

Disability Employment

INPUT, INFLUENCE, AND IMPACT Texans with Disabilities Driving Advocacy

Introduction:

The Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD), with the help of a variety of organizations and advocates, developed three online surveys to collect data on topics that directly affect the disability community. Statistical and qualitative data was collected from January 30, 2015 to March 13, 2015 on disability employment, early childhood intervention, and personal attendant services by CTD's developmental disability policy Fellow. CTD's fellow is part of Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities grant-funded program that supports a policy-focused staff member to develop professional experience on disability issues.

CTD estimates as many as 20,000 people with disabilities, their families, and supporters received (multiple) notifications of the availability of the surveys and their importance for the policy Fellow's research. Outreach was conducted via word-of-mouth, social media, newsletters, and online methods. Many of CTD's partners were gracious in sharing the outreach efforts.

Unfortunately, the numbers of submitted surveys were extremely low and not statistically significant. Therefore, inferring any conclusions or contrasting the survey data with nationally collected statistics would be inappropriate. However, the open-ended questions provided invaluable input and insight for CTD staff members during the 84th Texas legislative session. These responses helped CTD staff members to understand individual challenges and omnipresent barriers that Texans with disabilities face on a daily basis.

Respondent answers have been edited minimally by correcting spelling errors and formatting. All respondents were anonymous and responses have been randomized to protect each respondent's privacy. Several respondents filled out paper surveys (Appendix A) or were scribed by the policy fellow.

Current Situation:

People with disabilities continue to have difficulty entering the workforce and retaining employment. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the current unemployment rate for people with disabilities is a staggering **12.9%** while the unemployment rate for a person without a disability is 6.1%. Barriers such as accessibility, transportation, and appropriate training make it difficult to find, succeed in, and retain meaningful and competitive employment.

Survey Data:

The disability employment survey (Appendix A) consisted of 36 questions, to which 32 Texans with disabilities responded.

The Basics:

Employed?

- Out of 32 respondents, 50% stated that they **were employed** and 50% stated that they **were not**.

Looking?

- 50% of the respondents stated that they **were looking** for a job with the other 50% stating that they **were not**.

Want to work?

- 70% of the respondents stated that they **did want to work** with 30% stating that they **did not**.

Previous Employment?

- 100% of respondents (who are currently unemployed) affirmed that they had been actively employed at some time.

Fully employed?

- 50% of the respondents stated that they worked **part-time**, while the remaining 50% stated that they worked **full-time**.

Paid?

- Most (89%) of the respondents **had been paid** at some time in their employment history and 11% **had not**.
- 100% of the respondents who are currently employed stated that they were paid employees.
- 72% of the respondents **had volunteered** in some capacity; while 28% **had not**.

Retaining Employment?

- 65% of the respondents stated that they easily **kept a job**, while 38% stated that they **had trouble** keeping their job.

Meaningful?

- All respondents stated that they liked their current job. There were no negative responses.

Who we work for?

- 80% of the respondents stated that they **worked for someone** with 20% responding that they were **self-employed**.

Training?

- 62% of the respondents used a job coach, job skills trainer, or other personal **training**, while 38% **did not**.
- Of the respondents who used a job training services, 75% were provided by a Texas state agency while 25% were not.
- Of the respondents who used job training services, 50% felt that those services were helpful, while 50% did not.

Accommodations?

- 43% of the respondents stated that their **employer made accommodations**, while 57% **did not**.
- 65% of the respondents stated that they did **receive employer provided benefits**, while 35% **did not**.

Transportation?

- 59% of the respondents use their **own vehicle** to drive to work, while 41% used a mixture of **family and public transportation**.
- 78% of the respondents stated that transportation problems do not limit their ability to work, while 22% stated that they had problems.

Pay Rates and Benefits:

What is your hourly wage?

Responses	4	4	4	1	3
Hourly wage	\$7.25 - \$7.64	\$10.00 - \$18.27	\$20.19 - \$32.95	variable	unclear

Have you ever refused a raise or an increase in working hours to retain your benefits?

81% of the respondents stated that they had refused a raise or an increase in hours to retain benefits, while 19% stated that they had not.

Do you limit the number of hours you work to retain your healthcare benefits?

