

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:**

**FROM:**

**DATE:** October 16, 2014

**SUBJECT:** Florida's Employment First Initiative

The purpose of this correspondence is to provide awareness of state level efforts to prioritize employment for Floridian's with disabilities and to suggest strategies for strengthening employment at the local, grassroots level.

On October 8, 2013, multiple state level efforts with a mission to improve employment for Floridians with disabilities merged when Governor Rick Scott issued **Executive Order 13-284, Reaffirming Commitment to Employment for Floridians with Disabilities**. The order states that "employment is the most direct and cost-effective means in helping an individual achieve independence and self-fulfillment, which should be the primary objective of public assistance programs wherever possible." The Executive Order defines employment as follows:

"...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, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency."

The Executive Order mandated development of an interagency cooperative agreement between key Florida agencies and organizations, requiring that the agreement formalize objectives aligned with the elements of high performing states which have an evidence base for improving integrated employment services. The elements address the broad areas of leadership, strategic goals and benchmarks, financing and contracting methods, training opportunities, collaboration, service innovation, and accountability to prioritize employment and sustain efforts.

In May 2014, the Partners were successful in executing **Florida's Employment First Interagency Cooperative Agreement**, which represents unprecedented cross-agency commitment to improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Signatory parties to the agreement include the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD); Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES); Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR); Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services (DBS); Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO); Workforce Florida, Inc. d/b/a Career Source Florida; Florida Department of Children and Families, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Office (SAMH); Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC); and the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (FARF).

Three associated workgroups were formalized, including the **Employment Partnership Coalition**, the **Employment First Collaborative Team**, and the **Employment First Florida Grassroots Group**. These groups meet regularly, have incorporated many recommendations from the **Governor's Commission on**

**Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities** into their work, and have been reporting regularly to the Governor's Commission on their work.

The Partners have also developed a **Collaborative Strategic Action Implementation Plan** to support provision of quality employment services, established **Baseline Data** and targets for improving employment outcomes, and most recently developed a long-term communications plan for messaging to employers. This year, the Partners will focus on the development and provision of consistent training and technical assistance across the collaborating agencies and organizations, address systemic issues related to employment, and formalize a **Long-term Communications Plan** for messaging to employers.

Local level stakeholders and self-advocates are encouraged to develop or expand interagency councils or teams to include similar partnerships to those at the state level. Local stakeholders and self-advocates are encouraged to participate in the Employment First Florida Grassroots Group webinars, which will be held quarterly during 2014-15 beginning in October, and to use recommendations for messaging to employers that will be forthcoming from the state level Partners.

We hope you find this information useful as we strive to build capacity and improve employment outcomes for all Floridians with disabilities.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact...