EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA

2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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www.employmentfirstfl.org
People with disabilities want to be successful. Working at a job is the best way to be independent and successful. However, it is hard for many people with disabilities to get jobs. This means employers are missing out on the talents of people with disabilities.

Florida is trying to change this with a new law called the Employment First Act. This law says loud and clear that employment should be a priority for people with disabilities.

There are many different agencies that work together as partners to make sure the Employment First Act is put into place and followed carefully.

This report discusses the work of 9 different Florida partner organizations that worked to make Employment First a reality during 2015 and 2016.
THE EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA INITIATIVE

An “initiative” is a large effort or program that is supported by many people. The Employment First Florida Initiative is a program in which many different Florida partners work to make sure Employment First becomes reality.

Early Employment First efforts were started by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council with a project called Employ Me 1st through funding and support to the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts – Boston and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services.

The first step was to research how Florida compares to other states when it comes to employment for people with disabilities.

While the researchers were gathering results, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed an “Executive Order” for a Commission to look at barriers to employment for Floridians with disabilities. You’ll learn more about this Order on the next page.

Soon after, several state agencies and other leaders worked together to develop the Florida Employment First Initiative.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST EXECUTIVE ORDER

In 2013, Florida Governor Rick Scott issued an Executive Order that supports the hiring of people with disabilities. It defined employment as:

Integrated employment
- including supported employment, customized employment, and self-employment;
- where an individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater;
- or receives earnings through one’s self-employment business;
- and is fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.

What does this mean? The Executive Order says that jobs for people with disabilities should meet the following requirements:
- Jobs should be paid at minimum wage or higher.
- Jobs should not be isolated or kept away from other workers.
- Jobs should help people with disabilities achieve independence and success.
INTERAGENCY COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

This is a 5-year agreement between 9 state agencies. These partner agencies have agreed to work together for better jobs for people with disabilities:

- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)
- The FL Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- The FL Department of Children and Families (DCF), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) Office
- The FL Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS)
- The FL Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO)
- The FL Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC)
- The FL Department of Education, Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- CareerSource FL, Inc.
- The FL Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (FARF)

A great deal of work is involved with making Employment First a reality. Employment First work is shared by 3 teams.

- The Employment First Partnership Coalition (partner agency leaders)
- The Employment First Collaborative Team (partner agency staff)
- The Employment First Grassroots Group (self-advocates to share the voices of people with disabilities)

WHERE ARE WE STARTING?

Before they could move forward, the partners needed to know data about where they were starting. They looked at the numbers of jobs in Florida and how people with disabilities are affected by employment factors. This research formed “baseline data.”

PLAN OF ACTION

Areas of Focus:
1. Services and New Ideas for Services
2. Training and Technical Help
3. Methods for Working Together
EMPLOYMENT FIRST ACT

In 2016, the partners helped to pass a new law in Florida. It was called the Employment First Act. Its purpose was to “prioritize employment of individuals with disabilities and to change the employment system to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.” Basically, the act requires Florida to focus on providing good jobs for citizens with disabilities.

Making the focus into a new law means that efforts to improve jobs for people with disabilities will go on for a long time.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Employment First Communications Plan to share information with employers in Florida.
2. Employment First Video and Articles.
3. Agency Agreement to improve local efforts for more jobs for people with disabilities.
4. “Abilities Work” Web Site and Help Desk for employers to find job seekers with disabilities, and for job seekers to find job openings.
5. Employment First Florida Web Site to communicate what this project is doing.
6. Employment First Training to enable Florida agencies to provide up-to-date help to job seekers with disabilities.
7. Specific Efforts in 4 “Test” Counties (Miami-Dade, Nassau, Orange, and Osceola) to improve job services.
8. Presentations at conferences such as the Family Café and the National American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Conference.
Some accomplishments were the result of working as a team.

Others were the result of efforts by individual agencies or organizations.

The next pages show the major accomplishments of each Employment First partner.

There are even more activities to report:

1. The Employment First partners gave help and ideas to the Florida Department of Financial Services and helped with a training program called “My Money” for people with disabilities.

2. The partners worked to change and support laws, including:
   - Florida Equal Employment Laws. The partners are creating a training program for the people who hire new employees in Florida state agencies. The program will:
     - Teach how to offer accommodations and assistive equipment.
     - Make sure workplaces are accessible.
     - Keep track of how well agencies are doing when they hire.
     - Help agencies hire and keep more workers with disabilities.
     - Help agencies write new forms and applications.
   - Florida Unique Abilities Law. This law will recognize those businesses that are doing a good job with hiring and supporting workers with disabilities.
   - Florida Support of the United States’ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This new national law means that Florida must try to better meet the needs of job seekers with disabilities.
Project 10. Using a new system, school districts find students with disabilities who might not graduate and help them finish school. Project 10 gave money for 43 school districts to work as partners with other local agencies to improve transition from school to adult life.

