

EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA

2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Employment First
FLORIDA



This report was developed by the Employment First Partners.

Annual Report 2015-16
www.employmentfirstfl.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Individuals with disabilities, like everyone else, share the same desire and talents to be successful, contributing members of their community. Employment is the most direct and cost-effective means for individuals to achieve independence and self-fulfillment. Though much has been accomplished through the Americans with Disabilities Act and other

efforts to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, employment remains a significant challenge for many individuals with disabilities in their quest to become independent and reach their full potential in life. The barriers confronting persons with disabilities within the labor market also represent lost opportunities for employers to expand their

pool of talent and contribute to the economy at large. Given these challenges, Florida is leading a systems change effort to dramatically improve the employment of persons with disabilities, known as the Employment First Florida Initiative.

On January 21, 2016, the Florida Legislature passed and Governor Rick Scott signed



On January 21, 2016, the Florida Legislature passed and Governor Rick Scott signed the Employment First Act, establishing in law the state's long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities.

the Employment First Act, establishing in law the state's long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. "Employment First" is a declaration that employment is a priority shared by individuals with disabilities and is their preferred outcome toward achieving self-fulfillment. The Employment First Act was modeled after Governor Scott's Executive Order 13-284 and the work accomplished by a collaboration of state agencies and organizations serving persons with disabilities, known as the Employment Partnership Coalition/Employment First Collaborative Team. The Act requires a framework and strategies, specified within an Interagency Cooperative Agreement, to prioritize

employment of individuals with disabilities served by state programs, with the purpose of improving the employment system and better including persons with disabilities in the workforce.

The Employment First Florida 2015-16 Annual Report provides an overview of the collaborative accomplishments toward establishing employment of individuals with disabilities as a statewide priority that brought about the passage of the Employment First Act. It outlines the framework and strategies that were developed and are being used by the partnering agencies and organizations (also referred to as "Partners") to carry out the Interagency Cooperative Agreement, which has been in effect since

July 1, 2014. The report also discusses other collaborative activities occurring within the state to promote more employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Finally, the report highlights the employment accomplishments by each Partner organization during State Fiscal Year 2015-16.

As the state moves forward with implementing the Employment First Act, visible, continued and increased support from Florida's Governor and Partner agency and organization leaders will be necessary to ensure the effort's goals are attained.

PRESENT CHALLENGES

Individuals with disabilities have experienced significant disparities in employment and participation in the labor force.¹ According to the American Community Survey, 18.2 percent of individuals who have a disability were employed in Florida in 2013, while over 60.5 percent of those who do not have a disability were employed.² Similarly, at the national level, individuals with disabilities experienced a 10.4 percent unemployment rate compared to a 4.7 percent unemployment rate among those without disabilities.³ These figures strongly suggest that persons with disabilities are confronted by unique barriers negatively impacting their ability to compete for jobs on a level playing field. These barriers are largely attributed to misperceptions of individuals with disabilities among employers.

In 2011, the Able Trust conducted a study through Florida State University to identify key factors employers consider when recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and retaining people with disabilities. The study conducted a 78-question survey with decision-makers

in companies in Florida (i.e., chairmen, CEOs, managers, etc.). Participants of the survey were asked questions about their perceptions of how various factors present a barrier to the employment of persons with disabilities. The majority of the barriers that were identified by the study related to perceptions on the limitations of persons with disabilities, including an individual's "physical and/or stamina restrictions" to perform the job duties and "health and safety concerns" with hiring persons with disabilities within the organization.⁴

Barriers to entering the workforce result in many individuals with disabilities seeking benefits from state and federal programs. These programs can discourage workforce participation depending on how they are structured. Of the approximately 17.5 million working age people with disabilities in the United States, nearly 7 in 10 of them receive benefits from public programs.⁵ According to the National Disability Institute, many of these individuals would like to find employment, but are concerned if they



...individuals with disabilities experienced a 10.4 percent unemployment rate compared to a 4.7 percent unemployment rate among those without disabilities.

earn more money it will cause them to lose disability and health benefits.⁶

Barriers to employment on the one hand, coupled with disincentives to seek employment on the other hand, reinforce one another to create an existing scenario where people with disabilities are largely discouraged from participating in the workforce and competing for jobs.