Only one respondent stated that it was necessary for them to limit their hours to retain healthcare.

If so, how much did you limit your hours (on average)?

One respondent stated that they must keep their wages below \$700 per month.

In-depth:

How long have you been unemployed?

Responses	2	4	3	2	6
Length of unemployment in years	< 1	1 - 2	2 - 3	3 - 4	> 5

How long have you been working at your current job?

Responses	4	4	1	1	8
Length of employment in years	< 1	2	3	4 - 5	> 5

How did you find your job?

Responses	5	8	1	1	3
Job search	Internet	Friends and family	Newspaper	DARS	Other*

* One respondent who found a job through another method stated "I ran into a former intern of mine with a disability, who was shocked to find I couldn't get an internship. I volunteered, then interned under her. Later, I was hired by the organization."

How many days a week do you work?

Responses	2	4	13
Days/week	3	4	5

How many hours do you work each of those days?

Responses	1	1	5	8	1	1*
Hours/Day	1	3	4	8	9	10

* Respondent stated they work 4 days a week, ten hours each day.

What do you do at your job?

- a) "Review construction plans"
- b) "Developmental disability program specialist/adjunct professor"
- c) "I am a Christian life coach specializing in blindness sensitivity coaching and training. I am also a self-published author."

- d) "Policy research and writing."
- e) "Independent Living Specialist"
- f) "Injury recovery coaching"
- g) "My main duties include working on our e-newsletter (help with putting it together and editing/writing main articles), edit other documents that go out of the office, and support my co-workers with what they're doing."
- h) "Self-employed home shredding business; work at small catering shop"
- i) "Clean"
- j) "Social work"
- k) "Project Specialist, Conference coordinator"
- l) "Health related job"
- m) "Relocation Specialist for persons with Disabilities"
- n) "Building access and monitoring"
- o) "My job title is Claims Analyst"
- p) "Director of Advocacy"
- q) "Driver, chauffeur"
- r) "Advocate"
- s) "Clean dining room"

What accommodations does your employer make?

- a) "Touch pad for computer, raised work space"
- b) "I get a lot of support. Someone is always with me. I know what I'm supposed to do."
- c) "I am my own boss, so I accommodate myself."
- d) "Parking in the front close to my office, printer in my office."
- e) "Let me set up my desk area on the floor, bought me an adaptive keyboard & mouse, lets me work 2 or more days per week at home, emails me notes from meetings if I need him to. My co-workers even help me take my jacket on/off, get me coffee, and open the bathroom door."
- f) "Automatic door, raised toilet, lever faucets and door handles."
- g) "I worked to get a captioned phone and my organization requests CART for some meetings."
- h) "Extra time when needed, flexibility with schedule that comes with the understanding that might work will get done timely."
- i) "Accessible workplace, help with heavy lifting."

What do you LIKE about your job?

- a) "I get to help other people who face similar challenge being injured or disabled."
- b) "Ability to create the job into what I want, flexibility, variety, work from home option, central to home."
- c) "Picking up shredding from all over town Shredding - I don't need anyone's help Taking the shredding to recycling Catering: The people who work there Putting stamps on the boxes Helping Amy get ready for parties."

