

VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES




## Matters of Welcome: Individuals With Disabilities and Families in Faith Communities

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Lancaster Theological Seminary  
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## Rethinking Our Introductions






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## Introduction to the Nation




"The manner in which our nation cares for its citizens... is more than an index to its concern for the less fortunate. It is a key to its future. Both wisdom and humanity dictate a deep interest in the physically handicapped, the mentally ill, and the mentally retarded. ...we as a nation have for too long postponed an intensive search for solutions to the problems of the mentally retarded. That failure should be corrected."

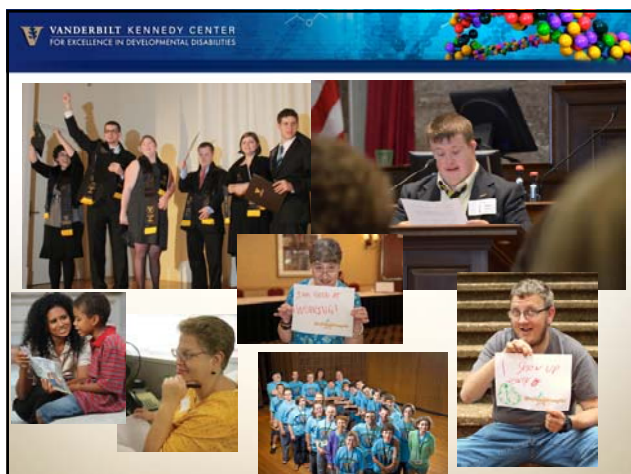
~President John F. Kennedy

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## Vanderbilt Kennedy Center



**1 in 5 children has a developmental disability**

**What is a developmental disability?**

**What do the 1 in 5 have?**

- Learning disabilities and language delays
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Down syndrome
- Rare syndromes

**How does the VKC help?**

Our Activities:

- Research
- Services
- Training
- Dissemination of Knowledge

Our Goal:  
Facilitate discoveries


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## How does the VKC help?

**2005-University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)**

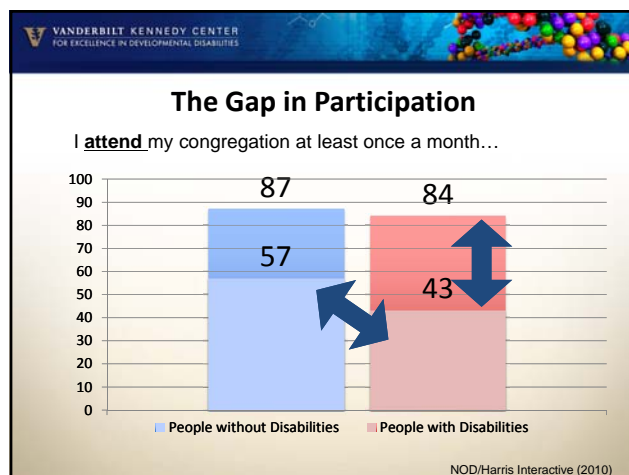
- Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD).

Focus on **Quality of Life**



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## Participation in Communities

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The spirituality and faith of people with significant disabilities is often overlooked, poorly supported, or actively ignored. Faith community participation may be particularly limited.


**Barriers:**

- Architecture
- Attitudinal
- Communication
- Programmatic
- Liturgical

E. W. Carter, Including people with disabilities in faith communities: a guide for service providers, families, & congregations. Baltimore Md.: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., 2007

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## Training



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## Field Education: Research

### SURVEY: Characteristics of Inclusive Communities

- Commitment of leadership
- **Use of educational resources**
- Religious teaching that positively portray people with disabilities
- **Had closer relationships with disability organizations**
- Commitment to addressing social issues

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## Field Education: Dissemination of Knowledge





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## Field Education

- Conferences
- Workshops
- Story Collection
- Interviews with leaders in special needs ministries to learn about how congregations commit to this work

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## Institute on Disabilities Temple University (Philadelphia)



[www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/](http://www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/)

- The Arc Pennsylvania: <http://www.thearcpa.org/>

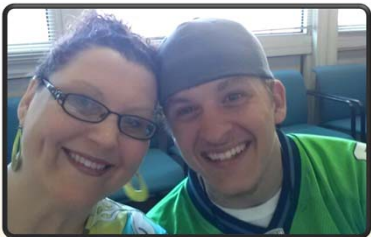
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## A New Agenda



**Erik Carter, Ph.D.**  
Professor of Special Education  
VKC Member

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## Youth and Families Flourishing Project


Erik Carter, Ph.D. (PI)

**Project Focus**


We sought to learn about...

