



FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.

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Employment First

The Council promotes a system for employment that is integrated into the community and where employment is the first option available for all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Employment First is a declaration of both philosophy and policy stating that integrated employment is the first priority and preferred outcome for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), and defined as individual employment paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or earnings through one's self-employment business, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.

Language has been developed by stakeholders using the successful elements of high performing states, which includes leadership, strategic goals and operating policy, financing and contracting methods, training and technical assistance, interagency collaboration and partnership, services and service innovation, and performance measurement and data management, to be signed by the Governor or passed by the legislature. Gubernatorial and legislative action will guide the state in a meaningful multi-agency effort to start the implementation of Employment First in Florida.

States that haven't adopted policies have recently been encouraged to do so by the National Governor's Association's Blueprint for Governors report, *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities*. States with Employment First policies tend to achieve better employment outcomes. Currently, the highest performing state with an Employment First policy has an employment rate of 88% for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Florida, on the other hand, reports a 20% employment rate using the same comparative data source. Employment outcomes for Florida's students with disabilities who exited with a special diploma are even worse with a rate of 16%.

Supported employment is one methodology that leads to successful employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Research indicates that over time, funding directed toward supported employment is cost efficient. The 2013 NGA report states "supported employment, which refers to support for jobs in the competitive labor market, yields a \$1.21 benefit to taxpayers for every dollar spent." According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), SSA disability beneficiaries who are employed through vocational rehabilitation support provide a return on investment of \$7 for every dollar spent."

The Council is currently sponsoring a project called Employ Me 1st. Research teams visited Florida to evaluate Florida's current system and the viability of national Employment First strategies for utilization in Florida. The Council is working with key stakeholders to develop an action plan for implementation. The expected long-term goal of the project is improved employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Florida.

Strategies for Employment First include, but are not limited to, transition to work programs that successfully assist youth as they age out of education settings and prepare to seek, gain and maintain meaningful employment. We can ensure that there is an expectation of Employment First for a new generation and shift funding emphasis to incentivize employment as the first option for employers and providers. Through Employment First initiatives, Floridian's with intellectual and developmental disabilities will become tomorrow's tax payers, voters, our neighbors and friends.