

InterHab Outstanding Business Award Submission

Nominee: **Johnson County Government**

For more than 50 years, Johnson County, KS Government has prioritized the inclusion and support of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, first creating a service provider and employment skills training program. Today, Johnson County Government along with the governing board of Johnson County Developmental Supports continue this commitment through a mission to provide public service, public value, and public leadership.

Identified in April of 2023, the Johnson County Board of County Commissioners adopted the below priorities that impact the daily lives of county residents. Through these initiatives, people with IDD are included and supported through all aspects of interaction with their local government.

- Housing - Safe, stable, and attainable housing is a foundational element in a person's life and the overall health of a community. Current activities include planning for those experiencing homelessness, vulnerable populations, and justice involved residents and supporting attainable housing projects across the continuum.
- Infrastructure - Identify needs and seek partnerships to deliver initiatives for the rapidly developing northwest portion of Johnson County, while creating an Area Development Plan that will include not only traditional land use but also transportation, transit, and broadband infrastructure.
- Staff - A resilient workforce that maximizes the County's ability to deliver exceptional services, contributing to a high quality of life for Johnson County residents.
- Health and Safety - As we continue to make health and safety a priority, we will do so through the lens of sustainability and diversity, equity, and inclusion to promote a healthier environment and create a sense of belonging/connection throughout Johnson County. This will be accomplished by considering sustainability and inclusiveness when making funding and policy recommendations/decisions.

Identified as a strategic priority in April of 2023, Johnson County Government has prioritized multiple programs that create a meaningful impact for county residents with IDD.

Housing – Grant awards to local nonprofits that specialize in creating safe, affordable, and accessible housing for those with IDD.

Infrastructure – The transportation of people with IDD is a priority in county transportation plans, ensuring people make it to work and services. This includes bus service, specialized transportation for those with IDD, and a unique peer transportation program through the Mental Health Center.

Staff – Significant investments have been made to employee recruitment and retention, increasing wages of DSPs to \$20/hr. starting pay and educational opportunities for those providing services to people with IDD, including a new registered apprenticeship program. Internship opportunities are available for residents with IDD through Project SEARCH. The county has been a host business for 10 years now and regularly hires graduates of the program to fill full-time roles. One employee from the first graduating class remains on staff with the Johnson County Sheriff's Office as a fingerprint technician.

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Health and Safety – Created a local program supporting people with IDD who are experiencing mental illness. The program is a unique partnership with the community mental health center and IDD service provider to serve more than 80 adults and children experiencing some level of crisis. The county also hosts monthly resource fairs for county residents that need assistance.

The Johnson County Government Board of County Commissioners in collaboration with the Johnson County Developmental Supports Governing Board have set the tone from the top. Having the buy-in and support of the elected and appointed officials responsible for budget allocations has helped to elevate the needs of the county's IDD population.

To maintain this awareness and visibility throughout the year, the BOCC issues proclamations in recognition of awareness days: Developmental Disability Awareness Month, Disability Employment Awareness Month, Direct Support Professional Appreciation Week. The board also recognizes award-winning employees for their work with county residents with IDD. In 2023, the county had three employees who won state and national awards for their commitments and contributions to improving the lives of those in the community with IDD.

As new facilities and programs are developed, the needs of people with disabilities are considered from the beginning, including adaptive recreational opportunities and accessible facilities through the Johnson County Park & Recreation District, art as employment program studio housed in the Arts & Heritage Center, Papercrete Works office housed in the county health and DMV building, resource fairs for community supported employment opportunities, and other IDD-specific trainings and resources.

Internally, Johnson County Government has created a resource group called VIBE. It stands for voices of inclusion, belonging and equity. This internal group of employees meets regularly to discuss opportunities and provide information to all county employees, most recently including an article on employment opportunities for county residents with IDD during disability employment awareness month. This group also presents a class for all new county employees and all new supervisors.

When the county governing body makes clear commitments to the community, all services are able to start their conversations and innovations with people and priorities included and not inserted as an afterthought.

Johnson County Government programs and resources consider the abilities, needs and challenges of all residents. When these things are addressed, all county residents benefit through increased access to the community, high rates of employee and customer satisfaction, decreased employee turnover, increased efficiency, and a greater understanding of fellow residents.

Johnson County Government operates under the management framework of High Performing Organizations, encouraging employees at all levels to contribute to innovations and ideas that improve outcomes. All the efforts across county government have led to an increase in availability of affordable and accessible housing; availability of qualified Direct Support staffing in the midst of a national workforce crisis; expanded employment opportunities for people with IDD; and improved access, inclusion, and understanding for community members with IDD.

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