1. CareerSource centers are working to better serve individuals with disabilities. Staff make sure that centers are fully accessible and that all assistive technology is up-to-date.

2. Staff stay in touch with advocacy groups and community agencies that help people with disabilities get jobs.

3. The Florida Abilities Work portal is now online: abilitieswork.employflorida.com

4. The CareerSource Florida network includes 24 local workforce development boards. There are over 100 career centers in Florida. 17 of the 24 centers are employment networks with the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work program.
1. The government updated the law on the employment of people with disabilities to improve outcomes.
2. VR now helps high school and college students with disabilities with more training and finding work.
3. VR has introduced the “STAR” system so students can get basic services without applying to VR.
4. VR worked with school districts so students can “try out” work and learn how to keep a job.
5. During the 2014-2015 school year, Employment Specialists with 20 school districts helped 224 students who would not otherwise have any work experience.
6. VR worked with 16 colleges in Florida to offer students with disabilities leaving high school the chance to attend college.
7. VR has partnered with Community Work Incentive Coordinators to offer benefits planning services to VR customers eligible for the Social Security “Ticket to Work” program.
8. VR also works closely so that workers will have a smooth transition from VR.
9. VR helps people go to work using “Supported Employment.”
10. VR’s “Project SEARCH” program helps students with disabilities in their last year of high school develop job skills. Almost 70% of people in this program get jobs.
11. VR Supported Self-Employment Services help VR customers to own their own business.
12. VR assisted 5,224 individuals to attend universities, state colleges, or career and technical schools. 3,599 of the individuals supported were youth ages 16-24.
1. Supported Employment. This agency defines supported employment as “evidence-based, community-based services” in a place with regular contact with non-disabled coworkers or the public. The job should be paid with at least minimum wage. A job coach supports workers for as long as needed.

2. Transitional Employment Placement (TEP). The Mental Health Clubhouse model works to:

   - Improve and/or get back a person’s social skills.
   - Provide therapy.
   - Develop supports to do well in the community or at a job.
   - Help with recovery from mental illness.

3. In Broward County, the local Mental Health agency and VR worked together to offer supported employment. The project used the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. 74 individuals are being served by two providers there.

- Florida currently leads the country with 26 sites, and the average job outcome is at 66% over the past 3 years. Next year, the Project plans to expand to 15 new sites representing 20 counties.

4. Rural Routes to employment. This project offers training and side-by-side help. A 40-hour classroom course in employment is approved for a National Certificate. This program is currently in 20 Florida counties and the project will soon add 2 more.

5. Employment First Website. This website for Employment First Florida provides important information to support community jobs: www.employmentfirstfl.org

6. Employment First Training. This project began with a guide for employment professionals to figure out what training they need. Next, it looked at training needs with partner agencies in 6 Florida locations. Plans for Year 3 will teach “train-the-trainer” lessons and give help sessions.

7. Employment First Pilots. New Employment First test areas were set up in Florida at 3 new locations, including the Central Florida Career Coalition, Miami-Dade, and Nassau County.
FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF REHABILITATION FACILITIES

INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED

1,269

1. Florida ARF works with state agencies to review how they fund Supported Employment services.
2. Ideas on how to change Supported Employment funding were sent to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.
3. Florida ARF is working to end the limit on the number of hours individuals can receive of Supported Employment services under the Home & Community Based Services Waiver Transition.
4. Florida ARF helped change the wording of a law so that transportation of individuals in the APD Medicaid Waiver can be part of their iBudget.
5. Florida ARF, as RESPECT of Florida, was given a grant in 2016 to help an individual start a photography business.
6. Florida ARF offers training sessions to teach agency staff how to make better job placements for individuals with disabilities.
7. Florida ARF is on the Employment First Strategic Workgroup and helps talk about Employment First across the state.
8. Through the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, Florida ARF works closely with VR to create transition plans for youth with disabilities who are still in school.
9. RESPECT of Florida offers services and items produced by individuals with disabilities to government agencies. In 2015, 842 employees earned at least minimum wage, working through Employment Centers. RESPECT wages increased by 4% (35 cents per hour) over the last year.

CONCLUSION

Individuals with disabilities want to participate in the workforce.

Florida will be a better place by helping them to do so.

In 2015-2016, the Employment First Initiative helped to make more and better jobs for people with disabilities.

It also helped employers understand how hiring workers with disabilities will make them better employers.

Employment First has worked to:

• Help employers understand the power of workers with disabilities
• Provide employers what they need to hire and help workers with disabilities
• Help state and local government with new employment practices

Employment First Florida is meeting the challenge of making employment the best way to independence for people with disabilities.