

SOLVING FLORIDA'S LABOR SHORTAGE: THE HIDDEN SOLUTION

*For information on The Able Trust and
disability employment in Florida,
visit www.AbleTrust.org*

Solving Florida's Labor Shortage: The Hidden Solution provides an update to a 2019 report *The Able Trust* released in partnership with the Florida Chamber Foundation. In our ongoing efforts to provide meaningful data and research, we are releasing this new report to show changes in the employment of persons with disabilities.

Currently, the labor force participation rate in Florida for persons with disabilities is 20.4 percent compared to 63.0 percent for persons without disabilities — a gap of more than 40 percentage points. This gap has persisted for more than 40 years and is clearly unacceptable for our state and the current demand for a qualified workforce.

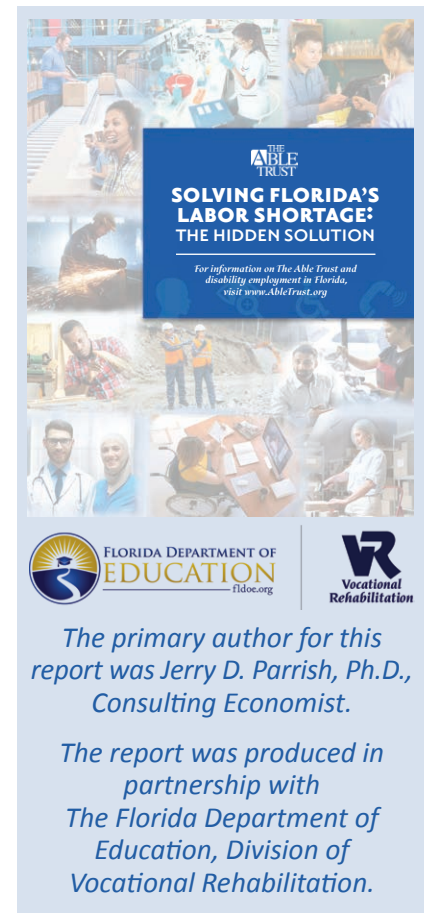
At this moment, Florida has nearly 500,000 unfilled jobs, and forecasts indicate substantial growth in new jobs annually between now and 2030. This report continues our focus on illustrating the disability workforce landscape in Florida and imagining what is possible when employers realize the value of a disability inclusive workforce. Floridians with disabilities are a part of a statewide workforce solution.

It is our goal to close the labor force participation gap for Floridians with disabilities by 10 percentage points in the next 10 years. This effort requires extensive analysis of existing data and research, identifying new areas of required research, facilitating collaboration among our many stakeholders, and engaging with more partners and funders.

With this report, you will learn about the current state of disability employment in Florida, and we invite you to imagine what can be possible when business, government, education, and Floridians with disabilities work together for the future of our economy and its workforce.

DEVELOPING FLORIDA'S WORKFORCE

The demand for qualified workers is currently very high. As a result, many Florida employers have an opportunity to expand their workforce to include traditionally untapped talent pools. One of the ways to expand Florida's workforce is to help more Floridians with disabilities move into the workforce.

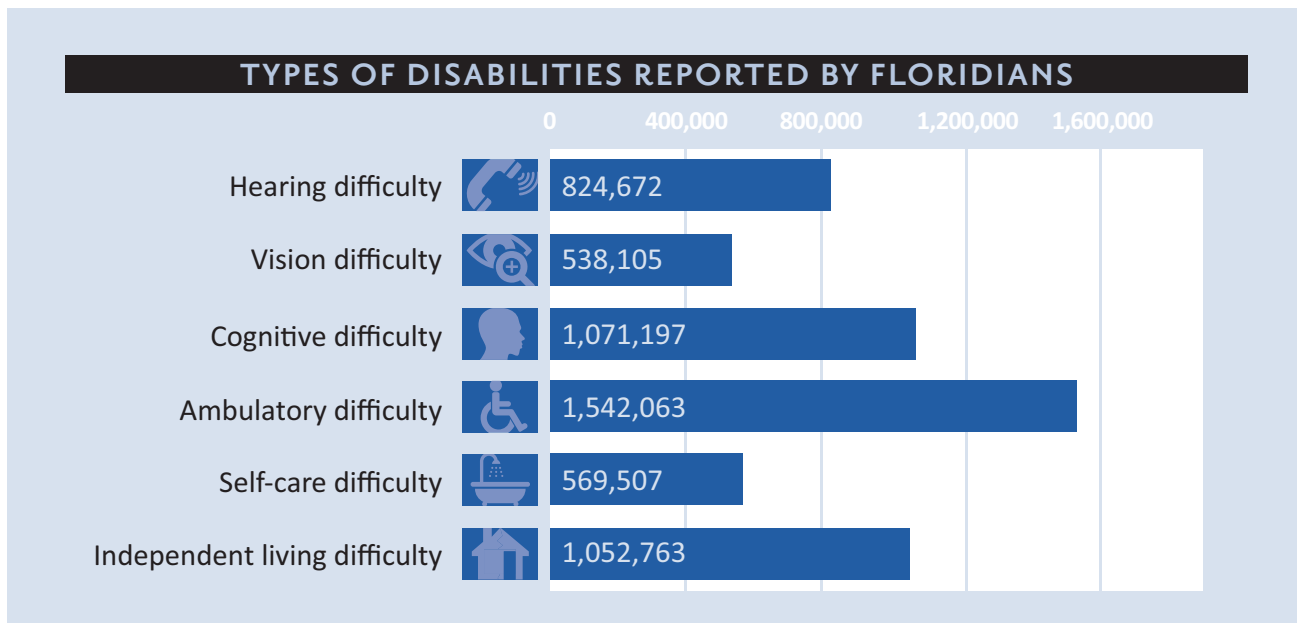


The Able Trust is also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation. The Able Trust is a public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990 to be the direct support organization for the state Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR). The Able Trust collaborates with Florida employers, community organizations, and career development partners to help Floridians with disabilities of all ages enter the workforce. Through a unique combination of research, outreach, and capacity building, The Able Trust works to strengthen our current system to ensure more Floridians with disabilities can enter the job market.

DATA ABOUT FLORIDIANS WITH A DISABILITY

According to the latest data available from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, there are 2,890,193 Floridians who have a disability. That is 13.7 percent of Florida's population, which compares to 12.7 percent of the U.S. population who have a disability. In the population who are 18 to 64 years of age, the most likely group to be in the workforce, there are 1,263,125 Floridians who have a disability.

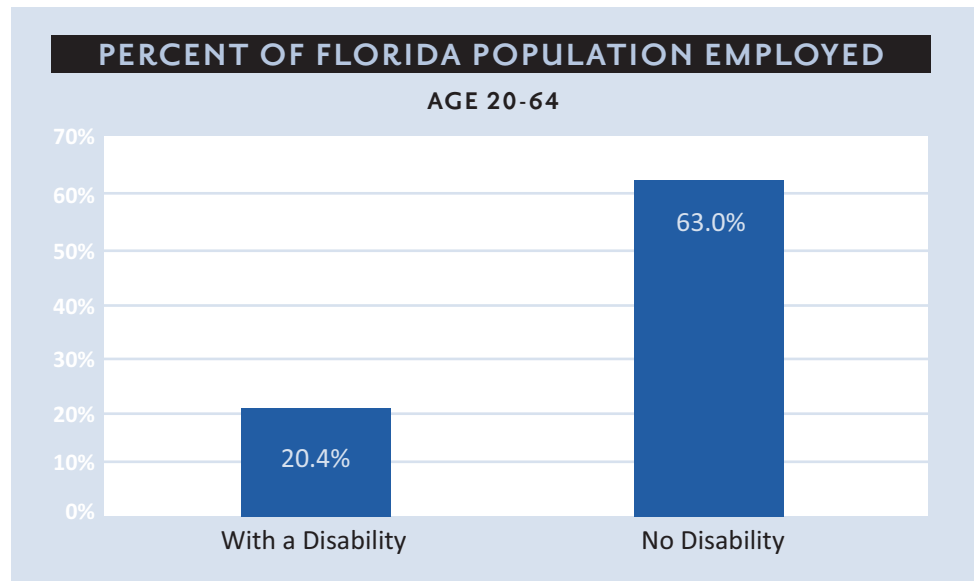
The chart below indicates the numbers of people who have differing types of disabilities, and it is clear that many Floridians have more than one type of disability.