- d) "I am passionate about what I am doing and I believe it is part of God's plan for my life."
- e) "I have opportunities for learning new skills and to use them. I like our building, the parking garage is next to our building, and the facilities are nice compared to other state agencies for which I have worked. For the most part, the employees are well educated, very skilled and have integrity. I like working for the legislature and staying abreast of what is happening at the capitol and with the legislature. For the most part, I like our insurance and our retirement plans. I like that our agency has adopted a wellness policy that provides the employees with time during the workday to exercise or participate in other healthy activities. I like that employees are able to work varying hours, so that people who like to work an earlier or later work day can do so up to a point. I also enjoy the fact that our agency provides up-to-date computer equipment for our work."
- f) "I get to meet different people."
- g) "Assisting people to continue to live independently at home or in the community. It is very rewarding. It does not feel like work to me because it is something I love to do."
- h) "I like helping make Texas a more accessible place for people with disabilities to live in, the people I work with and being part of a team."
- i) "I mostly work on the computer in an office. I don't have to talk to a lot of people. The organization I work for has a positive impact on the lives of Texans."
- j) "It is in alignment with my personal passion and purpose. I get to help others and plan changes in society."
- k) "Helping others to maintain or regain independence from facilities that they do not want to be in."
- l) "It's within my limits of what I can do."
- m) "I have the ability to make a difference not only in my life but also in others. My job allows me the ability to financially support my family and our needs without needing any other supports. When an employer creates a supported environment and offers competitive pay, many people with disabilities have a better chance at a more secure future."
- n) "It's a mentally stimulating job with a diverse range of projects and customers. It requires a high level of technical knowledge over a broad range of life-safety topics, and the ability to apply that knowledge to a specific building."
- o) "I like that I was given an opportunity to work. However, I cried when I received the offer for work at our organization because it was far less than I should be paid with a master's degree in Journalism. I said then that I was accepting the job, but at the same time I never imagined I would be paid so little after having earned a master's. However, since I was unable to even get a non-paying internship, I knew that my options were remote that I would find employment. I currently make \$11,000 less a year than I did when I had to leave teaching because of progressive

hearing loss. That is \$11,000 less than when I worked as a teacher with a lesser bachelor's degree. I am convinced after interviews for employment that awareness and education about hearing loss and deafness is sorely lacking in the business community. I am convinced after interviews for non-paying internships that people with hearing loss and/or deafness are being discriminated against in the workplace and elsewhere."

- p) "I always meet standards required for my job."
- q) "That everybody is nice."
- r) "Cleaning."

What do you Not Like about your job?

5 respondents stated that there was "nothing" they did not like about their job, while others stated:

- a) "When machines break."
- b) "I am not yet established enough to have a steady stream of income."
- c) "We can't work from home, so there is no telecommuting. Not all office entrances are as accessible as others, depending on where one parks. There are only three bathroom stalls in the two bathrooms on our floor and only one handicapped stall in each. We have way too many women using the women's bathroom such that the handicapped stall is almost always in use by non-disable employees. Disable employees are always having to wait for the stall to become available or go to another floor in the building and hope for an available bathroom stall in the women's bathroom. The pay scale for my unit is lower than some other areas of research, although our unit requires more technical skills and expertise. Management often forgets when they schedule outside meetings or events that not all of us can easily walk to other buildings or places. Management and staff members don't understand why disable folks can't be as flexible about participating in outside non-work related activities. There is not much room for advancement unless someone retires or dies. There is a definite schism between younger and older employees, a sort of cultural divide in which the younger employees seem to want older employees to retire as soon as possible, and older employees feel that they have institutional knowledge which they want time to impart to the younger and impatient employees. However, there are many older employees in management who do seem to have trouble accepting change overall, especially with procedures, using new technologies, and letting go of less efficient methods. There is much consternation among all that state employee pay has not kept up with the private sector."
- d) "My therapy takes about half of my hours M-F, so I can't dedicate as much time to it; therefore, I don't make as much money as I need to."
- e) "The stuff I don't like about the job are normal, i.e. sometimes I feel overwhelmed with work when we're busy, but I hate it more when we're not busy at all. It's just that sometimes I wonder if I'm as productive as they need me to be."

- f) "The work is not often challenging, and sometimes tedious. I don't make very much money."
- g) "I don't like being underpaid, obviously, because I feel that is one of the only companies that will hire me."
- h) "Pay."
- i) "Barriers that impede progress."
- j) "Intermittent schedule."
- k) "Poor management and a lack of recognition from within the department for the value of our work."

Further Clarification:

Of those stating that they had a hard time keeping a job, respondents provided significant input as:

