

# **From Disability in the Workforce to Our Time is Now**

Vermont State Rehabilitation Council:  
Advocacy, Education and Outreach Committee

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# Disability and History of Work

- 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries: Farm based work, trades, handcrafting. Some “fit in” with families and some were in control-based work
- 19<sup>th</sup> century saw rise of institutions
  - Isolation
  - “Management” of people with disabilities
  - Roots of Paternalism- what’s best for disabled people and society
- 1800’s “Freak Shows”
  - Some made very good living
  - Children sold for exhibition
  - Most closed by 1950s

- World Wars- more people with disabilities
- 1931 Act for Human Betterment through Voluntary Sterilization (Eugenics Movement)
- 1935 was a protest after finding out that the federal Works Progress Administration was screening out "PH" individuals from work
- 1950's polio epidemic, veterans returning into society barriers were more noticeable
- Independent Living Movement forming

## **Judy Heumann makes history**

- 1970 Judy was denied her teaching license by the New York Board of education believed she could not get herself or her students of the building in case of a fire
- Headline "You Can Be President, Not Teacher with Polio"

# Rolling Warrior

*There comes a point when a single drop of oil is all that's needed to tip a barrel over- and spark a revolution. The letter from the board of education was that drop.*

*I was done. I was done begging for things that everyone else took for granted, done apologizing for my existence. I was not a disease.*

*I knew I had to fight the board of ed.*

*But when I imagined myself sitting in front of everyone, demanding the right to teach, my heart pounded. It pounded so hard, it felt like it was going to explode out of my chest.*

*I was used to my parents standing up for me. It was very different to think about doing it for myself. I felt like I'd be put under a microscope. I mean, I never actually taught before. I didn't even know if I could teach.*

# Important Laws

- 1968: Architectural Barriers Act: Use of federal dollars must make it accessible
- 1972: Federal Supplementary Security Insurance program established “needy, aged, blind, and disabled individuals”
- 1973: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment and programs offered by federal agencies supported by federal dollars
- 1975: Education for All Handicapped Children Act- free and appropriate public education and mandated Individualized Education Plans

- 1990: Americans with Disabilities Act
  - Title I: Employment
- 2002: VT Closed Sheltered Workshops
- 2014: Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act
  - Stronger focus on Transition services

The Roots are still strong-  
Need change to *shift the system*

- Based in Paternalism- laws and programs, policies, attitudes... leads to how our culture is.
- Ableism
- Audism
- Sanism
- Racism



# Working with Disability: Toward a truly inclusive Vermont labor force

The Report:

[Working with Disability](#)

# What the data & report shows us

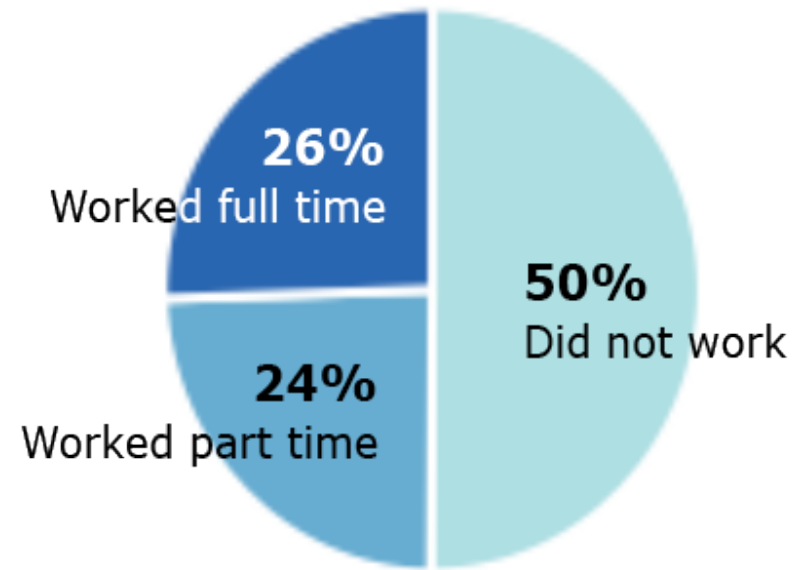
- Report: 2018 93,688 people with disabilities.
- One in Five
- People with disabilities are an important part of the Vermont labor force- working in all industries and occupations, at all wage levels.
- By 2018, Census data shows that nearly 22,000 Vermonters with disabilities ages 18 to 64 had worked at some time in the previous 12 months

## **Inclusive Policy**

Policies that make it illegal to discriminate and ones that require accommodations, universal design and changing work-place culture help people with disabilities access work.

