

New Tools for Success East Bay Trainings, October 25th and November 8th: Evaluation Report

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Introduction

After the California Health Incentives Improvement Project (CHIIP), in collaboration with representatives from several organizations, conducted three successful beneficiary-focused half day trainings that introduced and demonstrated Disability Benefits 101 Benefits to Work Calculator in June, 2006, they decided to offer several half day and full day training sessions across California. The training sessions were specifically designed to further introduce this new tool and to train service providers in using this tool with their clients. Key partners include:

- California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Sacramento
- Independent Living Centers in Marin, Contra Costa, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Alameda Counties
- The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Sacramento
- California Health Incentives Improvement Project, Sacramento office
- Hawkins Legal Center of the East Bay
- Social Security Administration Region IX
- California Department of Rehabilitation
- Employment Networks of the Ticket to

Work Program

- Goodwill Industries
- LA's HOPE Project (providing housing and employment services to homeless persons with a mental health condition)

The East Bay New Tools for Success training session was based on a half-day training session, now a documented, successful model with multiple speakers. (see prior submitted training evaluation reports on the New Tools for Work training sessions, June, 2006).

The first training session took place on October 25th, 2006, at the Cerebral palsy Center, in Oakland, California. The second training session took place on November 8th, 2006, at the Regional Center East Bay Concord Offices. The trainings were conducted by Bryon MacDonald, Program, Policy and Development Manager for the California Work Incentives Initiative (CWII) at the World Institute on Disability.

From 8:30-9:00 AM, participants registered, enjoyed a continental breakfast, and were in-

vited to collect free written materials at the registration and resource tables. These sessions emphasized benefits counseling with a special emphasis on the benefits calculator tool and the DB101 website (www.db101.org) as benefits counseling resources. The training sessions started with a brief introduction, followed

by a demonstration of the benefits calculator. After a short break, an interactive session took place during which the calculator was demonstrated by utilizing peoples' specific cases. Key community based benefits planners and Social Security Administration staff were available to offer their expertise as discussions developed.

Evaluation Results

Participants

The total number of attendees for the October 25th and November 8th sessions was 93. Of the 93 participants, 70 filled out the evaluation form (an excellent response rate of 75%).

How Participants Heard About the Meeting

A majority of participants heard about the meeting at work (43%).

- Colleague connected with work (43%)
- Email (37%)
- Non-profit organization (10%)
 - ◆ Coastal Career Center
 - ◆ Career Center
 - ◆ Regional Center
- Advertisement or flyer (3%)
- Some other way (7%)
 - ◆ Community Research Foundation
 - ◆ Deaf Community Services
 - ◆ Employer

Participants' Affiliation

Of all of the affiliations listed (some participants indicated more than one affiliation), thirty-two percent indicated that they were representing a community non-profit organization:

- Community non-profit organization (32%)
 - ◆ Employee, case manager or benefits planner at RCEB

- Government vocational or social service program staff (23%)
- An individual who provides direct services to consumers who have a disability (22%)
- Advocate (6%)
 - ◆ RCEB
 - ◆ Contra Costa Aids Program
 - ◆ Hawkins
- Individual with a disability using benefit programs and working (3%)
- Individual with a disability using benefit programs and not currently working (3%)
- Friend or family member of an individual with a disability (3%)
- Representing a church organization (1%)

Comments and Suggestions

Six open-ended questions gave participants an opportunity to give more in-depth information about their experiences at the New Tools for Success training session, along with their opinions and suggestions for future meetings. The following bulleted lists summarize the percentage of comments offered in particular categories, and provide a few representative examples of some of the comments made.

What goals did participants bring to the training session?

The majority of comments participants offered about the goals they brought with them to the training session were in reference to a better understanding of disability benefits in general (80% of all comments), mainly so that they may communicate their knowledge back to their clients. The rest of the comments were in reference to the benefits calculator (19%), while one person commented that they were not sure what to expect coming in (1%).

- A better understanding of disability programs (80%)
 - ◆ Become more familiar with SSI
 - ◆ Being able to explain benefits to clients and why or why not they should work
 - ◆ Better knowledge of SXSTYM
 - ◆ Better understanding of what happens to a clients benefits when they go to work
 - ◆ Find out how much a person with a disability can earn without losing their benefits
- Become more familiar with the calculator (19%)
- Wasn't sure what to expect (1%)

Were their goals met during the training session?

Participants were asked whether or not their goals were met during the training session and to describe further why or why not. Most participants (93%) indicated that their goals were met and had comments and insights to offer as to why they thought the training was successful. The remaining seven percent commented that their goals were only partially met, but no one said that their goals were not at all met.

- Yes, goals were met; comments on the plethora of information that was clearly presented (42%)
 - ◆ Benefits were described and made

clear

- ◆ Good definition of terms
- ◆ A lot of information about the various programs and how they work
- ◆ Presentation was explicative and demonstrative
- Yes, goals were met; comments on the calculator and other tools, plus the materials and access to the DB101 website (34%)
 - ◆ Calculator is totally exciting! I can see using this with clients during our visits
 - ◆ Given tools (calculator and website) to aid me in better assisting
 - ◆ Great handouts and walk through calculator
 - ◆ New internet tools are excellent!
- Goals were partially met (15%)
 - ◆ Could have used a couple more scenarios on the calculator
 - ◆ Got very vague and didn't provide enough examples
 - ◆ Need to use to really understand
- This was a great start to a complicated topic (9%)
 - ◆ I'm not an expert yet, but this was helpful!
 - ◆ Great start. I'm looking forward to exploring the website on my own.

After the training, are participants more hopeful that people with disabilities can work and retain benefits?

- Yes, the calculator and DB101 website are very useful tools (43%)
 - ◆ The calculator is a great tool for consumers and advocates alike
 - ◆ Helps clients think about and plan for the future
- Yes, all of the information , along with the resources, are empowering (31%)
 - ◆ It has dispelled some myths
 - ◆ I feel more optimistic about back to work programs
 - ◆ The back to work programs in place encourage employment
 - ◆ It erased the perceptions I had that benefits are more useful than employment
 - ◆ This training cleared some misperceptions that about people working with disabilities and still not able to receive benefits
- Even more so now: Previously participants had some knowledge, but the more detailed information along with the resources are very important and helpful (22%)
- Somewhat more hopeful (4%)

What Participants Found Most Useful

- Specific topic or tool (mainly the calculator, 58%)
 - ◆ Calculator + Query
 - ◆ BPQY
 - ◆ DB101 website

- ◆ Difference between SSI and SSDI benefits
- ◆ Just knowing these resources are available
- Specific resources provided at the training session (27%)
 - ◆ DB101 slides
 - ◆ Handouts
 - ◆ Case studies
 - ◆ The visuals
- All of the information (12%)
 - ◆ Good, practical suggestions
 - ◆ Information on resource lists and programs through SSA
 - ◆ Review of rules for various programs
- All of it (3%)

More comments on the calculator

Participants were asked if the calculator would be helpful to them or someone they know, and to comment further on the calculator. Eighty-four percent of those who responded indicated that the calculator would indeed prove useful to them or someone they know. Only one person (1%) indicated that it would not be useful to them or someone they know, while ten people (15%) declined to answer. The following are comments given by participants in regards to the calculator:

- Good information and useful tool that can be utilized with clients or significant others (30%)
 - ◆ Can give more information to people
 - ◆ A great tool to review for potential situations
 - ◆ Very important tool

- ◆ Very useful
- Comments on with whom the calculator will prove useful (30%)
 - ◆ Especially for people who are on the fence about employment
 - ◆ For those who are unsure if they want to work
 - ◆ My customers and I can look at how working will be financially beneficial to them
 - ◆ To help consumers plan their employment future
 - ◆ To assist disabled individuals and their families
- Clients can see for themselves how working will affect their benefits (17%)
 - ◆ Clients can individually see how working will affect them
 - ◆ It will be very useful to my clients who I can help figure out whether or not they can work with their disability and how much they can make without losing their benefits
- Unsure if this will be useful in the future (11%)
- Can't wait to use it and would like to train others (12%)

Recommendations

- More detail and/or more examples (38%)
 - ◆ Info on other omitted programs such as TTW, PASS, etc.