- a) "Deafness brought my release from employment - and I searched for along time - years - and couldn't find employment due to disability."
- b) "My difficulty in the past related to the fact that I have chronic health problems."
- c) "My disability gets in the way. I have been laid off because of it. My employer said it was too time consuming and didn't want to take the risk. I wanted to work with kids and kids with disabilities, but every daycare passed in hiring me."
- d) "About the whole line of questions above...I started my own company, but I am making minimal money. I would like to find a job to supplement my income, but I don't know when the next surgery will come, and my rehabilitation exercises take about 20 hours a week, so I cannot work full time. Additionally, employers don't want to hire me because every 12-16 weeks I'm required to fly to Colorado to see my surgeon and care team and my availability to work is limited while I'm in and out of appointments. Employers don't want to hire someone who isn't available all the time. Also, I have to lay down about 4 hours per day with my leg above my heart, so that also cuts down on the types of jobs I can apply for. "
- e) "Two reasons: 1) to work a job flexible enough to accommodate my disability, I would make too much to keep my attendant care services; and 2) my employer had a problem with providing accommodations as my disability progressed."
- f) "Not enough time to complete required work or activities."
- g) "I would get to work and if not enough business, would be sent home. No bus services, would have to wait for someone to pick me up. Needed more routine schedule. Frustration over transportation, random hours and with customers."
- h) "I have autism, IDD. School is not providing proper transition services in the community."

Of those respondents who stated that transportation problems limit their ability to work, 2 further explained:

- a) "If it rains, the person who drives me, doesn't like driving. Plus, I can't take the bus because my electric wheelchair might malfunction if it gets wet and I'm more susceptible to getting sick."
- b) "I work nights and public transportation ends before I get off. I am then at the mercy of other's schedule to get home."

In Their Own Words:

Respondents were asked to share their experiences and insights about working (or looking for work) as person with a disability.

- "I have primarily worked for organizations that have familiarity with people with disabilities or I've had a connection help me get a job. While I have gone to work as a public servant in an area that doesn't lend itself entirely to disability I have had to help change coworkers mindsets out of the pity model of disability. I've had to teach more disability etiquette because my coworkers had never worked with a person with a disability. In my other position as an adjunct professor I have the ability to teach virtually however that job was obtained through past employment with the university in another capacity. No one in this position except my immediate supervisor and dean know I have a disability so its a different experience."
- "I tried several home businesses that failed before finding my true calling I worked in the Corporate world for 20 years. My first job as an information specialist in the Attorney General's Office in Arkansas was referred to me by my rehab counselor. After that I found out about the rest of my jobs on my own. I always got along with my co-workers and was well accepted. I have found that a strong work ethic and a good sense of humor goes a long way in the work place. I believe that many employers today are afraid to take the risk of hiring an individual with a disability, because they are either ignorant with regard to our capabilities or they have been misinformed. Perhaps they may have even had a bad experience with some one who has a disability. I feel that rehab agencies are not doing an even adequate job of finding suitable employment. There are a number of legitimate companies that hire people to work from home. I believe this is the wave of the future. I have observed that there are sighted people who work in the blindness field who can be mean, cruel, critical and judgmental toward blind employees and/or blind consumers in a rehab setting."
- "As a National Dean's List member, Who's Who of American Teachers inductee, 14 years of service to American students, and after having

earned a master's degree, one of the most depressing moments of my life was going to 4 job interviews for FREE internships and not receiving one of those four. Not one call back. I received questions such as, "How will you talk on the phone?" I said I have a special cell phone that I use with major amplification and email, of course. Apparently, that wasn't good enough? I graduated one semester late from college. I was beyond hopeless. I suffered a major bout with depression because no one wanted me because of my deafness. Let me be clear to those of you who doubt this, isn't it very clear to you when you are not wanted? Is it really that much of a mystery? I was hired by people with disabilities who didn't see my needs as an unreasonable challenge. Corporate Texas, however, thinks otherwise. It is a shame that whatever I possess IN MY MIND-my thoughts, talents, ethics--were devalued because of my needs for accommodations for hearing loss/deafness. And that was such a horrible shock to me that I feel the pain still today. Still, every day, I got to work making a fraction of what I made before and give 100%."