## Half of working-age Vermonters with disabilities worked

People with a disability, 18-64, by work status, 2018



Data source: IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), 2014-2018 5-yr. samples ©2020 Public Assets Institute

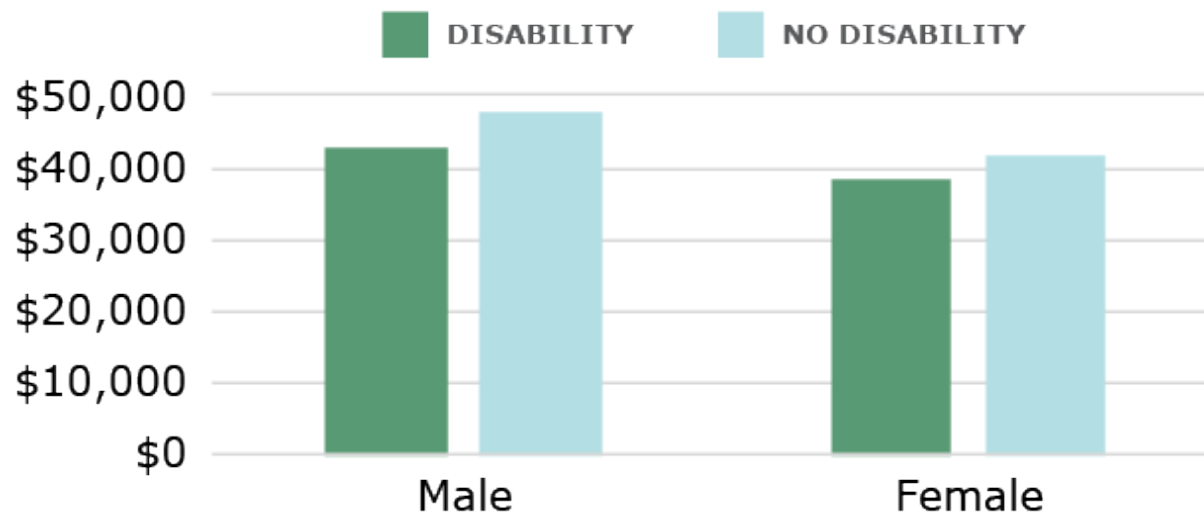
# Working Less

- People with disabilities have been less likely to work than people without disabilities regardless of educational completion
- Worked fewer hours and in lower-paying jobs, all resulting in lower earnings

# Gaps are still compounded by sex, gender, race, and ethnicity

## Women with disabilities earned the least

Median wage and salary earnings for full-time Vermont workers, by sex and disability status, 2018



Data source: IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), 2014-2018 5-yr. samples ©2020 Public Assets Institute

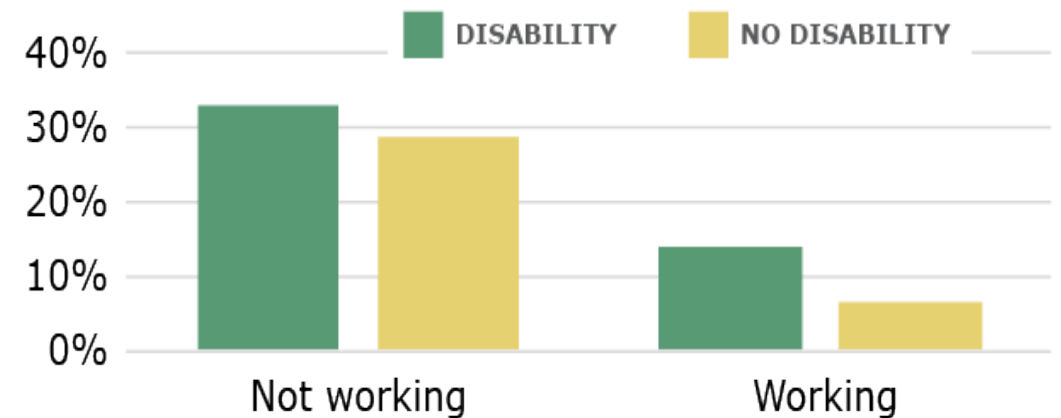
Those who worked full time have comparable median wages to those without disabilities working full time.

The impact of decreased work-force participation, in combination with inadequate safety net means that Vermonters with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, with one in three Vermonters with a disability not working living in poverty.

Nationally, people of color with disabilities have been most likely to live in poverty.

## Poverty rates were higher for people with disabilities, working or not

Percent of working-age Vermonters in poverty, by work and disability status, 2018



Data source: IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org), 2014-2018 5-yr. samples ©2020 Public Assets Institute



# Accessibility Built into the Workforce

- Working decreases poverty for Vermonters with disabilities and also impacts the additional 42,000 family members working-age people with disabilities live with.
- Universal/Human Centered Design: Important and impacts all workers
- More workers are good for the economy. Before the pandemic VT was estimated to loose 25,000 workers by 2030. If people with disabilities worked at the same rate as those without, that would be 17,000 more workers

# We're NOT Special

- Think about equity and reasonable, not special
- Have strong communication
- Planning, Thinking, Training, Education, Assessment, Policies & Procedures
- Planning and Reaching beyond the laws
- Barriers: Attitudinal, Communication, Physical
- Connection to people- building capacity, not just tokenism

# Our Time is Now

- Transition Services Strong, especially in Vermont because of the leadership of Diane Dalmasse and Vocational Rehabilitation
- Young people are demanding more
- More employers are reaching out around Disability, Equity and Inclusion and seeing the strength of people with disabilities

# Approaches

- Outreach- Lets get the dialogue going- broader community
- More reports to be able to draw upon actual data to help us change the restrictive laws
  
- National level- restrictions need to fight against
  - Ensuring people with disabilities basic needs are met- including federal and state laws “benefit cliffs” , Medicaid-based programs that create employment barriers
  
- Working with business community
  - Making work places in the public and private sectors accessible
  
- Working with individuals
  - Making work places in the public and private sectors accessible

# Questions

## Contact Information

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