The biggest difference between the population with a disability and the overall population is the percentage of each group who are working. The most recent data show that 63.0 percent of the population without a disability between the ages of 20 and 64 are employed, versus only 20.4 percent for those with a disability.

Although the gap is large, Florida's percentage of persons with a disability who are working, at 20.4 percent, is lower than the U.S. rate of 24.3 percent but is near the same percentage of most of the states in the Southeastern U.S.

To meet The Able Trust’s goal of closing this gap by 10 percentage points over the next 10 years, we must increase substantially the number of persons with a disability who are working. The Able Trust can reach this goal through consistent and coordinated collaboration of all stakeholders including government, workforce leaders, educators, and community service providers. The Able Trust is best positioned to facilitate and support this type of collective impact in Florida.

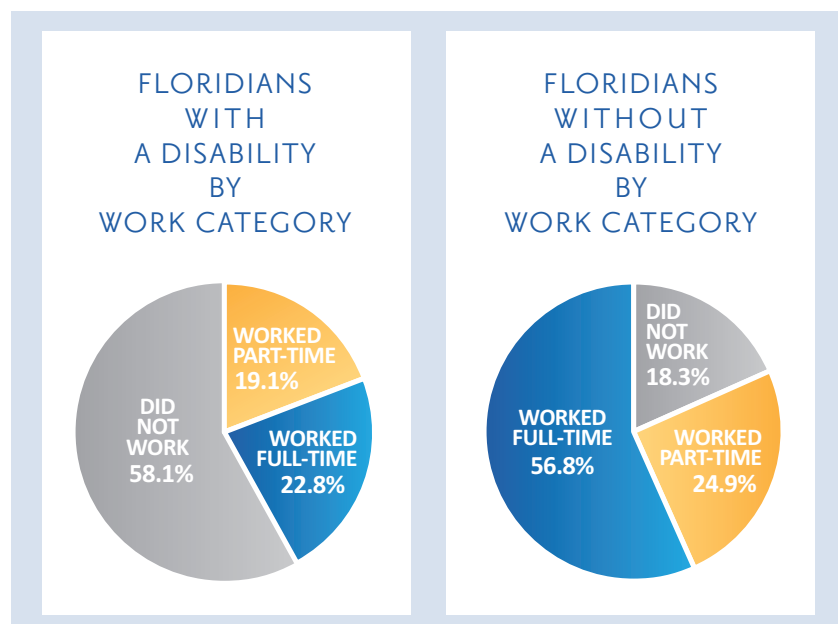


The good news is that the number of Floridians with a disability who are employed continues to increase each year. In 2016 there were 363,562 Floridians with a disability working, and the 2020 data indicate an increase to 437,548 – a 20.3 percent increase over that four-year period.

WORKING FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, OR NOT IN THE WORKFORCE

