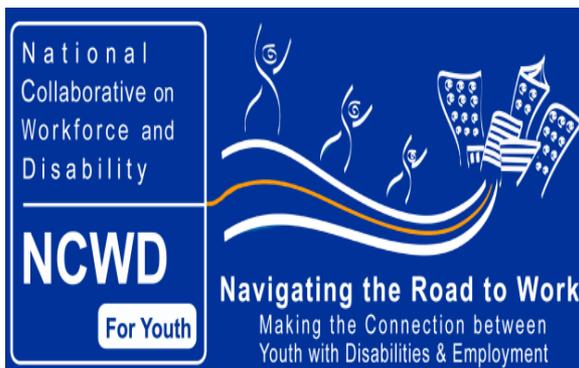




Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success

Project Search Conference

July 25-26, 2012 - Austin, TX



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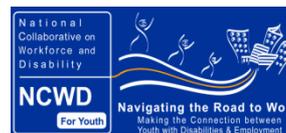
Who We Are



Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor:

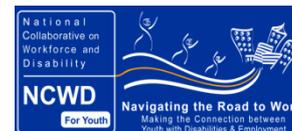
Mission: Provide national leadership on disability employment policy

Vision: A world in which people with disabilities have unlimited employment opportunities



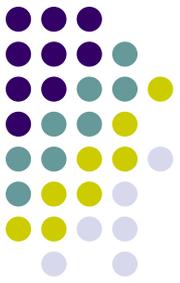
What are Soft Skills

Soft skills refer to the traits, work habits, and attitudes that all workers across all occupations must have in order to obtain, maintain, and progress in employment.



Our Soft Skills

- **Communication**
- **Networking**
- **Enthusiasm and Attitude**
- **Teamwork**
- **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking**
- **Professionalism**

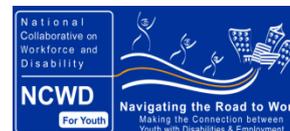


What Employers Want

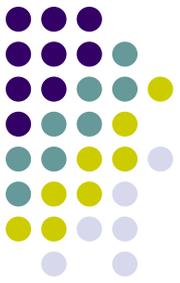


Employees with the ability to:

- get along with others,
- work in teams,
- attend to tasks,
- work independently, and
- provide excellent customer service

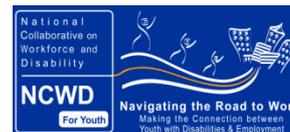


What Employers Say

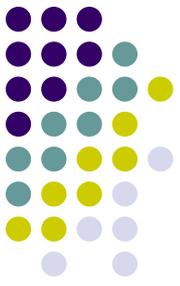


- **71** percent said answering a cell phone or texting during the interview.
- **69** percent said dressing inappropriately.
- **69** percent don't like it when an applicant appears bored.
- **66** percent said appearing arrogant.

chewing gum.



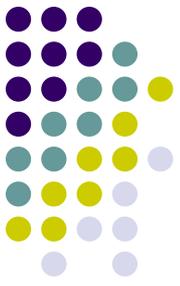
What is Skills to Pay the Bills?



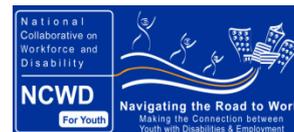
- ***Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success*** is a curriculum developed by ODEP
- Focused on teaching workforce readiness skills to youth, including youth with disabilities
- Created for youth development professionals to use when working with youth ages 14 to 21, in both in-school and out-of-school environments
- The tool consists of modular, hands-on, engaging activities that focus on six key skill areas



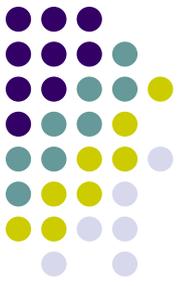
Communication



- Many forms including verbal, written, and visual
- Important to develop skills for both communicating TO others, and learning how to receive info FROM others
- Employers routinely list communication skills as top-rated “must have” skill
- Focus areas include information transfer and recognition



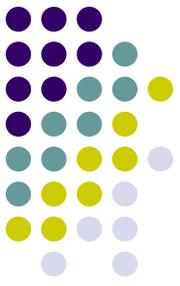
Enthusiasm and Attitude



- **“I can” attitude is critical component of workplace success**
- **Smiling, punctuality, and desire to learn are traits of a positive attitude**
- **Positive attitude can mean the difference between getting hired and fired**
- **Focus areas include positive thinking and enthusiasm during interviews**



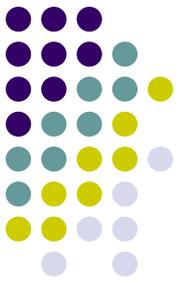
Teamwork



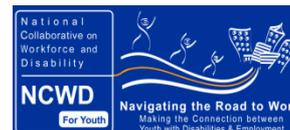
- **Each individual plays a role in team success**
- **Cooperation, responsibility, communication are key cogs in an effective team**
- **Employers value team players**
- **Focus areas include positive teamwork behavior and understanding roles**