- "I love to work. But I also want to be flexible so that I can go and do things with my family. My mom is 91. I want to be helpful taking care of mom too."
- "Hours were dramatically reduced by employer due to management change. Eventually lost job. It can be extremely difficult to access services through DARS in order to help find employment."
- "As a person with a multiple disabilities, severe arthritis being my main disability along with obesity I find it is very difficult to get up and do the things I used to do before. I have to get up earlier now because it takes me some time to just get into the shower to prepare to come to work. I cannot stand up for more than 2 minutes. I cannot park in the rear of the building because the walk is too far. I park in front of the bldg. I do have my printer in my office at hands reach so I can do my work. I lose my balance even when the wind blows. If I fall I won't be able to get up without assistance. Cannot climb steps to conduct home visits. I also suffer from Dermagraphism and this affects my life depending on the weather and the stress levels as well. I break out in hives or welts and it itches if I scratch and if it gets out of control I get anxiety and have to go to the emergency room. I cannot be outside at health fairs to disseminate information about our agency. I have to be in doors. The weather plays a big factor in this If my hives are too bad in the mornings I have to wait until they are controlled or I will not be able to get dressed and I cannot leave my home making me late for work. I have a supervisor and executive director that understand my conditions and the fact that we are an independent living center and here for people with disabilities"
- "While I didn't use job retention services, I did receive Job Development & Placement Services from the DARS Voc. Rehab. Program. The job development side of it helped by helping my develop my resume and getting me ready for interviews by practicing and giving me tips. The job

placement side of it always failed though. They were no better at convincing employers to take a chance on me than I was. They only place me once, and that only lasted about 1 month because they had no way that I could speed up my typing or figure an easy way for me to file papers. I've had 4 other jobs; 2 I got because friends hired me even though they knew my limitation, 1 I got by filling out an online application and going through the interview process myself and had it 3-4 years; and this one I found out about through a friend and got it by becoming a VISTA and volunteering first."

- "I have worked at 6 places - long term. At each place the same scenario happens - each office always has one employee who is indignant about working with a person with a disability. They go on a witch-hunt to watch and prove that people with disabilities are "less than" employees and hired only to fill a quota. They gossip and set the person up for failure. When their criticisms are explored to appease the insulted employee - the employee with the disability is found to be competent and there is no problem. But no one ever corrects the witch hunter. So the hunting begins again. This is called co-worker resentment. It is never talked about unless behind the back of the person with the disability and is the equivalent as to why some people would never hire a person with a disability. . . prejudice. It is not logical; it is emotional. No law protects from it. It is a hostile environment for maintaining a job. It isolates the employee socially from the team. Great social skill has to be used by employees with disabilities to navigate the double standard of performance and attitude. All on the disabled employee - never on the "Better/ preferred" employee (i.e. nondisabled and somehow over the employee with the disability who should be thankful they are there with a token quota). People with disabilities need to have the issue addressed before hand and trained on how to prevent and or deal with it. Hard to do when everyone denies it."
- "The most challenging part of looking for a job for me has been the job interviews. First impressions are hard to shake in so short a time, and it can be difficult to convince an employer to look past a disability and see that you are capable of performing the job."
- "The office building, including shared space and rest rooms, was modified to accommodate my needs. I strongly suggest that each employee with a disability work with his or her employer on accommodation issues."
- "I am frustrated. DARS worked with me and helped most excellently to get me back in college and teach me about CART. I love DARS! However, they were not helpful AT ALL with a job search. They didn't have resources about companies that are willing and promote that they hire people with disabilities."
- "When I started this job I was fairly physically fit...IE I was able to ambulate with out assistance. I was physically able to assist my consumers to move, by lifting, hauling, boxes and belongings. Shopping was not a barrier; now since the onset of my disability, I am in chronic

pain. I have a hard time shopping, and moving my consumers and most of the time try to get family involved in helping."

