



Employment First Florida Grassroots Group Online Meeting Summary Date: July 19, 2016

Topic: Self-Advocacy and Employment First

Presenters:

Arizona Jenkins, Self-Advocate in Florida

Ashley Wolfe, Staff member from the Institute for Community Inclusion

Aaron Coleman, Self-Advocate in Florida

Summary:

The July 2016 meeting focused on sharing strategies to help individuals with disabilities prepare to look for a job in the community. The strategies are part of a curriculum that is being developed for individuals with disabilities to use on their own or in small groups to begin to think about the skills and resources they have that can help them work in the community. Arizona Jenkins, Ashley Wolfe, and Aaron Coleman presented on their work experiences.

During the online event we learned about:

Q. How have self-advocates participated in the EmployME1st Project?

They have been involved since the project began in 2011.

We have regular meetings, write plain language documents that explain policies, and are creating a video blog that explains employment data.

We developed a “peer to peer” curriculum that helps people with disabilities teach one another about getting jobs.

Q. What does work mean to you?

A. We talked about what work means to self-advocates. Our presenters talked about how work gave them a sense of belonging and pride.

Q. What do you get out of working?

A. We talked about what people with disabilities get out of work. They talked about the importance of getting a paycheck and doing a good job.

Q. What are some success stories of self-advocates working?

In addition to the presentations of the three speakers, we shared the following stories:

Maggie likes being busy, and likes being independent. She lives near Boston, MA and has had many different jobs in the community. Currently, she works as an office manager's assistant at

the AMP Agency. AMP helps well-known companies like Hasbro, Princess Cruises, Samsung, and Boden with marketing (how they get information out about their products). Maggie, together with her [job developer](#) and the office manager, carved out a job that was a good fit for her. Now, Maggie's coworkers can't imagine the company without her. Ryan has been interested in nature since he was a small child, and once asked only for plants for his birthday. He lives in Reno, Nevada, likes math and science, and describes himself as a positive person. After taking a year of classes, Ryan qualified for a certificate allowing him to work in plant nurseries. He developed a portfolio of his work to show to prospective employers. Ryan now works at a nursery, managing and caring for landscaping at a large outdoor mall in Reno. He is responsible for the care of over 200 roses and daylilies. He plants, trims hedges, pulls weeds, and clears tumbleweeds. He works for 25 hours a week and earns nine dollars an hour.

Q. What is the curriculum, what is in it, and how have self-advocates been involved?

A. The curriculum is an important tool to help improve opportunities for employment for people with disabilities in Florida. The curriculum covers:

Why people work

Myths about people with disabilities and work

How people decide what type of job they want

How to advocate for yourself when you are looking for a job

Working with Employment Specialists

Disclosure and asking for supports once you get a job

Getting there...figuring out transportation

Q. How can I find out more about the Florida Grassroots Group Events?

A. For more information about future Employment First Florida Grassroots Group meetings or learn about past events, visit <http://www.employmentfirstfl.org> For more information about the Grassroots Group, contact John Kramer at john.kramer@umb.edu or by phone 617-287-4369.

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The EmployMe1st project is a joint project of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

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