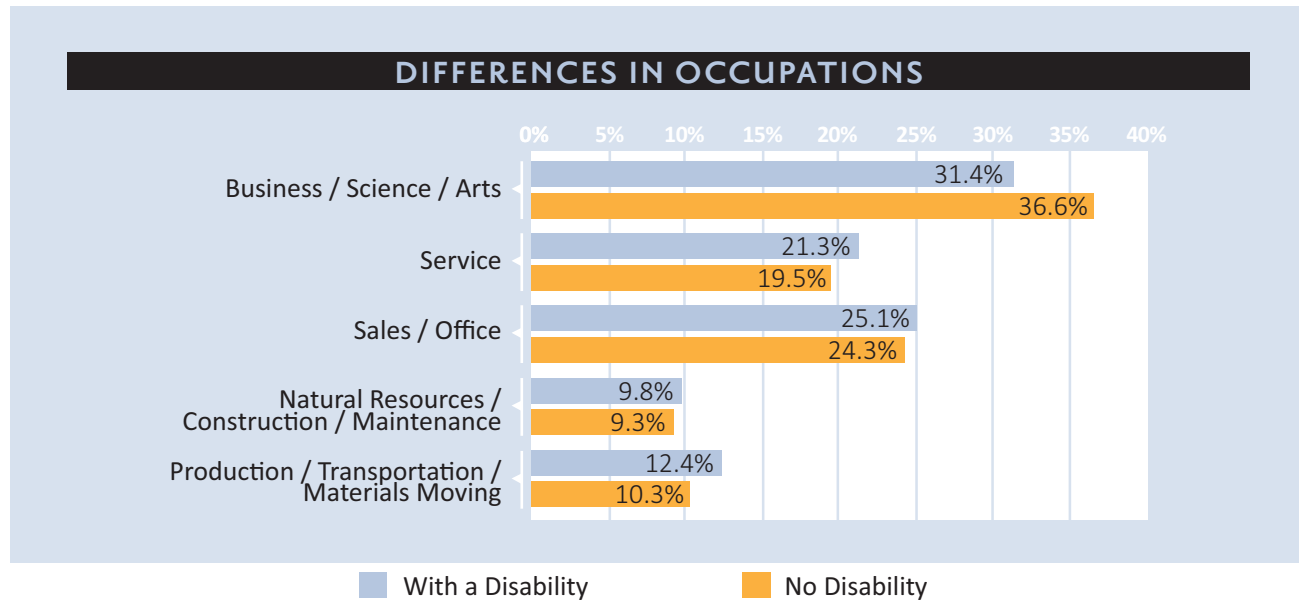
One of the major differences between the potential workforce with a disability and those without a disability is the difference in percentages of those groups that either don’t work, work part-time, or work full-time. A high percentage of persons with a disability between age 20 and 64 do not work – 58.1 percent, compared to only 18.3 percent for those who have no disability.

There are also large differences between the two groups in terms of full-time work. For the persons with a disability, 22.8 percent work full-time and for those without a disability the percentage is 56.8 percent. The difference in these two groups that work part-time is smaller – 19.1 percent of those with a disability are working part-time, compared to 24.9 percent of those with no disability.



DIFFERENCES IN OCCUPATIONS

When we look at the occupations of persons with a disability in Florida, they are less likely to be in the business, science, and arts category than those with no disability, but more likely to be in each of the other categories of occupation.



EMPLOYER HIRING TRENDS AND ATTITUDES

Employers who hire people with disabilities report real value that is reflected in their bottom line. According to a 2018 Accenture study on workplace accessibility, companies that hire people with disabilities have seen 28 percent higher revenues and two times higher net income.

In 2021, The Able Trust partnered with Florida's Council of 100 to survey Florida employers regarding trends and attitudes related to hiring people with disabilities. The survey showed that 51 percent of respondents' companies had hired a person with a disability. Thirty-eight percent of companies that had done so within the previous five years with the balance who had done so more than five years ago. The majority, 76 percent, were companies with 50 or more employees. However, companies of smaller size including those with fewer than 20 employees had hired a person with a disability.

When asked about the effectiveness of their employees with a disability, 93 percent of employers indicated that their employees with a disability had been as effective as expected and 27 percent of them indicated their employee had been more effective than expected. Only 7 percent reported that their employee was less effective than expected, and the majority of those employers indicated that the primary issue was due to lack of skills.



NATE POLETE
Pitney Bowes Presort Services General Manager.

HIGH SCHOOL HIGH TECH

As we expand the number of Floridians with disabilities in the workforce, we recognize the need to begin earlier to help them prepare for their careers. One of the ways The Able Trust is doing that is through its High School High Tech (HSHT) program. This program provides high school students with a disability the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to in-demand careers. There are 43 HSHT sites across Florida that work with high school students with disabilities to improve their graduation rates, increase their participation in vocational and employment-related activities, and increase their enrollment in post-secondary education and training. Some of the benefits of this program include the fact that students involved in these programs have a higher graduation rate, and they will be more prepared to enter the workforce when they are ready to do so.