- the **strengths** of young people with intellectual disabilities or autism
- the **spiritual expressions** of young people with intellectual disabilities or autism
- Parent recommendations** for how their own faith communities might better welcome and support families


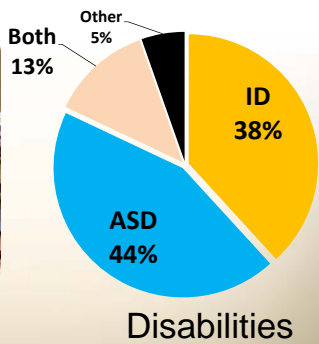
**Participating Families**



*Tennessee*




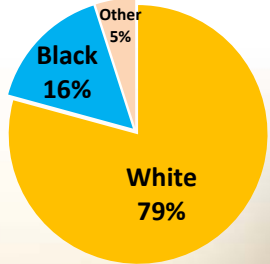
**The Labels We Use**

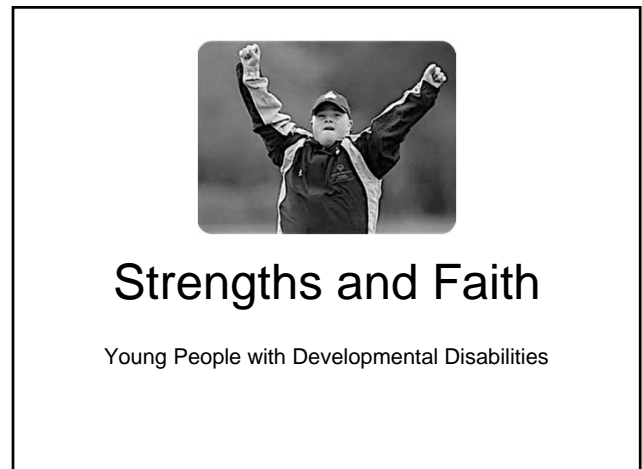
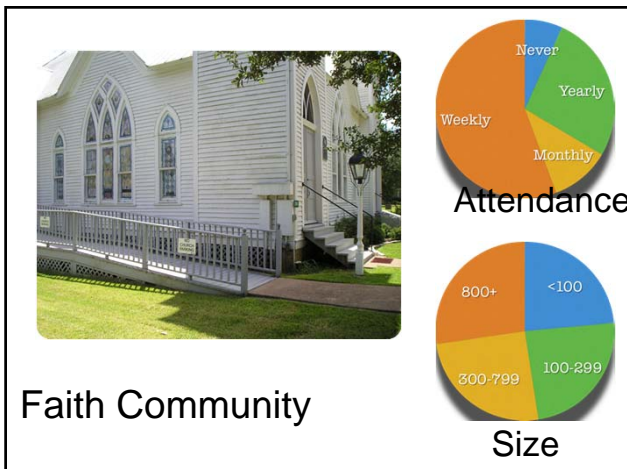
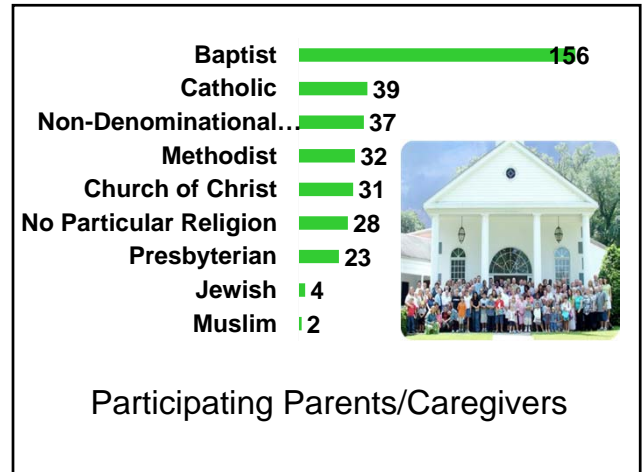
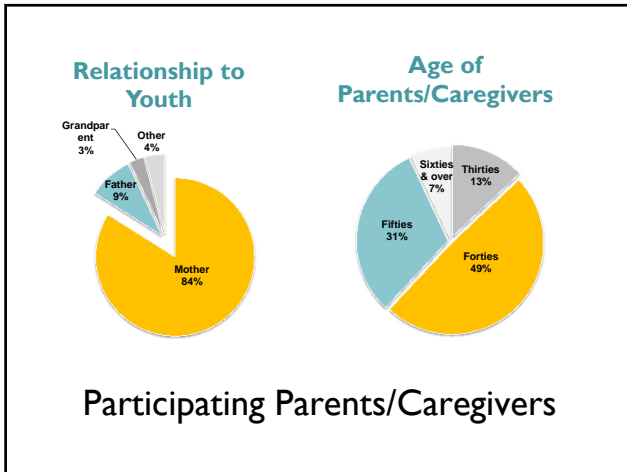
Label	Percentage
ASD	44%
ID	38%
Both	13%
Other	5%

