

Employment First Collaborative Team Meeting/Conference Call

May 6, 2014

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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

Minutes

Members Attending:

Allison Chen Hall

Dehryl McCall

Diane Vacca

Jan Pearce

Jarl Jackson

Jennifer Evans

Kristen Panella

LeeAnn Herman

Shelia Gritz-Swift

Shila Salem

Steve Dunaway

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began shortly after 1:00 p. m. Shelia welcomed everyone and quick introductions were made around the table.

II. Interagency Cooperative Agreement

Shelia reviewed the final version. She noted that the agreement had gone through three rounds of legal review and overviewed her own routing of the document for signatures. Also noting that there was just one more signature needed, she expressed hope that it would be ready for the Governor's Commission on Friday.

III. Collaborative Strategic Implementation Action Plan

Shelia noted that they all wanted a plan that everyone agrees with. She added that after the Governor's Commission meeting, she planned to clean-up the Excel version document in order to use it to track progress.

Steve asked about the sequencing of activities. Shelia responded that sequencing has not been established, but that they do have the top focuses for the fiscal year 2014-15: 1) Training and Technical Assistance, 2) SG and OP, and 3) Interagency Collaboration. She added that they should be in good shape, and just need to keep going.

The need for district- and regional-level work and collaboration was discussed. Judi noted the feedback received from Resources Broward expressing concerns about collaboration on the local level as well as on the state level.

Shelia noted that with brand new staff coming in to many of the agencies, there was uncertainty about how this would work going forward. Many new personnel don't know what has been done before, and there is a "hunger" for both information and resources. Judi agreed that there was continual turnover, and also noted the tendency that when seeking help or cooperation, that if one person in an agency says no, that is taken as the final word.

Diane suggested responding to such with 'Why not?' Shelia suggested that presentations be scheduled and made to bring people up to speed and onboard. Judi suggested asking questions about what is understood.

Shelia noted that the plan is no longer a draft, but a working document.

Steve suggested pressing 'Employment First' to be implemented as expected, noting that losing local staff should not affect local contacts. Shelia suggested getting assistance from Project 10 on how to keep it going.

Shelia noted that the Council was revising its State Plan in terms of Employment 1st, with an Employment area objective that now covers all disabilities. The relevant Implementing Activity Funding Proposal is set to be approved and ranked as number one among Employment-related proposals. (The workgroup will approve this, this same afternoon; the full Council next week.) She then reviewed the proposed Employment 1st Training Initiative: Shelia noted the fact that it involves broad-based training materials for all groups, at the same time addressing the unique features of each group. It covers both ??? and systemic issues, and includes mechanisms for it to reoccur. As it is, funding is proposed to be \$100,000 a year for two years.

Shelia noted that as the Council was doing, that all agencies and organizations should also review and revise plans as well.

IV. Baseline Data and Targets for Improvement

The Team collectively discussed the data currently available, with agency representatives present explaining in turn what their data means. A frequently-referenced matter was that of definitional issues: Making the presentation for APD, Steve asked the question, 'what are we defining as "competitive employment," as different agencies and organization may (and do) define this term differently and this affects how and whether we can understand and compare the data. Does it include supported employment? Does it include both individual and group employment?

Celeste asked, 'What do we want to collect the data on?' Shelia suggested that the emphasis should always be on individual, competitive employment. She added that another question is what kind of data can we or can't we collect? Steve noted that the creation of a new data system was currently being negotiated with a potential vendor.

Jan noted that we should specify who has, has gained, and has lost employment.

Making the presentation for BEESS, Judi noted that their public school exiting figures included not just those going on to seek and/or gain employment directly, but also those entering some form of higher education, adding that the data could be broken-down in many ways. She noted that unlike K-12, postsecondary numbers for students with disabilities included only those who self-identified as such, and included only those who were still in school.

Making the presentation for VR, Jan noted their figures were broken down based on numbers being served and numbers of those who cases were closed after being employed for a specified period of time. She added that once VR has placed clients into employment, they were done providing services to them, while APD continues to serve its clients, employed or not. APD has the numbers placed as well as numbers supported.

Making the presentation for DBS, Christy noted that their figures are broken down the same as VR.

Making the presentation for DEO, Daryl individuals with disabilities are tracked where possible, although it is up to the individual to disclose (or not disclose) a disability.

Making the presentation for RESPECT of Florida, Dave noted that they provided competitive, supported employment as defined by a service agreement... [?] Shelia noted that 'competitive employment' should not be defined as meaning not with nondisabled peers.