¹ American Institute for Research, An Uneven Playing Field: The Lack of Equal Pay for Persons with Disabilities, p. 2, December 2014, available at: http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Lack%20of%20Equal%20Pay%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities_Dec%2014.pdf.

² U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, American Fact Finder, Selected Economic Characteristics for the Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population by Disability Status, 2013, American Community Survey 1-year Estimates, Report S1811, searchable database available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

³ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Sex, Age, and Disability Status, not seasonally adjusted, Sept. 2015, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t06.htm>.

⁴ Born, Patty and Randy Dumm. "Key Factors that Assist Employers to Recruit, Interview, Hire and Retain People with Disabilities." Prepared for The Able Trust through Florida State University, June 2011. p.8

⁵ Houtenville, Andrew J., and Debra Brucker. "Safety Net Programs for Working-Age Persons with Disabilities." Presented at the June 8, 2001, Policy Forum of the Center for Studying Disability Policy, Mathematica Policy Research. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, 2011.

⁶ National Disability Institute with support from the Florida Development Disabilities Council, The Changing Face of Benefits Knowledge for Successful Employment and Asset Development, p. 1, March 2013, available at http://www.realeconomicimpact.org/data/files/other%20documents/changing_face_of_benefits_2013.pdf.





THE EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA INITIATIVE

The present challenges within the labor market demonstrate there is serious need for systems change to address the disparity in employment opportunities confronting persons with disabilities compared with the greater workforce. “Employment First” is a declaration of both philosophy and policy: employment is the first priority and preferred outcome for persons with disabilities to achieve self-fulfillment and independence within their community, and should be the primary objective of public assistance programs wherever possible. It is inspired by the belief

that everyone benefits when individuals with disabilities are fully included in the workforce and contribute to the economy.

Florida is in a prime position to demonstrate how this vision can become a reality as businesses and families around the country observe its example of employment and economic growth. For the past few years, great strides have been made to ensure employment is Florida’s top priority in helping individuals with disabilities achieve economic prosperity alongside their peers within the community.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INITIATIVE

In 2011, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC), entered into a partnership with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services to develop an Employment First Initiative in Florida. The overarching goal was to ensure broad participation from Florida stakeholders to develop and support a framework that would contribute to greater employment opportunities for Floridians with disabilities. During the first two years of the project, ICI focused on state comparisons, conducting in-depth research on nine states similar to Florida. ICI developed a Cross-State Summary Report and collected data in Florida through various methods, including town-hall forums, focus groups with self-advocates, discussions with key stakeholders, a web-based forum, and an online survey. The research resulted in a *Florida Findings Report*, a

draft Implementation Plan, and a *Marketing Framework*.

Simultaneously, Governor Scott issued Executive Order 11-161, creating the Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities, to identify and propose public policy solutions that would address the barriers confronting persons with disabilities in the workforce, with the goal of helping them achieve greater independence. The Commission took a macroeconomic approach to developing strategies that would help the state promote "win-win" outcomes in employment, where individuals with disabilities could better compete and succeed in the labor market and employers could have the tools to hire and retain qualified candidates with disabilities as part of their workforce. The Commission conducted its work between 2012 and 2014, during which time it presented three annual reports with recommendations to assist Governor Scott in developing a vision of job creation for individuals with disabilities, which could

be carried out by multiple agencies and organizations, both internally and outside of state government.

Together, these two efforts laid a foundation for Florida to develop a sustainable systems change approach within the state's employment programs serving persons with disabilities. Shortly after the Governor's Commission presented its first report in 2012, several key state agencies and organization leaders came together and formed interagency workgroups to help carry out these efforts. One workgroup was tasked with developing the framework to implement a statewide Employment First Initiative, incorporating the research and work that was conducted by ICI. The other workgroups developed strategies to fulfill some of the recommendations made by the Governor's Commission, including:

- The development of the "Abilities Work" Web Portal and Help Desk to assist employers in

navigating the disability employment system and finding candidates with disabilities in their community who are ready and able to work; and

- ▶ The development of a Multi-Agency, Long-Term Communications plan to promote a consistent message of awareness to employers about the value persons with disabilities offer Florida's economy.

As a systems change framework was taking form in Florida, state leaders were also identifying ways to prioritize employment within specific programs. In Fiscal Year 2013-2014, Governor Scott recommended and the Florida Legislature approved funding for Supported Employment services⁷ for individuals with developmental disabilities on the waiting list for Home and Community Based Medicaid waiver programs administered by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD). Individuals on the APD Waitlist had access to limited services, due to the lack of sufficient funds to bring them

onto a waiver program. The new funding supported work experience opportunities for youth on the waitlist to help them prepare for jobs and careers before they graduated high school. Further, the Governor's Commission recommended that similar funding be dedicated to Supported Employment for individuals served by the public mental health program to increase successful rehabilitations and allow more individuals to exit the public mental health system and live successfully in communities of their choice.⁸

In 2013, the collaborative work around Employment First culminated when Governor Scott issued Executive Order 13-284, reaffirming the state's commitment to the employment of persons with disabilities.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13-284

On October 8, 2013, Governor Rick Scott signed Executive Order 13-284 to ensure the Employment First

efforts continue through collaboration and are instituted into the state's policies and programs. The Order defined employment as:

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

The Executive Order called for the creation of an Interagency Cooperative Agreement among specific state agencies and other organizations serving persons with disabilities. It outlined seven objectives to be incorporated into the agreement, which were identified as key strategies and common approaches used across states with high levels of integrated employment outcomes:⁹

Characteristics of High Performing States;

- 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.



The Commission took a macroeconomic approach to developing strategies that would help the state promote “win-win” outcomes in employment, where individuals with disabilities could better compete and succeed in the labor market [...]

⁷ Supported Employment is an evidence-based practice and contributor that provides long-term supports to help individuals with significant disabilities to obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment within their community.

⁸ Governor's Commission on Jobs for Floridians with Disabilities 2013 Report, Recommendation 5: Provide Follow-Along Services for Individuals with Mental Health Disorders (p. 33-36).

⁹ Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzel, 2007

EMPLOYMENT PARTNERSHIP

In conjunction with Executive Order 13-284, the agencies and organizations charged with developing the Interagency Cooperative Agreement developed a framework for formally implementing Employment First efforts and solicited numerous organizations and stakeholders to participate in the initiative. To develop and carry out objectives of the Interagency Cooperative Agreement, responsibilities were divided into three interagency groups:

- ▶ The **Employment First Partnership Coalition** is composed of the Partner agency and organization leaders and/or their designees charged with the overall administration of each Partner's responsibility to facilitate employment for Floridians with disabilities and is also open to broad participation by others with a vested interest in improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The Coalition initially met on a quarterly basis, either in person or via conference call, with participation from Partners and/or their designees. The Coalition is charged with coordination and implementation of activities to achieve the purposes and desired outcomes set forth in the Interagency Cooperative Agreement and to ensure continuous improvement.
- ▶ The **Employment First Collaborative Team** is composed of program staff members assigned by the Partner agency or organization that are parties to the

agreement. The Collaborative Team met in person or via conference call, on a monthly basis. The Collaborative Team is responsible for: identifying barriers to systems change as well as practices and potential solutions to address those barriers; developing innovative funding and training solutions; identifying statute, rule, policy, practice and program gaps in the system; and identifying best practices. The Collaborative Team provides general recommendations to the Coalition to aid in decision-making.

- ▶ The **Employment First Grassroots Group** is composed of self-advocates and local level stakeholders representing a cross-section of persons with various disabilities. This group met via online meetings or conference calls on a quarterly basis to ensure the voices of stakeholders were heard, and to share information on the state's activities related to employment.

INTERAGENCY COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

On May 7, 2014, nine state agency and organization Partners signed the Employment First Initiative Interagency Cooperative Agreement, including:

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD);

The Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS);

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Blind Services (DBS);

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR);

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO);

CareerSource Florida, Inc.;

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) Office;

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC); and

The Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (FARF).

The five-year Interagency Cooperative Agreement, which took effect July 1, 2014, states that these Partners are “fully committed to working together to improve the number and percentage of growth in competitive employment for individuals with disabilities.” The general purpose of the agreement is to provide a framework for a long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for Floridians with disabilities. The agreement outlines specific roles and responsibilities of the Partners in order to accomplish the desired outcomes.

