

## **Employment First Collaborative Team Meeting**

March 19, 2015  
1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.  
124 Marriott Drive, Suite 203  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Conference Number – 1-888-670-3525

Conference Code – 7876850281#

### **AGENDA AND NOTES**

1:00 – 1:15 Welcome and Introductions

Antoinette Williams, Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services

Beth Romans-Corsi, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

David Darm, Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities

Diane Wilkins, Diane Wilkins Productions

Jeff Michaels, Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Jean Winsor, Institute for Community Inclusion, UMASS Boston

Judy White, Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services

Kathleen Roberts, Florida Department of Children and Families, Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Kristin Panella, Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services

LeeAnn Herman, Agency for Persons with Disabilities

Sheila Gritz- Swift, Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

1:15 – 1:30 Update on Employment First Messaging Video/DVD

Diane Wilkins has asked that Employment First Collaborative Team members help identify the most appropriate member of their state agency to speak during the video. The theme is that each of the partner agencies is part of a part of the puzzle that makes Employment First succeed. Sheila Gritz-Swift recommended that the people interviewed from each agency be the signatories for Employment First Interagency Agreement.

The purpose of this video is to showcase the ways in which each partner represents this initiative. People are likely to speak about what Employment First means to them, or to their agency. People may be asked to highlight a word or phrase that defines Employment First. The importance of including people with disabilities in a variety of jobs in the video was discussed, and plans were made to reach out to potential participants, or use footage from other videos. There is no specific script, but people will get to see the questions in advance that they will be asked. The video will likely begin with discussion of what Employment First is as a broad concept, what tools have been rolled out or are being developed to increase employment opportunities, and what stories highlight the possibilities that can be achieved.

The deadline to have the video completed is June 30<sup>th</sup>, and Diane expects to be filming interviews with people in the latter half of April and in early May. Once the video is completed, each agency will have an opportunity to vet it for final editing. Diane Wilkins would like to hear from everyone by March 21st about the availability of key people from each agency who are willing to be interviewed and videoed. The filming location for the interviews can be flexible, either at the interviewee's site or at Diane's studio.

1:30 – 2:30 Update on Employ ME 1<sup>st</sup> Year Three Project

Website: Jean Winsor presented the website and asked group members to comment on the colors and ease of navigation. The website has a "current activities" link that visitors can scroll down to and click on to reach different Employment First Initiatives, for example the Abilities Work Web Portal. Discussed the importance of having plain-language web content available. David Darm had several ideas about making the website intuitive, beginning with identifying the purpose that this website is designed for many stakeholders groups, not as much for employers. The group determined that they would submit feedback directly to Jean in a week and a half from the meeting date, probably next Friday.

Pilots: Jean and Beth Romans-Corsi received a number of applications to be pilot sites to develop Employment First local-level policy, and they decided to move ahead with four local sites. The pilot sites will be located in: Miami-Dade, Nassau, Osceola, and Orange county regions. Sites had the option to apply from a regional perspective, and since the four chosen sites are in different regions, there may be room to develop regional Employment First policy if the sites turn into good local models first. The training and technical assistance these sites receive is from the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). The sites will be notified next week that they have been accepted, and a leadership team with people from each site was identified as part of their application process. There will be an orientation call shortly afterward, and the local sites will begin receiving assistance. Sites will have the ability to record and share what they're learning with other sites to strengthen their efforts. Initially only 2 pilot sites were proposed and in order to support the 2 additional sites the FDDC and ICI have agreed to modify their contract to remove the peer-to-peer translation component.

Grassroots Group Webinar: The next grassroots group will be April 21<sup>st</sup> at 3:00. The topic will be how to take the state-level Employment First work to the local level. Jean will discuss the pilot sites and a representative from each pilot site will speak about their current collaborative activities as well as what they plan to accomplish through their participation in the pilot program. Jean also said that the format of the webinar has changed to allow people to comment and ask questions. There will be a break every 15 minutes during which the facilitator will ask the participants if they have questions.

2:30 – 2:45 Employment First Collaborative Training Initiative:

The Center for Social Capital submitted a toolkit for implementing the Employment First Collaborative Training Initiative that highlighted the training resources in Florida and across the country. They are continuing to refine the report and will have an update at the next EFCT meeting.

2:45 – 3:00      BREAK

3:00 – 3:15      Employment First Legislation:

The Employment First Act has been picked up under a Senate bill 1722. Sheila Gritz-Swift strongly encourages the EFCT membership to read Senate bill 1722 now because discussion about it is moving quickly. She also pointed out some topics they should review, including: the proposed financial literacy program for people with disabilities; the definition of a person with a disability as written in the bill; the scope of agencies mandated to be involved in developing programs for people with disabilities; mandatory training for human resource staff on interacting with people with disabilities; the development of plans by each agency to employ people with disabilities; and the specifics around the recognition of employers who promote inclusion .

