



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF CENTER FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION

## PARTNERING FOR WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

### 2009

Organization was founded through the support of the SHRM-Kansas City chapter and a grant from Kansas Works under the name Business Leadership Network of Greater Kansas City as an affiliate of the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN). Our organization was referred to as GKCBLN. Founding president was Keith Wiedenkiller, Chief People Officer of AMC Theaters and he served as president 2009-2013.

### 2010

Disability Champions Award was created to recognize companies who demonstrate excellence beyond compliance in their disability employment effort. Since 2010, the awards luncheon for employers and the GKCBLN Volunteer of the Year has been held each October with 100+ attendees, a national speaker and John Holt, Fox4News evening anchor as our emcee.

### 2011

Recognized as USBLN Affiliate of the Year at national conference in Orlando Florida for our success in engaging business.

### 2011-2015

Actively involved in the Add Us In Consortium through ODEP and UMKC Institute for Human Development. This five-year grant focused on disabled and disadvantaged youth in the urban core. The Urban Career Academy was launched, curriculum developed, classes held and about 180 students completed the program with majority finding employment or pursuing higher education.

### 2013-2014

USBLN recognized the scope of accomplishment in the Kansas City area and Keith Wiedenkiller was elected USBLN Board Chair for a two-year term, 2013-2014. In that role, he was the driving force behind the USBLN Disability Equality Index that is now one of the leading benchmarks for organizational effectiveness in disability employment.

### 2014

Brenda Perkins, Partner/Consultant with Joshua Communications served as president in 2014. During the year, Rob Hoffman joined GKCBLN as Executive Director. Three significant grants were secured that have been instrumental in propelling our efforts and success.

Grant 1 - Three-year grant from Poses Family Foundation (October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2017) was the catalyst for KCeWork initiative and Nexus consortium of service providers.

Grant 2 - Three-year grant from the Missouri Council on Developmental Disabilities provided funding for development of web-based business resource to connect business with qualified candidates with disabilities. Online tool launched in April 2016.

Grant 3 - Multi-year grant through Show-Me-Careers supported community collaborations to assist youth and young adults with disabilities gain work experience and employment.

### 2015

David Westbrook, SVP of Strategy & Innovation at Children's Mercy Hospitals served as president in 2015. The first annual Disability Inclusion Summit was held at the BEST Conference Center at KU Edwards Campus in April. This full-day event with national speakers and breakout sessions attracted 135 attendees. In August, the first annual Thought Leaders Luncheon was held at the Federal Reserve Bank. Jill Houghton, Executive Director of USBLN addressed the 50 attendees at this invitation event. The 6th Annual Disability Champions Event was held in October at the Ritz Charles where Dr. Jennifer Arnold, Medical Director at Texas Children's Hospital and star of the television program, Little People, was keynote speaker.

### 2016

Teresa Salinas, EEO, Affirmative Action Specialist with Cerner was elected president for 2016-2017. GKCBLN received its 2nd Affiliate of the Year Award and recognized at the annual conference.

### 2017

Mary Beth Majors, VP Talent Acquisition with UMB was elected president for 2018 - 2019.

### 2018

In July, National announced a new brand changing from USBLN to Disability:IN, the IN stands for inclusion. Affiliates required to re-brand using same name and city. By December grants ended and ED Rob Hoffman resigned.



## 2019

January 2019 Darla Wilkerson was appointed Executive Director. We began the process of re-branding, creating strategies to roll that out to our partners and the community. Our re-brand was announced, and we are now Disability Inclusion of Greater Kansas City (Disability:IN GKC).

In March Brenda Perkins was contracted to be the Business Relations Consultant to continue outreach and communication to current and potential partners.

In June we launched the Kansas City Disability Inclusion Network, meetings being held monthly to connect business, pivotal partners and academic partners together to elevate disability inclusion in Greater Kansas City. For the first time we designed a partnership option for community provider agencies called Pivotal Partners. Educational/Academic partners began attending Network meetings. Also, in June we launched our new job board "Our Ability Connect", a partnership with Disability:IN NY. This is another tool to help connect our business partners with candidates.