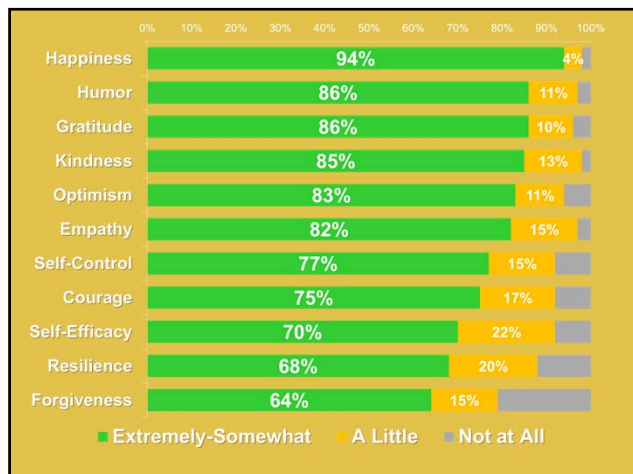
Disabilities

**Race/Ethnicity of Youth**

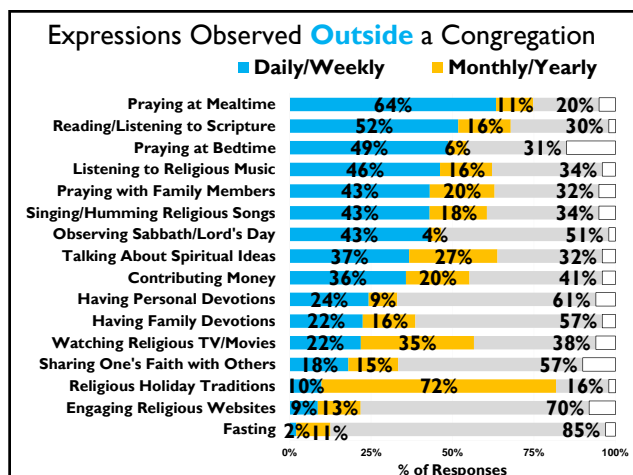
Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White	79%
Black	16%
Other	5%





