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Eileen M. Brennan  
*Portland State University*

Barbara C. Wankoff

Julie M. Rosenzweig  
*Portland State University*

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# Building Layers of Support at KPMG LLP

## *Training Human Resource Professionals for Collaborative Conversations*

**BY BARBARA C. WANKOFF, JULIE M. ROSENZWEIG, PhD AND EILEEN M. BRENNAN, PhD**

**W**hen an employed parent is raising a child with mental health difficulties, there are times when reaching out for support at the workplace is essential. At crisis points when family members must leave work to arrange for immediate mental health assistance and at times when special child care arrangements break down or when children or young people have difficulty at school or in the community, workplace support can be a life saver.

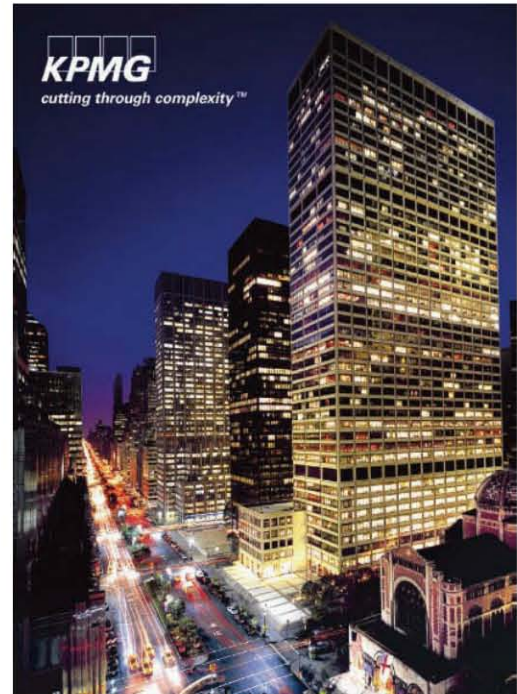
KPMG LLP and Portland State University partnered to develop and test a new training program to prepare human resource (HR) professionals to confidently provide workplace supports for the 9% of employees caring for children with disabilities (Perrin et al., 2007). KPMG joined this partnership as part of its commitment to promoting workplace inclusion.

### **The KPMG Disabilities Initiatives**

In December 2007, KPMG LLP established a national Disabilities Network to help ensure the firm would continue to foster a work environment that recognizes people of all abilities and the impact disabilities can have on an individual's life and family. It also wanted to foster a culture of respect and inclusion as it relates to people with disabilities and their families.

The national network strives to raise awareness among KPMG's people about the unique needs and talents of individuals with disabilities, helping to ensure all partners and employees feel accepted, valued, and treated fairly. It also provides an avenue for those seeking the guidance, encouragement, and camaraderie of others who have successfully faced similar challenges.

KPMG believes that its Disabilities Network enhances its business by providing opportunities to educate and increase awareness, support career development, influence policy decisions, and participate in community activities. The network's leaders—a senior firm leader who is the parent of a child with special needs and a partner who herself has a disability and also is a caregiver for her sister, who has special needs—also are members of the firm's national Diversity Advisory Board (DAB). They have been role models and



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KPMG's purpose is to turn knowledge into value for the benefit of our clients, our people and the capital markets.

advocates for raising awareness of challenges in the workplace and leveraging community partnerships to further engage KPMG employees on the issue.

The Disabilities Network is one of KPMG's six national diversity networks, all of which are represented on the DAB by their respective co-chairs. The other five networks include KNOW (KPMG's Network of Women), African American Network, Asian Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and Pride (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender). The DAB brings together the individual ideas and best practices of all six networks—all of which also have their own advisory boards—and influences and advises the firm's management committee and board of directors on diversity strategies and objectives, progress made, and ways the firm can continue to integrate diversity and inclusion in its business strategy. In addition to the co-chairs of KPMG's six diversity networks, the DAB includes the firm's Chairman; National Managing Partner, Diversity and Corporate Responsibility; the Vice Chair, Human Resources; and the national Director, Diversity.

To achieve the firm's objectives, the Disabilities Network has taken the following actions:

- Launched 12 local office Disabilities Network chapters; each chapter meets regularly and drives initiatives led by employees and partners, with the support of the local partner champion.
- Conducted facilities audits in each office to identify aspects of work spaces that may pose a challenge to people with disabilities.
- Provided disabilities awareness training to employees to help them better understand how to communicate, work with, and relate to those with special needs.
- Conducted recruiter training to build confidence among campus recruiters and recruiters of experienced professionals when recruiting someone with a disability.
- Built strategic partnerships with organizations recognized for serving people with disabilities, including the Special Olympics, the National Business and Disability Council, and the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN).
- Conducted surveys and focus groups to encourage self-identification and determine the needs of potential members.

To further underscore the firm's commitment to those with disabilities and to those who are caregivers for others with special needs, KPMG developed podcasts featuring the Disabilities Network co-chairs, who shared their personal insights on the objectives and meaningful outcomes realized through network efforts within larger KPMG offices. A disability awareness resource also was created as part of the firm's Diversity website to provide partners and employees with access to materials explaining *People First Language* and *Exceptional Care Giving*. In addition, throughout the year the firm conducts firm-wide virtual meetings. Topics have included Planning for the Future of a Loved One with Special Needs, Working with Your Insurance Company, Managing Healthcare for the Elderly, and Living with a Chronic Illness.

Most recently, KPMG offered training to its HR staff on ways to support parents who are providing exceptional care.