## 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic starting in March, we transitioned all programs/events to virtual. By year end, we provided - 10 webinars, 3 trainings in partnership with Greater KC Chamber and 8 partner company presentations on disability awareness. Hosted Diversity & Inclusion Consortium meetings with Michael Gonzales and co-hosted the Construction Roundtable with Cecily Bee at Performance Contracting Group. First Thing Thursday virtual chats became an integral way to foster connections and conversations. Held all 3 annual signature events virtually, 6th Annual Disability Inclusion Summit, 11th Annual Disability Champion Award and 6th Thought Leaders Event. Added 9 new business and community agency partners, and hired Jill Webb as part-time Social Media Coordinator.

## 2021

In February, Jill Webb was contracted to be the Assistant Director to continue outreach and communication to current and potential community agency partners. We continued to experience significant growth with new corporate partners, community agencies and strategic partnerships across the region. Based on extensive conversations with organizations in Omaha, we expanded our efforts in that area. Due to our sister affiliate in St Louis discontinuing operation, and a number of existing partners having their corporate office there, we also began expansion in that area. We held all 3 annual signature events virtually, 7th Annual Thought Leaders Forum, 7th Annual Disability Inclusion Summit and 12th Annual Disability Champion Award. In September, we launched our new name and new brand - Center for Disability Inclusion - at our Annual Summit. That month, we also contracted with Meaghan Walls to be the Director of Business Relations in Omaha.

## 2022

In April 2022, Andy Traub joined the leadership team as Director of Corporate Disability Inclusion. In September, the Seal of Accomplishment for Leader in Disability Inclusion was announced. This national seal recognizes businesses who accomplish milestones from the disability inclusion process designed by the Center for Disability Inclusion. By year end, we experienced a 24% increase in new business partners, 95% partner renewal rate and 4,981 attendees at educational training sessions. Overall for the year, learning opportunities and events reached employees in 22 countries.



## 2023

Kathleen Cooper led the 15-member Board of Directors as President in 2022–2023 and Jessica Lopez joined the CDI Leadership team as Corporate Training Consultant. Our 2023 Inclusion Summit “Amplifying Intersectionality”, national collaborative conference, was held September 27–28 at the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Put on through CDI’s collaboration with the D&I Consortium, KC Chamber and National Association of Asian American Professionals–Kansas City (NAAAP-KC), it attracted 296 attendees from 142 companies in 24 states and 2 countries.

In January, we launched the Leader in Disability Inclusion Seal of Accomplishment process, developed by CDI. Nineteen companies indicated interest and/or started the process and 10 successfully demonstrated progress and were recognized as the founding group of Seal of Accomplishment Award Recipients at our December Awards Event. First year recipient companies were: Ameristar Casino & Hotel, Black & Veatch, Blue Cross Blue Shield Kansas City, Commerce Bank, Dairy Farmers of America, Enterprise Bank & Trust, GEHA, Jack Henry, Magna Electric Vehicle Structures and Mutual of Omaha.



We expanded the reach and impact of our delivered programming in 2023. In 2023 CDI held 20 learning events, including webinars, Disability Network meetings, the Inclusion Summit and Annual Awards event for an impact that reached 1,285 attendees representing 716 companies.

The CDI Leadership Team provided 2,200+ hours of consultation and 54 customized training events with a combined attendance of 2,792. Our LinkedIn audience increased in followers by 38.9%. We experienced business partner growth of 11% with a retention rate of 98%. The year ended with the retirement of Darla Wilkerson, CEO after five years of service. Her successor Meaghan Walls, officially stepped into the CEO role on December 23, 2023.

## 2024

In January, Derrick Nelson, started a two-year term as Board of Directors President for 2024–2025. Year two of the Leader in Disability Inclusion Seal of Accomplishment process starts with six new companies committing to pursue the process, in addition to nine of the 2023 recipient companies who are continuing their targeted work. Plans are underway for 10 monthly Disability Network meetings, 2 deep-dive Webinars on topics of Inclusive Data Collection and Content Accessibility. The 2024 Inclusion Summit “Audacious Dialogues” will be held on September 26–27 at The Abbott in Kansas City + Virtually.