## Spiritual Expressions

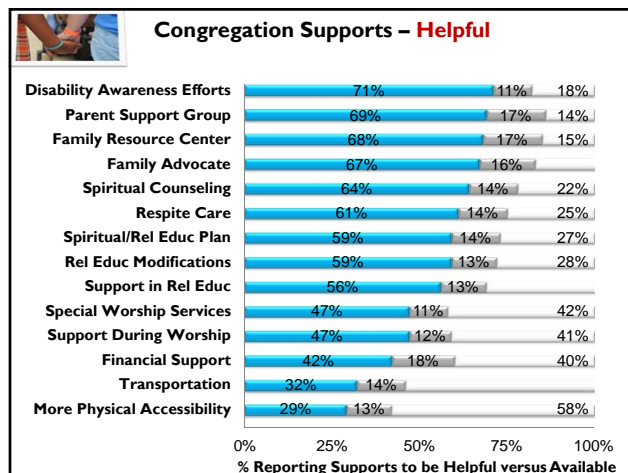
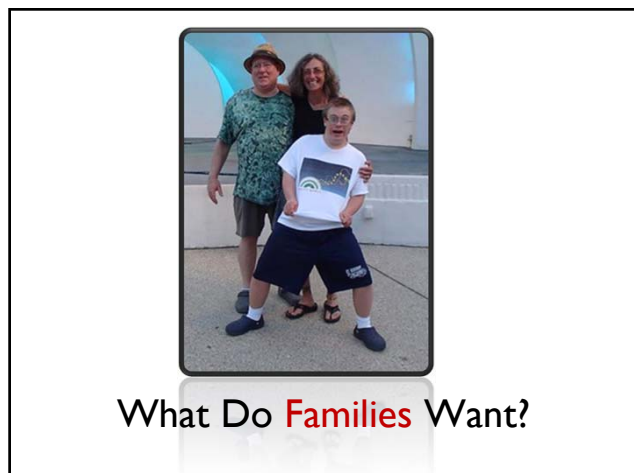
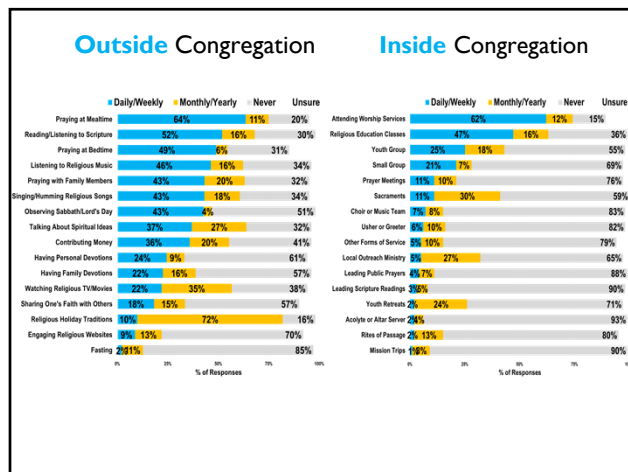
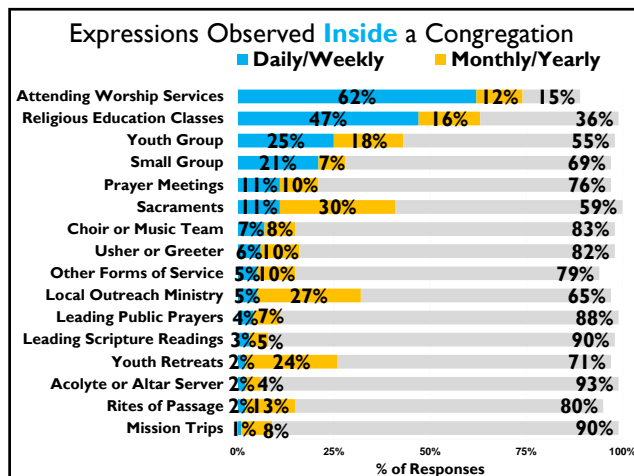
Beyond the Congregation



## Spiritual Expressions

Within a Congregation





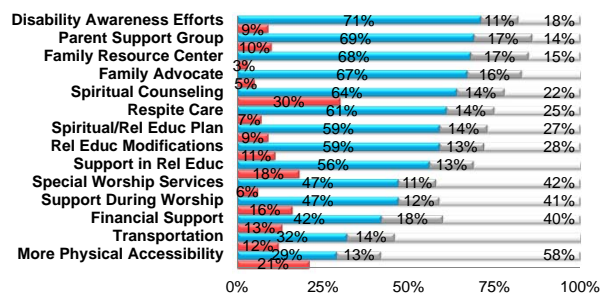


## What Are Congregations Doing?

### Congregation Supports – Helpful vs Available



■ Currently Available  
■ Would Be Very/Somewhat Helpful  
■ Would Be A Little Helpful



