



## FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

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### Employment First

**The Council supports a system for employment programs that is competitive and where supported and integrated employment is the first option available for all individuals with developmental disabilities.**

Employment First is a declaration of both philosophy and policy stating that employment is the first priority and preferred outcome for people with disabilities. Despite the clear intention of policy shifts over the past few decades that emphasize the value of community employment for individuals with developmental disabilities, Florida's employment numbers for individuals with disabilities are well below the national average even when one considers the economic downturn. In Florida, 64% of the general working-age populations are employed but only 30% of individuals with any disability are employed. In 2010, only 15% of those of working age on the DD/HCBS waiver were in integrated employment.

Research indicates that over time, funding directed toward supported employment is cost efficient. A study of all 231,000 individual supported employment cases closed by Vocational Rehabilitation between 2002 and 2007 found that the average supported employee generated a net monthly benefit to taxpayers of \$251 per individual. This resulted in over \$ 69,577, 200 in tax revenue nationally per year!

There are many training and technical programs that have been successful for individuals with developmental disabilities but as Neil Romano, the previous Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy said in a memo dated 1/15/09: "The greatest challenges are not with employers or people with disabilities themselves, but with our public system of disability assistance. Limited coordination of benefits and services across agencies and conflicting policies make it more difficult for a youth or adult with a disability to become self-sufficient and participate fully in all of the benefits our nation has to offer."

FDDC is currently sponsoring a project called *Employ Me 1st* to research and evaluate the various Employment First strategies being utilized in other states and assessing the viability for utilization of these strategies in Florida. Once viable strategies have been identified, the Council will work with key stakeholders to develop an action plan for implementation. The expected long-term outcome of the project is improved employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities in Florida. These outcomes will be assessed through various indices including state agency policy changes and changes in provider practices.

Individuals with developmental disabilities can work with targeted supports. All individuals, including those with the most severe disabilities, can and should be an integral part of their communities, productive, and valuable. Benefits of supported employment for persons with developmental disabilities can be extraordinary – the right job can quite literally change someone's life.