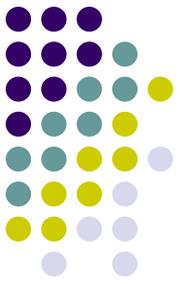
Networking



- “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”
- Essential strategy for career development and exploration
- Networking is key to unlocking “hidden job market”
- Focus areas include taking initiative and overcoming fear



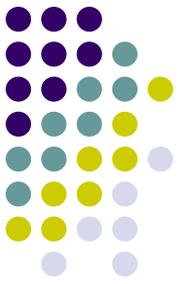
Problem Solving and Critical Thinking



- **The ability to use knowledge, facts and data to solve problems**
- **Process is as important as final answer**
- **Employers value ability to develop solution**
- **Focus areas include ethical decision-making and problem solving in a team setting**

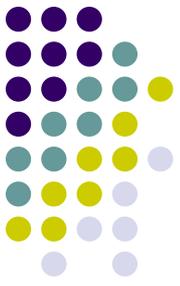


Professionalism



- **Professionalism is a key to success, regardless of industry**
- **Employers value those who carry out duties in professional manner**
- **Quality work, honesty and integrity are key facets of the “total package”**
- **Focus areas include molding soft skills together**

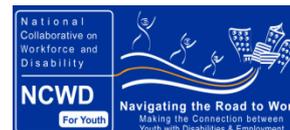


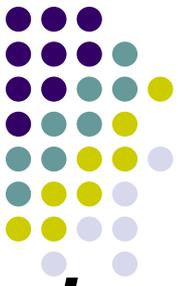


Development

● 12 Month Project Design

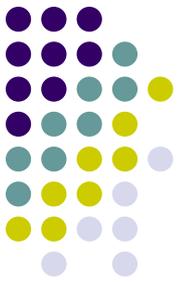
- **Step #1: Seek feedback from the field**
- **Questions to facilitators**
 - **Current materials used for soft skills?**
 - **Lesson structure (scripted v. unscripted)?**
 - **Types of activities most effective?**
 - **Lesson design (progressive vs. independent)?**
 - **Social networking, email, texting?**





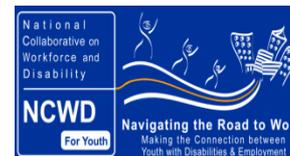
- **We also wanted to know:** *Do you believe youth in your program understand and demonstrate skills in these areas:*
 - **Communication: 60%**
 - **Enthusiasm and Teamwork: 81%**
 - **Teamwork: 58%**
 - **Networking: 0%**
 - **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking: 50%**

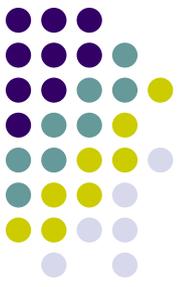




● What the sites said:

- Flexible lesson design
- Structure for instructors
- Minimal lecture/reading; maximal interaction

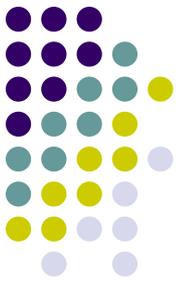




● Through the lens of Universal Design

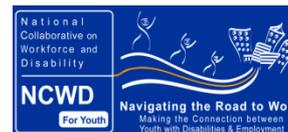
- Account for learning differences and varied skills, talents and interests
- Provide a wide range of learners an opportunity for success
- Tips for improving access for all youth
 - Global strategies
 - Inclusive teaching strategies
 - Accommodations

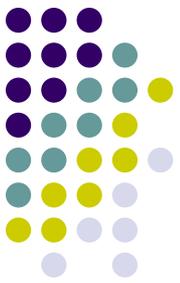




● Pilot

- **6 sites – in different parts of the country**
- **Different populations of students, and included youth**
 - **With and without disabilities**
 - **Those engaged in GED and career preparation classes**
 - **Whose primary language was other than English**
- **Participant and instructor feedback led to adjustments and adaptations of product**

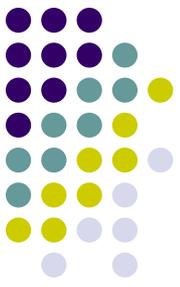




● Youth ratings

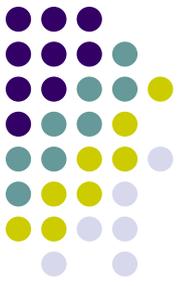
- ***YUCK!*** Where you do you guys come sup with this stuff?
- It was kind of boring...but not the worst thing I've ever done.
- Eh – it was OK.
- It was pretty good.
- It was ***AWESOME!*** I even learned something new.