STRATEGIC ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Partners developed an annual Strategic Action Implementation Plan to prioritize collaborative activities toward accomplishing the objectives within the Cooperative Agreement. For Fiscal Year 2015-16, the Partners identified the following three main areas as top collaborative priorities:

 <p>SERVICES AND SERVICE INNOVATION</p> <p>Promote service innovation</p>	 <p>TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE</p> <p>Ensure that Florida has a comprehensive training program that fosters quality integrated competitive employment for all individuals with disabilities.</p>	 <p>INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION</p> <p>Ensure that Florida has a strong network of partners that work collaboratively to promote employment as the first option for individuals with disabilities.</p>
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This report summarizes the accomplishments the Partners have made thus far toward fulfilling these objectives, both as a collaborative and within their own organizations (**see p. 17**).

BASELINE DATA

The Partners determined that it would be useful in carrying out their mission to identify each agency or organization's baseline employment outcome data.

Data collected was for Floridians with disabilities served by the Partner agency or organization in any form of direct employment services, and targets set for improvement. Agencies and organizations use varied timelines for reporting, which will impact the outcome data. Many also report lag data. Therefore, due to the varying data sets and the nature of these long-term systems change efforts, immediate employment outcome impact may not be realized.



EMPLOYMENT FIRST ACT

During the 2016 Legislative Session, the Partners supported the development of legislation to codify the Employment First efforts into state law. The Employment First Act became part of section (s.) 413.80, Florida Statutes (F.S.), a comprehensive legislative package supporting several initiatives related to individuals with disabilities. The Act provides legislative findings regarding the present challenges confronting persons with disabilities in the labor market, and provides the purpose of the Act to “prioritize employment of individuals with disabilities and to change the employment system to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.”



[...]the purpose of the Act to “prioritize employment of individuals with disabilities and to change the employment system to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce.”

The Act codifies Executive Order 13-284 into law by requiring the nine state Partners (as well as other appropriate organizations) to develop and implement the Interagency Cooperative Agreement. It provides that the Interagency Cooperative Agreement must identify the roles and responsibilities of the Partners and include the following objectives:

- ▶ Establishing a commitment by the leadership of the agencies and organizations to maximize resources and coordination to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities who seek publicly funded services;
- ▶ Developing strategic goals and benchmarks to assist the agencies and organizations in implementing the agreement;
- ▶ Identifying financing and contracting methods that will help to prioritize employment for individuals with disabilities;
- ▶ Establishing training methods to better integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce;
- ▶ Ensuring collaborative efforts between multiple agencies to achieve the purposes of the act;
- ▶ Promoting service innovations to better assist individuals with disabilities in the workplace; and
- ▶ Identifying accountability measures to ensure the sustainability of the agreement.

The passage of the Employment First Act solidified the state's commitment to not only dramatically improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities on a long-term basis, but also to bring about positive systems change within state government. Achievement of this magnitude would not have been possible without the leadership of the Governor and legislature, and commitment among multiple agencies and organizations to ensure Floridians with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities as everyone else to compete and contribute to Florida's economy.



Achievement of this magnitude would not have been possible without the leadership of the Governor and legislature, and commitment among multiple agencies and organizations [...]

EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNERS' COLLABORATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the Cooperative Agreement has taken effect, the Employment First Partners have accomplished many goals, including implementing several recommendations made by the Governor's Commission. A brief summary of these achievements and individual agency and organization accomplishments follow:

1

The Partners developed an Employment First Multi-Agency, Long-Term Communications Plan to assist the state in improving perceptions among employers and encouraged them to hire persons with disabilities. The Commission recommended the state develop such a plan to: 1) increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by motivating employers to hire; 2) promote a consistent message of awareness among employers; and 3) inform them about "Abilities Work" and other resources that are available to assist in meeting their hiring needs.¹⁰ The Multi-Agency, Long-Term Communications Plan incorporated these objectives and serves as a resource for the Partners in their employer outreach efforts, both at the state and local levels. Further, the plan is supporting collaborative activities led by the Department of Management Services to promote more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities within executive state agencies, as part of the implementation of 110.112, F.S. (discussed further below).

¹⁰ Supra 8, Recommendation 2: Create a Coalition of Agencies to Adopt a Long-Term Communications Plan (p. 24-26).