% Reporting Supports to be Helpful versus Available

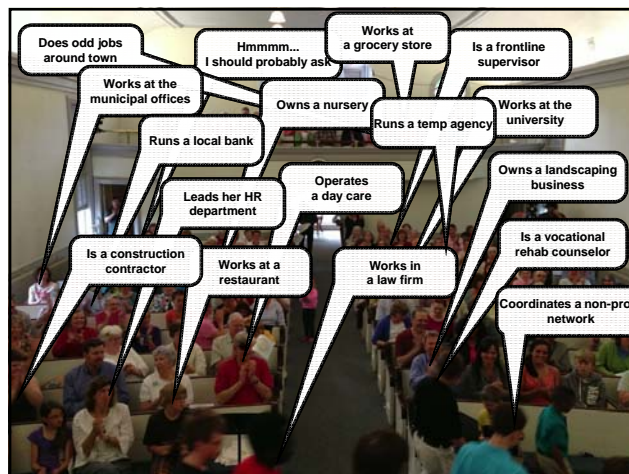


## Putting Faith to Work

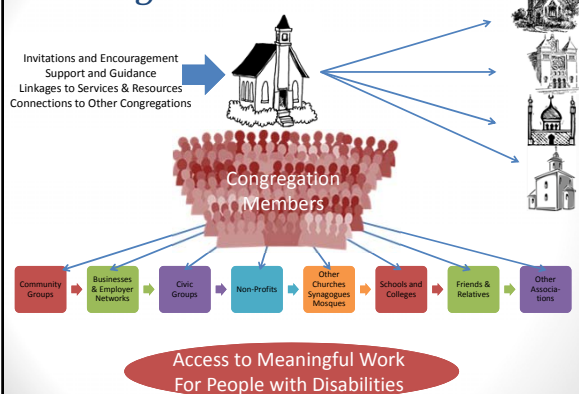


## Critical Need for New Approaches

- Persistent and pervasive problems of unemployment
- Lack of other valued avenues for community contribution
- Service systems beyond their capacities to meet deep needs
- Natural support systems regularly overlooked



### Putting Faith to Work Model



## Inviting Faith Communities

[illegible]

Why is this work important?  
(in their words)

- “It is important for people in the congregation to help people find jobs because everybody deserves to work if they want to whether they have special needs or not. Everybody has strengths and things they are good at, even individuals with special needs.”
- “It is important because church congregations should be places where people already feel safe.”
- “We all need to work. Lord says ‘Don’t work, don’t eat.’”

## Inviting Congregation Members and job Seekers

- Bulletin inserts
- PowerPoint announcements
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Personal invitations
- Other approaches

[illegible]

## Conversations About Work

### Questions to Answer

- Which strengths, gifts, and passions should we consider when thinking about a meaningful job?
- Which prior experiences should we remember when considering possible jobs?
- What types of job responsibilities might be a really great fit?
- What are possible businesses and organizations in our community where these types of jobs exist?
- Who should we talk to in our congregation (or beyond) who may have connections to such employers?
- What supports do we think will be needed to promote success?
- What are our next steps as a group?


[illegible]

## One Page Profiles

### Skills I bring to a job:

- Sweeps and vacuum floors and rugs
- Clean windows, tables, chairs, and carrels
- Sorts, washes, dishes, and puts away laundry
- Loads and unloads dishwasher
- Bags, sorts, organizes, and straightens
- Packs and unpacks boxes
- Breaks down and sets boxes for recycling
- Assembles theatre light fixtures
- Plants, weeds, water, and harvest a garden
- Feeds and collects eggs from chickens
- Roast pecans and prepare food
- Packs lunches, serves meals, pour drinks
- Decorates and designs greeting cards

## Kate



**What warb best describe me:**

Determined, open, hard worker, enjoys working with people, friendly, curious, organized, likes cleanliness, attentive, team player,

### Supports that aid my success at work:

- If I have a trouble understanding my verbal instructions, by repeating the information using different words
- Have more time to complete the tasks I enjoy
- Be the willing to listen and ask me to repeat myself if you don't understand what I've said
- Provide opportunities for me to work with other people, as I am friendly and enjoy being with others
- I will do best when not overwhelmed. I understand that activities that raise my heart rate can result in me not good for my health

## Reverse Job Ads

### Seeking Part-Time Employment

My name is Katie, and I'm a member of Christ Presbyterian Church. You may recognize me as I have volunteered in the church nursery and have helped out during Vacation Bible School.

I am looking for a job.