- **The result: 30 Lessons**
 - **“Just the Facts” – a brief description**
 - **Time frame (suggested)**
 - **Materials (suggested)**
 - **Directions (including sample scripts)**
 - **Conclusion (discussion/dialogue)**
 - **Journaling activity (with choices)**
 - **Extension activity**

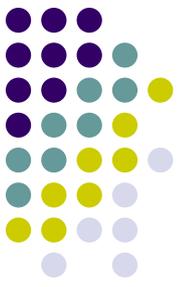




● **Post Pilot:**

- ***Do you believe youth in your program understand and demonstrate skills in these areas:***
 - **Communication: 100% (↑40%)**
 - **Enthusiasm and Teamwork: 100% (↑19%)**
 - **Teamwork: 100% (↑42%)**
 - **Networking: 100% (↑100%)**
 - **Problem Solving & Critical Thinking: 100% (↑50%)**

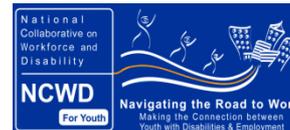




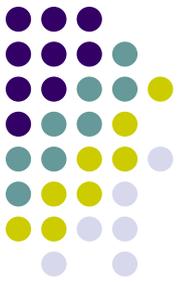
Activity Example:

The Good, The Bad, The Reasonable

- A favorite exercise of students
- Students discuss some of the barriers to effective teamwork
- Using spaghetti and marshmallows, students have 15 minutes to create tallest freestanding structure
- Tallest structure has solid foundation---students discuss importance of foundation for a team

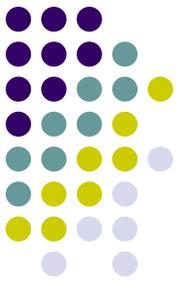


Success Story – Brandon Pursley



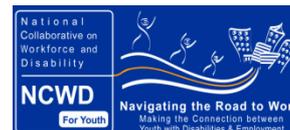
- ***Skills to Pay the Bills* cover artist**
- **Student at Madison County High School**
- **Experience with curriculum gave him the confidence to take his art in a new direction**
- **Currently living and working in Boston**

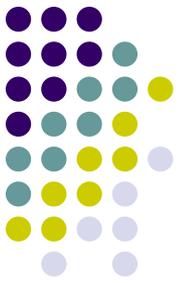




In Their Own Words

- **“It was an experience going beyond my wildest dreams”** - *Brandon Pursley (student)*
- **“I can’t think of just one thing that we did because I enjoyed everything”** - *LaShondra Neely (student)*
- **“The Soft Skills activities are fabulous. They cover the five areas that are desperately needed in today’s workforce”** - *Virginia Dever (facilitator)*



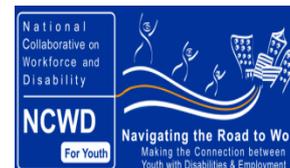


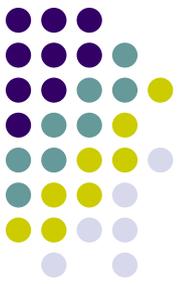
Skills to Pay the Bills - Adopters

- **Washington, DC**
- **Maryland**
- **Virginia**
- **New York**
- **South Carolina**
- **Florida**



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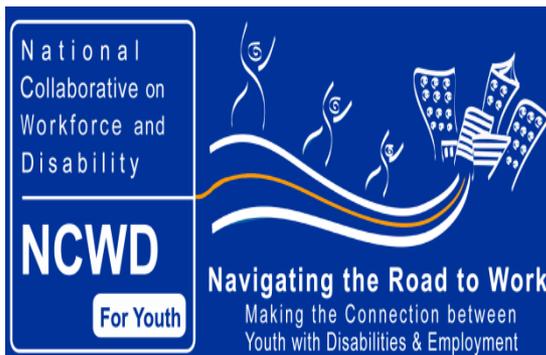


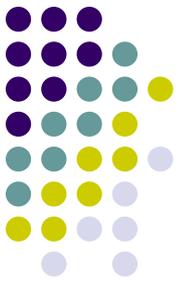


Coming Soon!

***Skills to Pay the Bills* web-based game** (ETA Fall 2012) – A web-based game teaching youth soft skill and career awareness

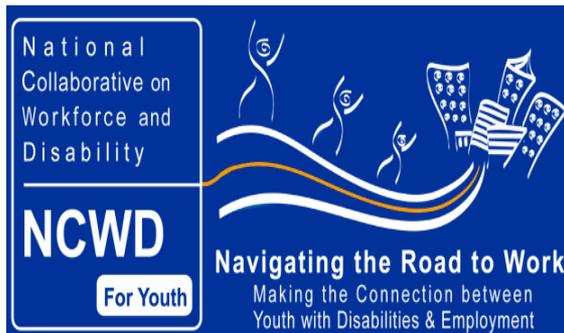
***Skills to Pay the Bills* video series** - Vivid interpretations of how soft skills should be used to be successful in obtaining a job and continuing to work successfully in the workplace.





Thank You!

- **Tell us how you use the curriculum at softskills@dol.gov**
- **To download in English or Spanish, please go to: www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills**



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