2

The Partners' communication efforts also resulted in the Employment First Messaging Video available via <http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/home>.¹¹ The video was funded by the FDDC and featured leaders from each Partner agency and organization, discussing the impact of these collaborative efforts on the employment system. Further, the Partners have developed several articles, including an article for **Florida Trend Magazine**, to highlight the state's commitment in promoting employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

3

The Partners developed and disseminated a collaborative memorandum to inform their local agencies and other organizations (providing services to individuals with disabilities) of the statewide effort to improve employment outcomes. The memorandum encouraged local stakeholders to engage in collaboration to promote improvement of local employment outcomes. This was recommended in the Governor's Commission 2014 Report to ensure the Employment First Florida Initiative is embraced and implemented at the community level, where employment outcomes are achieved.

4

The Partners assisted in the development and implementation of the Florida "Abilities Work" Web Portal and Help Desk to better connect employers with qualified candidates with disabilities in their communities. In 2013, the Governor's Commission recommended the Department of Economic Opportunity, with the support of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, establish a "single-point of contact" for employers to: 1) assist them to access people with disabilities who are ready and able to work, for recruitment and hiring purposes; 2) provide information on available services that can

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h09HMvvrRK0&feature=youtu.be>

support persons with disabilities in the workforce. These responsibilities were supported by the Employ Florida Marketplace “Abilities Work” Web Portal administered by DEO along the creation of a Help Desk administered by VR to provide information and referral services for employers. The Partners helped develop content to be used on the Web Portal and by Help Desk staff, and helped coordinate awareness efforts to promote “Abilities Work” around the state. Awareness efforts included a collaborative presentation to the Florida Cabinet and press release; collaborative development and release of an Abilities Work Memorandum and [Flyer](#); and collaborative development and release of an Abilities Work Brochure. The Partners continue to support these resources to ensure communication efforts promoting “Abilities Work” are being consistently developed and delivered, and Help Desk staff are adequately equipped with information and support from the Partners to effectively answer inquiries.

5

The Partners also collaborated on the development of the Employment First Florida website, which includes information about all of the major Employment First efforts and provides “Easy Read” information for individuals with disabilities and their families as needed.

6

The Partners served in an advisory capacity in the development of an Employment First Collaborative Training Toolkit. Funded by the FDDC, the training toolkit is designed for cross-agency use to evaluate and address training needs among employment service professionals. The toolkit uses evidence-based resources for training providers that implement job development, job site training and provide other related supports to employers and to individuals with disabilities. In 2017, the Partners will host “train-the-trainer” sessions throughout the state, to incorporate the toolkit within their ongoing training activities with staff.

7

The Employment First Partners are providing support to four Interagency Pilot Sites in Miami-Dade, Nassau, Orange and Osceola counties. These pilot sites involve collaboration among local agency representatives, local school districts and education networks, universities, parent and self-advocacy groups, providers of services to individuals with disabilities, Florida colleges, and mental health organizations. It is anticipated the pilot sites will replicate state level efforts to create models for improving collaboration and employment outcomes at the local level.

8

The Partners have conducted presentations on the Employment First Florida Initiative at multiple professional development conferences, including the VISIONS statewide educational conference, the Family Café, and the National American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Conference.

OTHER COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

In addition to these achievements, the Partners are participating in multiple collaborative initiatives that are advancing employment for Floridians with disabilities.

- 110.112, F.S. modified the state's equal employment policy to enhance executive agency employment opportunities for individuals who have a disability. The Partners are assisting the Department of Management

Services (DMS) in carrying out the objectives provided by the bill, including:

- ➔ Developing and implementing job-related programs for individuals with disabilities;
- ➔ Developing training programs for human resources personnel and hiring managers within executive agencies;

- Assisting executive agencies in developing specific hiring goals and implementing agency-specific plans to increase employment of individuals with disabilities;
 - Compiling data regarding the hiring practices of executive agencies as it relates to individuals with disabilities and making that data available on the DMS website;
 - Assisting executive agencies in identifying and implementing strategies for retaining employees with disabilities, including training programs, funding reasonable accommodations, increasing access to assistive technologies, and ensuring accessibility of physical and virtual workplaces; and
 - Adopting rules related to forms that provide for voluntary self-identification of individuals who have a disability and are employed by an executive agency.
- ▶ 413.801, F.S. also created the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program to recognize businesses that demonstrate a commitment, through employment and other support, to helping individuals with disabilities achieve independence within their communities. The Partners are assisting the Department of Economic Opportunity in implementing the program.
 - ▶ In 2014, the U.S. Congress and President Obama reauthorized the Workforce Investment Act of 1999, with the passage of