3:15 – 3:45      Update on “Abilities Work” Help Desk and Web Portal:

Copies of the brochure describing the Web Portal and Help Desk were distributed. Contacts have increased, with 17 out of 20 contacts in March being employers. Since the Help Desk began, 40 job seekers were referred for employment services, 13 were interviewed by employers and 6 are currently employed. Some employers are contacting Abilities Work with actual jobs, while others are getting in touch to establish a relationship with the Help Desk group and report about future jobs later. The variety of jobs they are being contacted about is widening. The team is also analyzing information about the traffic to the Web Portal. The team is finding it easy to respond and follow up with callers within the ideal time limits they came up with when developing this service. Sheila also mentioned that Beth, who was unable to attend, wants to catch up with the team about some additional ideas an individual suggested to her about how the help desk and web portal could work.

3:45 – 4:30      Collaborative Partner Updates on Related Work and Initiatives:

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): VR has just finished some new coding to make the tracking of expenditures more easily. There was a recent VR conference with 300 registrants and 280 attendees that was successful. A collaboration with school districts is receiving feedback. VR also has a provider update regarding placements in community employment. To meet WIOA requirements, VR has made changes to employment service delivery: People being served through Category 1 are not going onto wait lists for services at all, and people served within Category 2 are slowly coming off the wait lists. Service recipient coming off the wait list are being referred to CareerSource Florida, so this is a strong partnership. There is also a collaboration with University of South Florida for providers to be trained in the Discovery process, and all the class sessions are filled. They are working to meet the challenge of ensuring access to Discovery services, especially in rural areas. They have looked into the educational system to see if teachers of students with special needs also want to receive training on the Discovery process, and are continuing to look of suggestions about other groups who might want to become trained and increase VR’s service delivery capacity. The role of school districts and the ways in which VR can collaborate with school districts to cover the cost of transition services was also discussed.

Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD): APD staff has been meeting with people from the Department of Economic Opportunity and the Chamber of Commerce as part of the APD’s Employment

Enhancement project. These meetings, primarily with employers, have led to questions from employers about how to connect to potential employees with disabilities and learn what their skills are. APD is referring them to the Abilities Work Help Desk and Web Portal, and encouraging individuals to develop and post their resumes. This does mean that people have to disclose their disabilities to be part of this system, but it also means that they can more easily connect with employers who want to hire. APD is also behind a bill to employ people with disabilities through tax incentives to employers who hire them, but the group discussed the concern from the Governor's Commission that tax incentives are essentially state subsidies of people's wages, and it might mean that employers might perceive these individuals to be not as high-quality as other employees. Recent research indicates that employers were likely to have hired the individuals anyway, but took advantage of the tax incentives. The discussion also included the importance of high-quality job matches as the main strategy for making the business case to hire individuals, much more so than the tax incentive idea; states that have those incentives are not necessarily high performers in terms of employment placements for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The information on states' rates of performance is available in ICI's annual StateData blue book.

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services: The Visions conference is coming up in May and now includes a presentation from Judy White that covers WIOA and Employment First. Her presentation is on Friday, May 8, 2015.

Department of Economic Opportunity: There is an internal reorganization that has reassigned Sheila Salem off of Special Projects. They will be competing for a new Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant in April that has a youth component.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health: The legislature is examining reforms to the mental health system. For example, the legislature is examining adding follow-along supported employment services. Next month, there is likely to be more information on what reforms are being proposed and how they might affect employment outcomes. Max Outreach, an employment placement agency, has contacted the work group to make sure their jobs are included on their job boards.

Division of Blind Services (DBS): Annual VR statewide training will take place next month. Also, DBS is researching ways to connect with the state employment databases. They have also hired a new consultant, Brian Michaels, to help them implement changes to meet WIOA requirements; he has a wealth of experience working with the transition-age population. They have also been accepted into a pilot program through Institute for Community Inclusion's VR-RRTC to employ people who are the hardest to place using the Vermont Progressive Employment Model. They are training their staff on the Abilities Work Help Desk and Web Portal, and will also have significant representation at the VR training conference's Family Café. Discussion ensued about making sure the Employment First materials and message are distributed at future conferences.

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC): David Darm mentioned that the FDDC has been invited by CareerSource Florida to collaborate to ensure that programmatic services are in line with WIOA requirements.

Other emerging areas: LeeAnn Herman mentioned the issue that that when people on the Medicaid waiver begin to work and reach the point in time when they have worked long enough to apply for disability insurance (DI) payments and start receiving them, their earnings from work need to be at the level of sustained gainful activity (SGA), and can't when added to the DI payment increase to the point where people become ineligible for Medicaid. Becoming ineligible for Medicaid would likely results in the loss of funds to pay for supported-employment and/or supported living waiver services that allow them to keep working. The Collaborative Team decided to bring in a benefits planner from the National Disability Institute or Maximus to see how this disincentive to working could be addressed.

4:30 – 4:45      Next Steps:

- Rescheduling April meeting: Sheila will send out an email asking about dates for the April meeting that needs to be rescheduled due to conflicts.
- First year report: All the agencies should submit information for the first year's Employment First report. Sheila cited APD as a model of well-formatted, rich information. The structured format of reports from agencies allows people to see what they achieved during the last year and what directions to go next.

4:45 – 5:00      Wrap-up and Adjourn