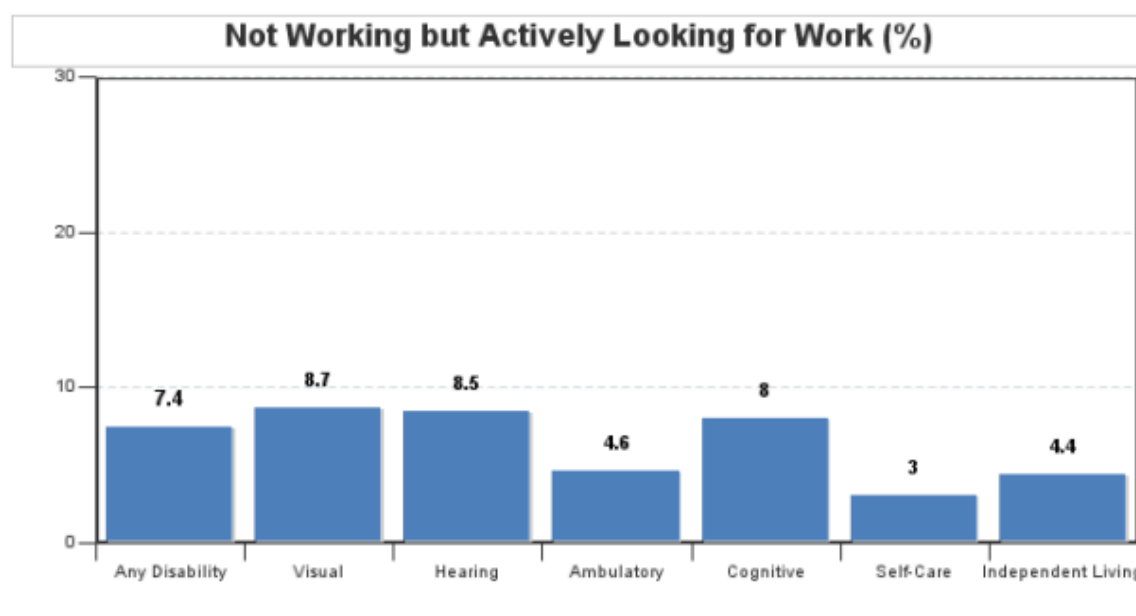
(W Erickson et al., 2019)

### Employment of non-institutionalized working-age people (ages 21 to 64) by disability status in the United States in 2017



Disability Type	%	MOE	Number	MOE	Base Pop.	Sample Size
No Disability	79.4	0.08	131,789,000	231,020	165,987,300	1,556,444
Any Disability	37.3	0.29	7,318,000	70,030	19,637,200	195,644
Visual	44.2	0.67	1,643,100	33,480	3,714,400	35,356
Hearing	53.4	0.67	2,055,300	37,420	3,847,000	38,791
Ambulatory	25.4	0.37	2,442,800	40,770	9,604,200	95,270
Cognitive	27.9	0.41	2,298,900	39,560	8,253,300	81,575
Self-Care	16.3	0.52	561,400	19,610	3,442,300	34,887
Independent Living	17.8	0.38	1,237,500	29,080	6,961,300	70,302

**Percentage who are not working but actively looking for work among non-institutionalized working-age people (ages 21 to 64) in the United States in 2017**



Disability Type	%	MOE	Number	MOE	Base Pop.	Sample Size
No Disability	17.4	0.17	5,944,600	63,270	34,198,300	321,869
Any Disability	7.4	0.20	913,500	24,990	12,319,300	122,966
Visual	8.7	0.51	180,400	11,120	2,071,200	19,362
Hearing	8.5	0.55	152,700	10,230	1,791,600	17,829
Ambulatory	4.6	0.21	326,500	14,960	7,161,400	71,265
Cognitive	8.0	0.29	478,600	18,100	5,954,400	59,517
Self-Care	3.0	0.26	87,400	7,740	2,880,900	29,377
Independent Living	4.4	0.22	249,200	13,070	5,723,800	57,870

## Appendix C: Outcomes Matrix

	Evaluative Criteria				Totals	
Program Option	Effectiveness (*0.4)	Equity (*0.3)	Scalability & Sustainability (*0.2)	Cost (*0.1)	Total Point Value	Weighted Total
<b>Program 1: CTE Center</b>	Medium (3)	Neutral (3)	Very Likely (5)	Feasible (5)	16	3.6
<b>Program 2: Employee Consultation</b>	Low (1)	Very Desirable (5)	Very Unlikely (1)	Feasible (5)	12	2.6
<b>Program 3: Employer Consultation</b>	High (5)	Very Desirable (5)	Neutral (3)	Burdensome (3)	16	4.4

Since all the scales are coded with the worst outcome being the lowest number on the scale and the best outcome being the highest number on the scale, the program with the highest point value is the preferred outcome under this analysis.

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