- ◆ Overview of basic SSI and SSD7 for those who don't know
- ◆ Training on the difference between SSI and SSA
- More of the same (29%)
- All of the training was great; no suggestions (19%)
- Organizational suggestions (14%)
 - ◆ Climate controlled room
 - ◆ Longer Q&A session and more situation specific examples
 - ◆ Non-sweet food for people who can't eat sweets

Participants' Overall Ratings of the New Tools for Success Training

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding the New Tools for Work Training, on a scale ranging from one to five. One indicated that they strongly disagreed, and five indicated that they strongly agreed, with five questions designed to assess their overall satisfaction with the New Tools for Success training session. Overall, participants gave high ratings on all five questions, and the average ratings across participants were above the neutral point (three) on every question (see table on page six). In other words, overall, participants agreed that they felt more confident that they or their loved ones or clients would be able to work and continue to receive benefits, that there are support networks in place for them, along with tools, resources and staff that they can access at any time, that they know where they can go to get help should they need it, and that being able to work and receive benefits will enhance the lives of disabled individuals.

Question:	Average	Standard Deviation from average
I feel more confident that I (or my loved one or client) would be able to work and still retain needed benefits:	4.14	.77
There are support networks in place that can help me (or my loved one or client) work receive benefits:	4.16	.76
There are tools, resources and staff available that I (or my loved one or client) can access which will help me in the future:	4.36	.70
I (or my loved one or client) know where to go and who to contact if help is needed in the future:	4.12	.76
Being able to work and receive benefits will enhance the quality of my (or my loved one or client's) life:	4.44	.69

Summary

According to these evaluation results, CHIP and partners have hosted another successful training session. After the training session, participants felt confident that they or their loved ones or clients would be able to work and continue to receive benefits, and that there are support networks in place for them, along with tools, resources and staff that they can access at any time. They also indicated that they know where they can go to get help should they need it, and that being able to work and receive benefits will enhance the lives of disabled individuals.

Some participants came into the training session with the explicit goal of learning about resources such as the DB101 website and the new Benefits to Work Calculator tool, and indicated that their goals were met during the training session. Other participants had more general goals related to learning more about working with a disability so that they can pass on their knowledge to their clients. Most of these participants indicated that their goals were fully met, although some indicated that their goals were only partially met, and that they would have liked a more detailed session.

The most striking finding of this evaluation is that participants had a lot to say about the DB101 website and the calculator, and had very few suggestions for improvement in the future. The comments offered as recommendations were mostly along the lines of having more of these sessions, or adding more detail. Some people simply commented that it was all excellent and that they had

no suggestions for improvement.

Most participants cited the Calculator and the DB101 website as the most useful element of the training session. When asked to comment further on the Calculator, they seemed to think the Calculator, along with the website, are very useful tools that will help consumers and advocates alike, and liked the fact that individuals with disabilities can use the Calculator tool themselves to evaluate their specific circumstance. Many thought that the Calculator will be useful specifically for those who are ambivalent about working with a disability because they are afraid of losing their benefits.

Most importantly, when asked to comment on whether or not they are more hopeful that disabled individuals can work and still receive benefits, all commented that they are even more so after the training, or at least somewhat more hopeful. Many agreed that the new tools are empowering to clients and consumers. The new tool helped them to clear up any misconceptions that benefits are generally more useful than employment in the long run, or that people who are disabled and working are not able to receive benefits. They seemed to generally feel more optimistic about back to work programs after having participated in the New Tools for Success training session.

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Please direct any comments, questions or suggestions regarding this report to:

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