the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The new law fosters stronger collaboration within the workforce development, educational, and human services systems to better meet the needs of job-seekers, including those with disabilities, and employers served by these systems. In Fiscal Year 2015-16, CareerSource Florida, Inc. facilitated an interagency task force charged with identifying strategies to assist the state in its implementation of WIOA. The task force used the framework developed by the Employment First Partners as a model for promoting collaboration among the state programs impacted by WIOA, many of which are administered by the Employment First Partners (such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation).

- ▶ The Employment First Partners also served as advisory members to the Florida Department of Financial Services and provided input into the development of the Financial Literacy resources, particularly the *My Money* curriculum.



INDIVIDUAL **PARTNER** **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Each of the Partner organizations have accomplished many goals related to improving employment options for individuals with disabilities during Fiscal Year 2015-16. Some accomplishments were the direct result of collaborative efforts, while others reflect individual agency or organization accomplishments related to prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities in Florida. **Pages 23 through 39 feature major accomplishments in FY 2015-16.**

AGENCY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



2,485

IN COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT!

APD has improved the method of collecting and reporting data. APD serves 2,485 individuals in competitive employment!



State Fiscal Year	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
APD Customers Served	50,862	51,282	56,177	52,190
Number in Competitive Employment	3,188	3,208	3,075	2,485
Percent in Competitive Employment	6.3%	6.3%	5.5%	4.8%
Number in Day Services (ADT & SE only)	15,940	14,376	13,208	13,794
Percent in Competitive Employment Receiving Day Services (ADT & SE only)	20%	22.3%	7.6%	10.6%
Number Wanting Employment who are not employed (QSI)	9,626	9,599	8,960	8,382
Percent in Competitive Employment or Want Employment	24.9%	25%	23.4%	20.8%

Source: a. Annual Reports to ICI State Data; b. Annual APD Long Range Program Plan; c. APD Monthly Data Reports

APD continued on following page



agency for persons with disabilities
State of Florida

Legislative Appropriations for Employment Enhancement Program

APD has received funding over the past 4 years to provide employment services to individuals on the APD Waiting List. During the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16, Governor Rick Scott and the Florida legislature appropriated \$1 Million to APD for the Employment Enhancement Program. This money was used to help students and adults on APD's waiting list find jobs and internships throughout Florida. Services funded included supported employment coaching, follow-along services, paid internships, transportation, personal assistance, and some ancillary services and products. APD works closely with schools, families, and providers to achieve their goals. Through this FY 2015-16 appropriation, 209 individuals on the waiting list obtained competitive employment, 23 secured internships, and 215 individuals maintained their employment!

APD Customers in Jobs

APD is focused and committed to increasing the number of people with developmental disabilities in the Florida workforce. APD continues to improve processes and services to ensure employment is a successful first option for people with developmental disabilities.

Employment is the first option

APD staff are trained that employment is the first option for "meaningful day activity" upon intake, crisis application, and Significant Additional Needs (SAN) application. As part of SAN requests, employment is introduced again and emphasized as a clear priority at the Regional and State offices.

"TRAIN" Online System

APD is implementing an online training website for all APD courses via "TRAIN." APD currently offers both online and classroom Pre-Service Training courses for APD providers and Social Security Work Incentive Training (SSWI) for APD providers. At this time, the trainings are not available on the TRAIN system, however, the

trainings continue to be made available to APD providers and the public through in-person classes around the state.

Disability Employment Awareness Celebration

Annually, APD takes the lead on facilitating Disability Employment Awareness Celebration at City Hall in downtown Tallahassee. This is a wonderful venue where employers and employees are recognized and honored for their hard work and dedication to the employment of people with disabilities. The employers honored for 2015 included: Kilwins Jacksonville, LEGOLAND Florida in WinterHaven, Lowe's Home Improvement, Miami-Dade County Parks Recreation and Open Spaces Department, OfficeMax/Office Depot, Popeyes in Panama City, 3 Daughters Brewing in St. Petersburg, and Winter Park Memorial Hospital. The employers honored for 2015 included: 2-1-1 Broward, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Citi Bank in Jacksonville, Dunkin' Donuts in Pensacola, Gulf Coast Enterprises, Lee & Marie's Cakery Company in Miami, and SeaWorld Orlando.



BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES (BEES)



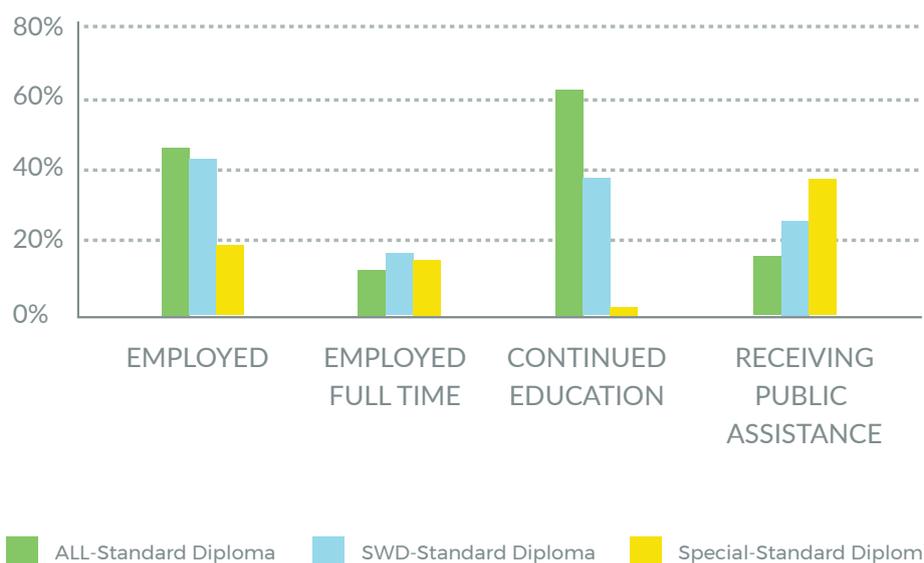
56%

of Florida's students with disabilities who exited the school system in 2013-14 were found after one year employed or enrolled in postsecondary education.

FETPIP data, based on the Fall 2014 findings for 2013-14 graduates, show the percentage of students with disabilities employed at similar rates to all students receiving a standard diploma, and employed at higher rates in full-time employment. Please note that this data is based on 18,728 graduates with disabilities and 125,107 without.

State Fiscal Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
School Exiters (one year later)	20,996	18,337	19,984	19,474
Number in higher education	5,759	4,881	5,665	5,575
Percent in higher education	27.5%	26.6%	28.3%	28.6%
Number in competitive employment	2,407	2,140	2,757	2,930
Percent in competitive employment	11.5%	11.7%	13.8%	15.0%
Number in other education	1,015	564	457	467
Percent in other education	4.8%	3.1%	2.3%	2.4%
Number in other employment	1,709	1,648	1,874	1,883
Percent in other employment	8.2%	9%	9.4%	9.7%

Source: Florida Education Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP)



BEES continued on following page



Graduation data tracking system and positive interventions increase graduation rate

Project 10, a BEESS discretionary project, has trained 39 districts on an early warning system that was created to improve the graduation rate of students with disabilities. The system uses school-based data to identify students with disabilities who are at risk of not graduating, and provides a list of evidence-based interventions that can be implemented to help the students. 100% of the districts trained in the system increased their graduation rate from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