I'm 24 years old and have a variety of work experiences that will help me to do a good job. I am eager to work. My previous job experience includes working in a nursing home and in a hotel kitchen. I have worked with children in the nursery, and at Goodwill Industries organizing and sorting clothing. I also have designed and sold jewelry and bookshelves, and have organized (from start to finish) the collection and delivery of toys to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. I find every job that allows me to work closely with others. I am friendly, compassionate, dependable, motivated, able to focus on the task at hand, and very happy to follow a routine.

I am interested in finding part-time work (between 5-10 hours per week), preferably in the mornings and/or on weekends. I am open to learning new skills, and I look forward to hearing from you.

If you are a business owner or are in a position to hire, I would appreciate an opportunity to demonstrate my skills and my willingness to work. God bless.

Katie is seeking a job with assistance from Putting Faith To Work (PFTW) @ Christ Presbyterian and the Unemployed Network Center (PFTW) and/or church staff to address the employment needs of some of their members by connecting people with disabilities to quality employment opportunities through the natural networks represented by congregation members.

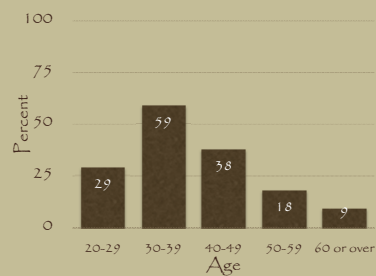


**Katie**  
Phone: (615) xxx-xxxx  
Residence: Nashville, TN  
Email address: xxxxxxxx

How people describe me:  
Compassionate, caring, task oriented,  
enjoys working with people, friendly,  
curious, organized, peacemaker,  
independent, creative.

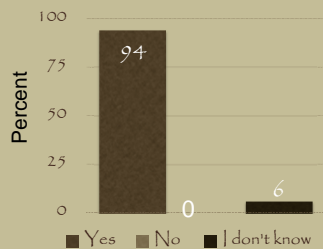
Putting Faith To Work

## Who were our job seekers in TN?

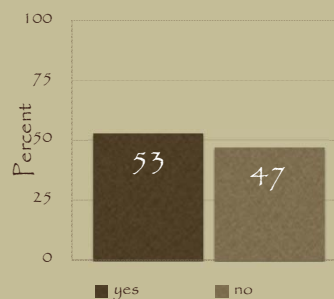


54.5% of job seekers were members of the congregation supporting them.

Did you feel like the meeting helped people learn about you and what you want?



Were you successful in finding a job?

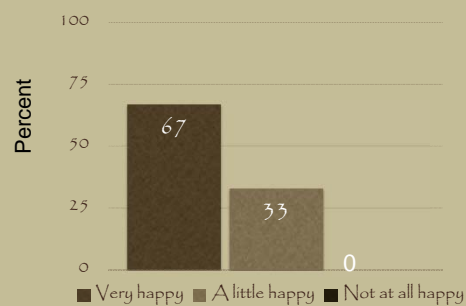




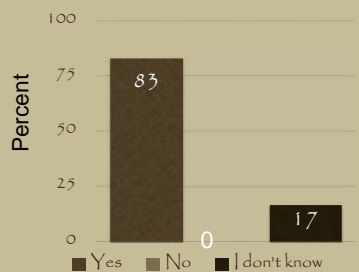
## Putting Faith to Work Job Placements

- Goodwill Industries
- YMCA
- TRIAD at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
- Local community colleges
- Financial organizations
- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Franklin First United Methodist Church
- Curry Ingram Academy
- Prime Therapeutics
- Metropolitan Center for Independent Living
- Vanderbilt University Plant Operations
- Brighton Nursing Home
- Many, many more...

## How happy are you with your job?



## Would you recommend this program to other congregations?



## Project Outcomes

- 72 individuals with disabilities
- 13 have secured full-time work, average wage \$20 per hour.
- 17 have secured part-time work, average wage \$11.47 per hour
- Job sectors: food service, custodial work, administration, sales, customer service, medical coding, massage therapy.