- "Transportation is a major difficulty. I cannot afford a vehicle and this leaves me at the mercy of public transportation schedules (an hour and a half for a five minute trip), or imposing on friends and family for rides."
- "Gaining experience was difficult, but was lucky to participate in the Americorps VISTA program to finally gain that experience needed to move forward."
- "I WANT TO WORK! MY FAMILY HAS HELPED ME BY GIVING ME SOME WORK TO DO AROUND THE HOUSE OR WITH FRIENDS BUT I DON'T FEEL IT IS REAL WORK, EVEN THOUGH I GET PAID. I HAVE A HARD TIME WORKING BY MYSELF. I WORK BEST WITH 2 OR 3 PEOPLE (OR MORE IF I AM COMFORTABLE. MY FAMILY HAS ALSO SENT ME TO SCHOOL TO LIVE IN 2 DIFFERENT STATES. THEY HAVE HIRED TUTORS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND GOT ME IN 2 SUPPORT (1 STATE, 1 LOCAL) AGENCIES. THE FIRST ONE MADE ME UNCOMFORTABLE BY FOCUSING ON MY DISABILITY INSTEAD OF HELPING ME GET A JOB. WE HAD TO WAIT FOR MONTHS AND THEN THEY DECIDED TO DO AN ASSESSMENT. EVEN THE CASE MANAGER SAID SHE WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT THE JOB EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT WAS TOO GENERAL AND NOT VERY SPECIFIC ABOUT MY STRENGTHS. I DIDN'T WANT TO MEET FOR TRAINING I WANTED TO GET A JOB. THEN I GOT DEPRESSED AND WAS IN THE MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITAL A FEW TIMES FOR SHORT TERM STAYS AND ENDED UP WITH A LOCAL AGENCY. I MEET WITH MY SOCIAL WORKER 1X EVERY 2 WEEKS, SHE HANDS ME LISTS OF AGENCIES OR LECTURES ME. SHE FINALLY SAID SHE MIGHT PUT ME ON A SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM TO GET A JOB. I KEEP GETTING MORE DEPRESSED, ANGRY AND SCARED. I KNOW MY PARENTS WON'T BE HERE FOREVER AND I WANT TO BE MORE INDEPENDENT. I AM JUST LEARNING HOW MUCH THINGS COST AND HOW TO KEEP MONEY INSTEAD OF SPENDING IT ALL AT ONCE. IT IS HARD TO FIND PLACES TO LIVE AND TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. I HAVE A HARD TIME EVEN GETTING VOLUNTEER WORK BECAUSE OF WHERE IT IS, WHAT IT IS, AND TRANSPORTATION."
- "I applied at many places before my parents found me this job that allows me only a few hours a day."
- "Hard worker."
- "I feel that people with disabilities have to be overeducated to get the job they want. Meaning, a person without a disability may just have a bachelor's degree but a person with a disability would need a master's degree just to be seen on par with the candidate that does not have a disability. I find that some people are hesitant to take on a certain amount of education debt (if any) to really go after what they want. If you want to be successful in a certain career then you have to accept that there are steps you must take to attain that goal. No amount of job coaching will get

you that job unless you have the education and skills to back it up. Don't be afraid to start from the bottom, we all start somewhere, and don't be afraid to change jobs every couple of years to broaden your knowledge and skill set, that is how you obtain the experience needed to really go far.

- "Employment is good and I really like money."
- "I am very concerned about the consolidation of rehab services. Service delivery as it now stands is minimal as best. Consumers are being under served, and many who need services are not being served as all. Some people in the rehabilitation field are unqualified for their jobs, and others are inadequately trained and lack appropriate understanding. If and when services are consolidated my view is that it will be a total disaster, total disorganization. The disabled consumers will suffer indeed!"
- "As a person with a disability, I thought it would be easier to get a job especially with the government. I looked at federal grants and when they opened up new programs I would look for work in that area. Whatever work you do - do an awesome job at it and you'll get referrals. I got hired that way twice. I am not currently working, as I cannot take the rigors of full-time work. My health has fluctuated and I might take a part-time job, but currently I am not. I would mentally like to work, but physically can't handle it anymore. I have other outlets for community involvement. I am a producer at Channel Austin and do video work with the Gene and Dave show to tap my creative side, just can't do a fixed time schedule."
- "I hate the fact that I'm punished for helping support myself. I can make a whole \$85.00/mo. before I start losing part of my SSI. They take \$0.50 for every \$1.00 that I earn. How is this fair? I could understand it if I was making enough money to support myself, but I'm not. I barely make enough to get by and I probably never will because the high paying jobs are the ones who generally don't give jobs to someone like me."
- "This questionnaire has made me terribly sad. It is terrible that people with disabilities have so many obstacles to overcome to work, then to get paid less, and face discrimination too."
- "I really wish that people did not have to feel afraid of losing their healthcare by working and earning a living wage. There should be some type of waivers to keep them insured if they financially need it."
- "Have better job sampling, volunteer jobs, and help with my depression, anxiety so I can work. Employers should want someone to work and help them with their hours or talk to them more about what they are good at or need help with."

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