EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA
2016-17 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Publication of this report is sponsored by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Having a job is the best path for people to be independent. People with disabilities often have a hard time finding good jobs that pay well.

In 2016, Florida passed a law called the Employment First Act. Its purpose is to “prioritize employment of individuals with disabilities and to change the employment system to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.”

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

Through Employment First, Florida is setting new standards for both employers and employees. The work has made a positive impact on employment issues. More than 12 policies and practices have been created to support the law.

This report will present information about how partners in Florida will work together on Employment First so that people with disabilities can get good jobs.

HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

A group of agencies got together in 2012 to begin work on the Employment First Initiative.

The goal was to help Florida create positive changes in employment for people with disabilities.

The partners took examples from other states to help workers and employers recognize the strengths of employees with disabilities.

The Employment First Initiative created or contributed to:

- Public awareness of the strengths of employees with disabilities.
- A long-term communications plan.

Florida’s 9 employment partnership agencies have continued to work together and follow the successful employment elements of other states.
The 2016 Employment First Act created 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 Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) Office
- The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS)
- The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO)
- The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC)
- The Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- CareerSource FL, Inc.
- The Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (FARF)

The partners came up with the following objectives:

- Work together to help people with disabilities who seek publicly funded job services
- Create specific goals, strategies, and methods of measuring success
- Find funding resources that will make employment of people with disabilities a top priority
- Create training to help people with disabilities enter their jobs
- Make sure all partners are working together
- Promote new ideas about how to deliver job services to people with disabilities
- Find ways to make sure all partners are doing their best to create a long-lasting plan

Throughout the year, partners met regularly to work on objectives. Partners communicated in person, with webinars, and through the Employment First website.

In addition, the Explore Work program was added to the Employment First website. The program was designed by people with disabilities. It helps people with disabilities find work and prepare for new jobs.
The Partners have done great work. They have improved employment practices for people with disabilities at every level.

In total, the Partners created or improved 124 employment-related policies and practices. A few highlights are below:

1. The Partners worked with The Florida Department of Management Service to make sure Florida's equal employment policy (110.112, F.S.) is followed. They helped develop training for managers to understand the special ways people with disabilities are supported in their jobs. They also helped create website materials to share resources.

2. The Partners worked with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and CareerSource to find businesses that would participate in the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program.

3. The Partners worked with The Florida Department of Financial Services to develop the "My Money" program. The program helps people with disabilities and those who support them to learn money basics.
1. APD received $750,000 for the Employment Enhancement Program in 2016-17. This money helped students and adults on APD’s waiting list find jobs and internships:

- 131 on the waiting list got jobs.
- 22 found internships.
- 288 kept their jobs.

2. APD staff are trained that employment is the first and best option for the daily activities of people with disabilities.

3. APD continues to work with VR to help people with disabilities who are earning less than minimum wage in sheltered workshops. The goal is to help people with disabilities work within their communities to achieve a more independent life.

4. Every year, APD leads a Disability Employment Awareness Celebration in Tallahassee. The employers honored for 2016:

- Barrette Outdoor Living of Brooksville
- Bealls
- Flowers Baking Company of Jacksonville LLC
- Greenspoon Marder of Ft. Lauderdale
- Humane Society of Bay County
- Thrift and Gift Store of Panama City
- Mantiques Clock Shop of Inverness
- The Pickle Baron of Key West
- The Print Shop of Naples
- Rosen Shingle Creek Resort of Orlando
- Walgreens

INDIVIDUAL PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Each of the Employment First Initiative partners reached many goals to improve employment for individuals with disabilities during 2016-17.

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

AGENCY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (APD)

2,837 IN COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT

Each of the Employment First Initiative partners reached many goals to improve employment for individuals with disabilities during 2016-17. This money helped students and adults on APD’s waiting list find jobs and internships:

- 131 on the waiting list got jobs.
- 22 found internships.
- 288 kept their jobs.
1. BEESS recognizes that high school graduation is a goal for all students in Florida because students who earn a diploma are more likely to find and keep jobs.

2. BEESS, through Project 10: CONNECT, provided $69,000 to 40 grant winners in 46 school districts. BEESS helped agencies identify goals for students with disabilities.

3. The 2016 Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP) Act provides postsecondary educational opportunities.

4. The FPCTP Act created the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities (FCSUA) at the University of Central Florida as well as other centers in Florida.

5. The graduation rate for students with disabilities increased by 2% from 64% in 2015-16, to 66% in 2016-17.
1. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) expand the VR services that students with disabilities may access during and after high school. VR served 17,486 students during the 2015-2016 school year.