Making the presentation for DCF-Mental Health, Jennifer noted that their figures are divided between those with "persistent" and those with "serious" mental illness, with numbers for the total of each receiving services. There was also breakdown by how many are in sheltered employment, and how many in supported employment, with some overlap of the numbers.

Making the presentation for the Council, Shelia noted that there is no direct service provision, and that projects tend not to be funded by the Council for the long-term. Projects with at least an employment component, like all projects data, is reported to the Feds. It represents fairly small numbers, some individuals noted as having only pending employment.

V Miscellaneous

Shelia also noted there are three more webinars scheduled for the Grassroots Coalition, the next one being May 28. The leading issue continues to be transportation, with a rising amount of interest in transition as well. Allison noted that people like to be able to ask questions of agency representatives.

She also noted that plain language version of the Strategic Action Plan would be completed shortly, and a Transition panel discussion held, consisting of agency representatives.

VI Communications Subcommittee

Judi noted that the focus of the Communications Subcommittee has been on two areas: 1) Communications to two distinct groups of employers, with distinct “toolkits,” which are about showing, not telling; and 2) Communications to employers on a one-on-one basis.

She added that they have discussed the issue of communications with the Grassroots Coalition as well. Based on this feedback, they have looked at what is already being done, tried to establish a special identity in this area for Florida, and are looking at setting a kickoff date.

Judi also noted that a question they face is how to convey the message of Employment First to the staff people in the field, and that they are using social media and crowdsourcing for feedback.

Steve noted that the internal practices of agencies and the schools tended towards ‘old-think’ – in terms of communications approaches, as in print over electronic media.

Shelia noted that once the agreement is signed, each partner can get it out to everyone in their agency or organization. Judi suggested that they should all issue identical, common-message, press releases.

VII Emerging Thoughts

Shelia then began a discussion on ‘Emerging Thoughts,’ asking the question whether the practice of companies using long, online questionnaires for applications is discriminatory. Steve noted that many do not need to go the standard application-interview route, and that this is a training issue for providers

Jarl noted that these long, online applications, with their dependence on algorithms to ferret out applicants often miss the nuances found not just in individuals with disabilities, but in any applicant. Shelia noted that there was now more difficulty getting individuals with disabilities through the corporate process, and less friendliness shown towards them. Steve asked how we could get around this. Judi noted that these online applications require lots of time and effort that providers simply cannot always help with. Allison noted that she had heard of individuals being screened out due to their disability-related challenges using such systems.

Jean noted that APD had developed a briefing document on this issue. She and Steve noted that the two solutions found were 1) To develop relations with and networks among employers, and 2) To make connection with corporate HR departments.

VIII Collaborative Partner Updates on Related Work and Initiatives

Judi noted that due to recent legislative action, there was now no more special diploma; instead, there were now “pathways” to a standard one. She also noted new federal reporting requirements that involve some newly-combined indicators, a new state systemic plan, by which they are to show improvement in a single area. (The state having chosen the standard diploma requirement as its particular area.) Also that there be a postsecondary program for individuals with disabilities, including a special path to employment.

Judi added that many individuals are classified as ‘not job ready’ due to their remaining in entry-level positions for extended periods.

Shelia noted that the Council has problems with the results of the legislative session, but was hopeful of the intentions behind the ‘Certificate of Completion’ over ‘Special Diploma.’

There was then a general discussion of the changes, with hope expressed that there would be no more misleading in terms of practical value as with the special diploma.

Jan noted that VR was going to get the full Federal match that was available to it for the first time in a while, which would allow it to release people from the waiting list, fill vacant staff positions, and strengthen job development statewide in general – including setting up joint call centers with DEO.

Steve noted that APD was receiving additional funds to help provide services to those on the Waitlist, as well as move people from the Waitlist and onto the waiver itself. He noted that CMS was looking differently at the issues of inclusion and integration. He also noted that provider rates were increased, while forty-six local positions were lost agency-wide as it shifted from a less local, more regional focus.

Celeste noted that due to reallocated and additional funds, DEO would hold ‘Disability Expos,’ providing rural areas with recreation and information, including on rates.

Shila noted that DEO’s Disability Portal test link would be sent out next week for feedback. She added that there would be both customer and employer pages. She also noted that they had received from the Legislature all the funds for which they had asked for. She suggested the upcoming Workforce Summit could include workshops on Employment1st.

Dave noted that RESPECT of Florida was working in the area of micro-enterprises and self-employment, and was seeking involvement with the school districts on these efforts.

Shelia announced that she had been accepted as the new Deputy Director for the Council.

IX Next Steps and Calendar Items

Shelia asked for any calendar requests for future meetings.

X Adjourn

Shelia thanked everyone for their work in getting the Employment 1st effort to where it is today. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15pm.