25 Years of High School High Tech Success

The Able Trust is committed to identifying and elevating existing practices that have shown significant progress in addressing the issue of disability employment in Florida. We are proud that our own High School High Tech Program (HSHT) rises to the top of career and postsecondary exploration for high school students in our state. We have operated HSHT for over 25 years through partnerships with local school districts and community nonprofit organizations. HSHT uses the nationally recognized *Guideposts for Success* as a program framework. The Guideposts incorporate evidenced-based career development interventions that make a positive difference in the lives of all youth, including youth with disabilities.

The Able Trust HSHT operates in 39 counties with the goals of increasing high graduation rates and post-secondary education enrollment of students with disabilities. For more than ten years, HSHT has achieved a 99 percent graduation rate for program participants and over 80 percent of our graduates continue on to post-secondary education and/or employment.

HSHT relies heavily on the involvement and guidance of business and industry leaders to ensure our students are on a path to Florida's in-demand and growing careers.

For information, visit abletrust.org.

80%
continue on to
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HSHT
participants

Individual Success

Melisa Lewis credits The Able Trust's High School High Tech program for helping her achieve her dream of becoming a registered nurse.

Melisa wanted a career in healthcare – and she wasn't about to let her auditory processing deficit and hearing loss keep her from achieving her dream. The education, internships, and career training she received as a HSHT student prepared Melisa to attend and graduate Magna Cum Laude from the University of Central Florida College of Nursing.

Melisa applied for three positions at a Daytona area hospital and was hired on the spot by their neural unit. She credits her HSHT internships for giving her the experience and confidence to go after a job she really wanted.



CONCLUSION

This report provides a snapshot of where Floridians with a disability work, as well as providing some of the details about their types of employment. What is clear is that significant disparities exist in the employment of persons with a disability and those who do not have a disability. We also know that employment gaps between the two groups are even larger in Florida's rural counties.

With the differences in labor force participation between these two groups and with the expected growth of Florida jobs over the next several years, there is a clear opportunity for Floridians with disabilities to be a solution to our workforce shortage in the state. Floridians with disabilities have a wide variety of education, experience, and skills, and in many cases mirror those of persons without disabilities. Florida is well positioned to make a concerted effort to include persons with disabilities in the state's talent pipeline. Florida's 2021 Reimagining Education and Career Help Act (REACH) positions the state to help those with barriers to education and employment become self-sufficient, giving them better access to good jobs and careers that offer economic opportunity.

Our data and research help provide the science to move Florida forward in closing the disability workforce gap, our outreach communicates that information, and our capacity building creates meaningful change in areas such as education, workforce development, and business culture to help increase people with disabilities in Florida's workforce. This report is just the beginning of our work.


As the demand for workers continues to grow, we see even greater opportunities for employers to turn to Floridians with disabilities as not just a viable solution, but one that will strengthen Florida businesses with improved bottom lines. We invite you to examine the current state of disability employment in your area using this report. Consider how bringing more people with disabilities into your local workforce can have a positive economic impact, and partner with us to make that happen. The Able Trust is available to guide local conversations, build collaborations between employers and local disability employment resources, and facilitate your success in hiring Floridians with disabilities.

Contact us to get started, today! To find out how you can help improve Florida's workforce and provide more opportunities for persons with a disability, contact The Able Trust at www.AbleTrust.org or email info@abletrust.org.

THE ABLE TRUST: Direct Support Organization to Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

In 1990, the Florida Legislature created The Able Trust to be the direct support organization (DSO) for the state's vocational rehabilitation program. As a DSO, The Able Trust is responsible for encouraging public and private support to enhance vocational rehabilitation and employment of Floridians with disabilities.

We accomplish our work as a DSO in many ways including:

 **Research and data analysis** to inform our work, as well as that of the state vocational rehabilitation program and other Florida stakeholders.

 **Outreach and communication** with a variety of partners including employers, business/industry leaders, educators, service providers, and government entities.

 Using our resources to **build system capacity** to increase and improve disability employment in Florida.