2. During the 2015-2016 school year, Employment Specialists with 19 school districts served approximately 200+ students who would not otherwise have received any work experience.

3. Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Programs provide opportunities for learning, job preparation, and social activities to students with disabilities at colleges and universities. Some programs pair students with mentors. Other programs offer training that leads to certifications.

4. VR has introduced the “STAR” system so students can get basic services without applying to VR.

5. VR worked with 16 colleges in Florida to offer students with disabilities leaving high school the chance to attend college.

6. VR has partnered with 33 staff known as Community Work Incentive Coordinators. They offer benefits planning services to VR customers eligible for the national Social Security “Ticket to Work” program.

7. VR also works closely with employers so that workers will have a smooth transition from VR.

8. VR helps people go to work using “Supported Employment.”

9. “Project SEARCH,” supported by VR, helps students with disabilities in their last year of high school develop job skills. Almost 70% of people in this program get jobs.

10. VR Supported Self-Employment Services help VR customers to own their own business.
1. This year the Division of Blind Services exceeded its goals by serving 10% more people than the previous year. This year’s successes will make a big difference to DBS clients, their families, and the community.

2. The DBS “See Different” videos have helped schools and businesses understand how people with blindness can live, work, and play. The people featured in the videos are all current or former DBS clients.

3. The DBS Bureau of Business Enterprise (BBE) helps people start their own business in food service. During 2016-17, the BBE program supported 6 new food and vending companies.

4. BBE students’ average salary earnings are over $69,000 and their median earnings over $64,000.

5. DBS has more than 500 business and government partnerships that have employed people with blindness.

6. DBS has trained Employment Placement Specialists throughout the state who connect employers with job-ready clients.

7. DBS continued its 4-week Pre-Employment Program (PEP) for people with visual disabilities in Daytona. In 2016-2017, 10 students successfully completed the PEP 4-week learning program.

8. DBS and its core partners submitted a plan, with the first 2 program years being approved and published on the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) website.
1. Defines supported employment as “evidence-based, community-based services” with regular contact with non-disabled coworkers or the public, paid with at least minimum wage. A job coach provides support for as long as needed.

2. The Mental Health Clubhouse model works to:
   • Improve social skills.
   • Provide therapy.
   • Develop supports to do well in the community or at a job.
   • Help with recovery from mental illness.

3. During 2016-17, the Legislature appropriated $1,000,000 to SAMH for Supported Employment services using the Clubhouse model.

4. In Broward County, the local Mental Health agency and VR worked together to offer the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. 117 individuals are being served by 3 providers there.

1. Project Achieve. The Council worked with Florida State College at Jacksonville and the Duval County School District to create this program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In 2016, over 70% of the students enrolled had earned CTE certificates.

2. Project TOPS. This is a program at a school district technical college designed to provide creative help for students 18-22 with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

3. Project SEARCH. The Project SEARCH high school transition program is a one-year internship in a business setting for students with disabilities. The project began expansion to 15 new sites.
4. Rural Routes to Employment. A 40-hour classroom course in employment is approved for a national certificate. 78 students earned the ACRE Community Employment Certificate. 57 people began jobs earning at least $8.10 per hour.

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. 2016-2017 included a “train-the-trainer” program that is being revised for web-based delivery.

7. Employment First Pilots. After 3 local Employment First areas were set up in Florida, Nassau County became the first school district in the state to become a provider of VR services.

FLORIDA ARF
1,173 INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED

1. Florida ARF, working as RESPECT of Florida, manages programs that protect people with disabilities who work in sheltered workshops. About 70% of the work done through RESPECT pays minimum wage, or higher, and is performed at integrated work sites.

2. Florida ARF works with state agencies to review how they fund Supported Employment Services.

3. Florida ARF spoke up about the need for multiple transportation options to allow individual choice.


5. Florida ARF offers training sessions to teach agency staff how to make better job placements for individuals with disabilities.

6. Florida ARF is on the Employment First Strategic Workgroup and helps to talk about Employment First across the state.
7. 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.

8. RESPECT offers services and items produced by individuals with disabilities to government agencies. In 2016, 954 employees working through Employment Centers earned at least minimum wage. RESPECT wages increased over the last year from $9.16 to $9.25 per hour, compared to Florida’s minimum wage of $8.05 per hour.

CONCLUSION

In 2016-2017, Florida’s Employment First Partners showed leadership and worked together with many other organizations. They successfully changed policies and procedures. They also created new training programs and located funding for important services and programs.

Florida’s Employment First efforts are paving the way to better job opportunities for Floridians with disabilities. These efforts serve as a model for other states wishing to improve the employment of their citizens with disabilities!