## Project Outcomes

- Improved self-esteem
- Employment
- Empowered family
- Encouraged independence
- **Built relationships and increased sense of belonging**

## What's Next for PFTW?

- A free "Practice Guide"
- Online portal for PFTW Resources ([puttingfaithtowork.org](http://puttingfaithtowork.org))
- Presentation at TASH Faith and Flourishing Conference in Nashville (April 22)
- Articles for faith-based magazines
- Journal articles that few people read...

[puttingfaithtowork.org](http://puttingfaithtowork.org)

## NATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ON FAITH AND DISABILITY

[www.faithanddisability.org](http://www.faithanddisability.org)

## Vision and Mission

People with disabilities and their families will have compelling opportunities and supports to develop and express their spirituality, engage in congregational life, and share their gifts and talents in ways that are personally valued and that strengthen communities.

Our mission is to support people with disabilities, their families, and those who support them by providing national and international leadership in the areas of research, education, service, and dissemination related to disability, religion, and inclusive supports.

## Activities of the Collaborative

- ✓ Develop and support an interdisciplinary and interfaith network of scholars and leaders who are addressing the intersection of disability, religion, and/or spirituality in their work.
- ✓ Foster rigorous, collaborative, and interdisciplinary scholarship, including research, policy analyses, theological reflection, and program evaluations.
- ✓ Develop educational materials, programs, and technical assistance fostering collaboration among, or building the capacity of, religious leaders, human service professionals, service providers, congregations, individuals with disabilities, and families to address spirituality and build inclusive spiritual supports.
- ✓ Produce and disseminate compelling resources based on research and state-of-the-art practice in both disability services and inclusive spiritual supports.
- ✓ Provide national and international leadership by speaking to policy initiatives, cultural developments, and other emerging issues related to disabilities, religion, and spirituality.
- ✓ Serve as a central and visible "clearinghouse" for resources, research, trainings, conferences, programs, and organizations.
- ✓ Provide an accessible and engaging link between academic, professional, and lay communities.
- ✓ Support and enhance the efforts of other organizations, faith networks, and groups carrying out work in related areas.
- ✓ Pursue large-scale funding to carry out the work of the Collaborative.

## Lessons Learned Today

- Introductions Matter (focus on strengths, not deficits)
- A disability label is not an indicator of how important a spiritual life is to a person
- People with disabilities want to contribute and be meaningfully included in faith communities
- Congregations have opportunities to minister with people with disabilities and families both inside and outside the congregation
- Congregations are natural partners in making employment connections
- Collaboration in this area is beginning at the national level.  
**Get involved!!!**

## Thank you

### Vanderbilt

- Erik Carter
- Jenny Gustafson
- Janet Shouse
- Allie Utley
- Thomas Boehm
- Topher Endress
- Kyle Jonas
- Sue Francis
- Lydia Wingo-Kane
- Viki Matson
- Trudy Stringer
- Elisabeth Dykens
- Elise McMillan

### PFTW

- Bill Gaventa
- Joe Timmons
- Derek Nord
- Penny Seay
- Milt Tyree
- Harold Kleinert
- Wes Allen

## References and Resources

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- ◆ Carter, E. W. (2013). Supporting inclusion and flourishing in the religious and spiritual lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Inclusion*, 1, 64-75.
- ◆ Carter, E. W., Boehm, T. L., Annandale, N. H., & Taylor, C. (2015). Supporting congregational inclusion for children and youth with intellectual disability or autism and their families. *Exceptional Children*.
- ◆ Carter, E. W., Boehm, T. L., Biggs, E. E., Annandale, N. H., Taylor, C., Logeman, A. K., & Liu, R. Y. (2015). Known for my strengths: Positive traits of transition-age youth with intellectual disability or autism. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*.
- ◆ Liu, E. X., Carter, E. W., Boehm, T. L., Annandale, N., & Taylor, C. (2014). In their own words: The place of faith in the lives of young people with intellectual disability and autism. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 52, 388-404.
- ◆ Taylor, C. E., Carter, E. W., Annandale, N. H., Boehm, T. L., & Logeman, A. K. (2014). *Welcoming people with developmental disabilities and their families: A practical guide for congregations*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.
- ◆ Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Religion and Disabilities Resources: [vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu](http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu) (Resources tab)
- ◆ National Collaborative on Faith and Disability: [faithanddisability.org](http://faithanddisability.org)

## Contact Information

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