### The HR Training Program

Designed to bridge the gap between the workplace needs of employed parents of children and youth with disabilities and the business objectives of companies, *Children and Youth with Disabilities: Their Parents are YOUR Employees* is a training program developed by a team of researchers at Portland State University (Rosenzweig, Malsch, Brennen, Mills, & Stewart, 2010). The material included in the training and its companion manual is based on more than 15 years of research with families of children with disabilities, workplace supervisors, and HR professionals (Rosenzweig & Brennan, 2008).

Human resources professionals employed at multiple KPMG sites across the United States participated in the two-part training provided through an online interactive platform. The basic format included didactic material, PowerPoint slide presentations, structured group activities, case studies, participant polls, and knowledge-check questions. In addition, the participants had access to the online companion manual.

The material is covered in eight modules, each of which is similarly structured with a brief introduction, objectives, and salient information, followed by key points and action planning. Modules 1 through 4 assemble an essential knowledge foundation about children's and youths' physical, developmental, and mental health disabilities and how caregiving responsibilities affect their parents' work lives. The first two modules introduce and review the different types of disabilities experienced by children and youth and the

#### CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND THE WORKPLACE

- Approximately 11% of 8-15 year olds in the United States have a *mental health disorder* serious enough to interfere with their daily lives, but only half receive treatment (Merikangas et al., 2010).
- Among youth ages 12 to 17 the rate of *substance dependence or abuse* is 8% and *alcohol dependence or abuse* is 5.5%. Only 8.7% of the youth who need treatment for substance or alcohol dependence or abuse receive it (SAMHSA, 2007).
- Given the lack of community supports for their exceptional caregiving responsibilities, employed parents of children with mental health difficulties often seek adjustments to their work arrangements but fear being stigmatized as a result of their disclosures in the workplace (Rosenzweig et al, 2011).
- Human resource professionals need to know how to talk with employees about these sensitive and emotionally charged issues, but lack information about children's mental health difficulties and their parents' unique challenges.

associated prevalence rates, including a formula to estimate the number of employees who are parents of children with disabilities. The next two modules discuss the work-life integration experiences faced by employed parents of children with disabilities, with a focus in Module 3 on the complexities of exceptional caregiving responsibilities and a description in Module 4 of the five most pressing challenges for these employees.

At the conclusion of the first session (Modules 1-4), the participants had a working understanding of the scope and pervasiveness of disabilities affecting infants, children, and emerging adults. They could also identify significant differences in the dependent care demands and workplace support needs experienced by employed parents of children with typical development, compared with those of employed parents of children with disabilities.

The second session focused on building workplace strategies and skills that lead to solutions and comprised Modules 5-8). Fundamental to solutions in the workplace that bridge employees' support needs with business needs are implementation of federal and state work-family policies, including those related to family responsibilities discrimination, which are discussed in Module 5. The training next turns to parents' employment-based strategies that maximize flexibility to meet exceptional caregiving responsibilities. Module 6 initiates a crucial discussion about employees' considerations and stigmatization concerns when making decisions to disclose their children's disability status within the workplace. This dialogue is furthered in the next module, where participants share their dilemmas as HR professionals in implementing work-life policies equitably and interacting with employed parents of children with disabilities. The final module is dedicated to development of communication skills specific to supporting employees whose dependent children have disabilities. A distinctive three-step process is taught and practiced using a case study example. The process involves building layers of support in the workplace through collaborative communication, improving workplace culture, and enhancing organizational policies and practices.

The Portland State researchers found that the HR staff who participated in the training had greatly increased confidence in working with employees providing exceptional care, and their knowledge about the needs of working caregivers and effective strategies to build supports grew significantly. An external evaluation of training effectiveness revealed that the majority of participants rated the training as having a significant impact on improving the quality of their work, increasing employee satisfaction, increasing the firm's revenue, and decreasing the firm's risks.

### **Workplace Inclusion of Exceptional Caregivers**

Having a disability or caring for a loved one with a disability such as a mental health disorder is a private matter, one that employees may not want to bring to work (Corrigan & Miller, 2004). Consequently, self-identification remains a challenge, so the firm continues to deliver resources that consistently demonstrate its commitment and instill

confidence, while providing employees and partners with the tools they need. The firm also continues to enhance the accommodations request and evaluation process.

KPMG believes that the ability to identify leaders among its employees who are passionate about enhancing the work environment for people with disabilities and their caregivers is critical to its success as an employer and a firm. As to how the firm assesses its progress, KPMG measures the success of all its diversity networks through employee involvement and is proud that more than 43% of its employees and partners currently are engaged in one or more diversity networks. The firm's achievements have been validated publicly, and KPMG has been recognized by DiversityInc as a Top 10 Company for People With Disabilities, was named USBLN's 2010 Supplier Diversity Corporation of the Year, and most recently was honored with the Disability Matters Employer of Choice award in 2011.

*Barbara C. Wankoff is Director, Workplace Solutions at KPMG LLP.  
She can be reached at [bwankoff@kpmg.com](mailto:bwankoff@kpmg.com).*

*Julie M. Rosenzweig, PhD, is Professor of Social Work at Portland State University and Co-Principal Investigator of the Work-Life Integration Project of the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health (NIDRR Grant No. H133B40038). She can be reached at [rosenzweigj@pdx.edu](mailto:rosenzweigj@pdx.edu).*

*Eileen M. Brennan, PhD, is Professor of Social Work at Portland State University and Co-Principal Investigator of the Pathways Transition Training Collaborative of the Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures (NIDRR Grant H133B090019). She can be reached at [brennane@pdx.edu](mailto:brennane@pdx.edu).*

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