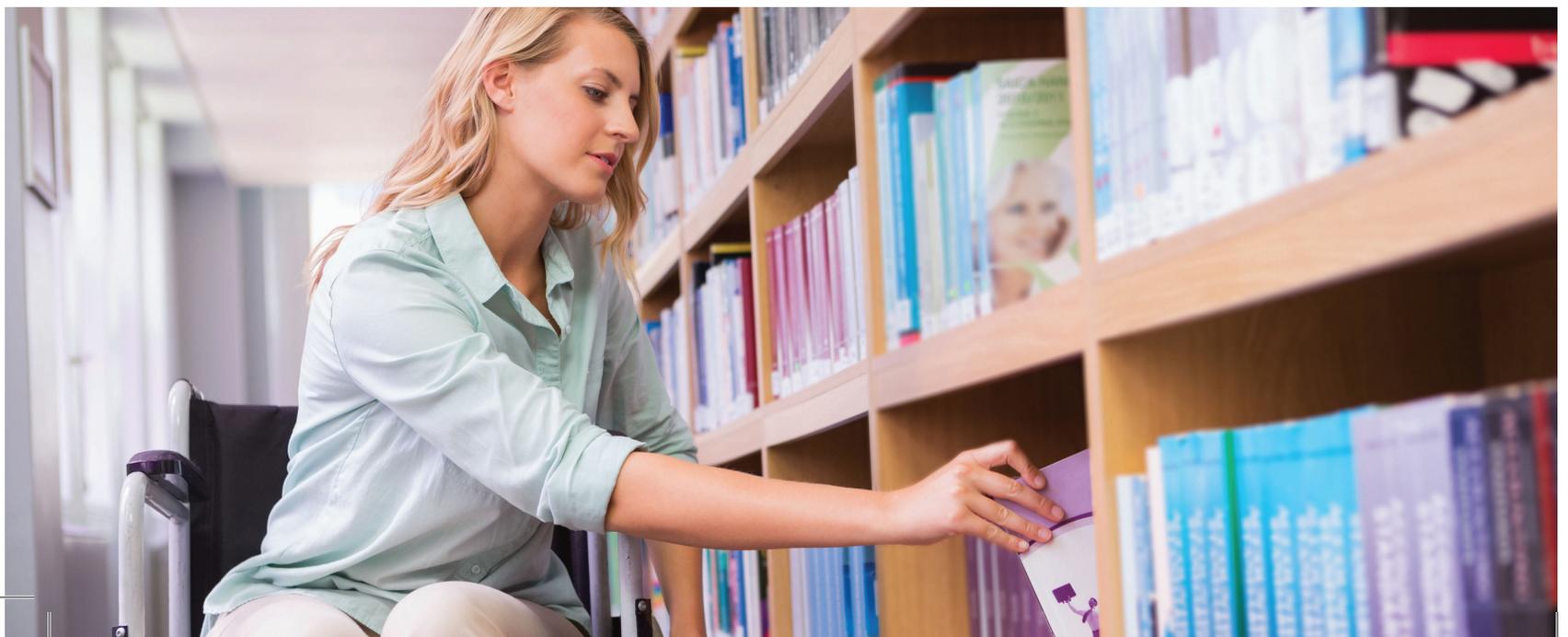
Improved graduation rates lead to better employment outcomes

The need to graduate from high school, ready for college, career, and life has been identified as a goal for all students in Florida. Graduation has been identified in the federally required State Systemic Improvement Plan as the State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) for improvement. Post-school outcome data consistently demonstrate that students with disabilities who earn a standard diploma are

nearly as likely to be employed, either part or full time, as all students with a standard diploma. In 2015-16, the standard diploma federal uniform graduation rate for students with disabilities increased 2% from 60% in 2014-15, to 62% in 2015-16.

90% of Project 10: CONNECT Interagency Councils prioritize access to work-based opportunities

BEESS, through Project 10, provided \$64,500 in funding to 35 grant recipients for Project 10: CONNECT. This enabled 43 school districts to establish and/or maintain local interagency councils to collaborate on transition issues, including employment. These councils typically include representatives from school districts, community-based organizations, Vocational Rehabilitation, families and postsecondary institutions. Ninety percent of the councils prioritize improving access to work-based opportunities for students with disabilities.



EMPLOYMENT COMES FIRST WITH



39,207

CUSTOMERS SERVED!

State Fiscal Year	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
VR Customers Served	50,026	57,004	53,141	39,207
Number of Customers Gainfully Employed*	6,071	6,523	7,214	5,760
Rehabilitation Rate	48.9%	43.4%	29.8%	39.2%
Percentage of Gainfully Employed Customers with Significant or Most Significant Disabilities	98.6%	98.9%	97.3%	98.8%
Average Hourly Wage	\$10.86	\$10.98	\$11.15	\$11.38
Total First Year Projected Earnings	\$104.9M	\$112.5M	\$126.5M	\$100.3M
VR Return on Investment **	\$6.97	\$9.15	\$10.73	\$10.67

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

- ▶ Emphasizes youth services
- ▶ Increases services for employers
- ▶ Requires coordination and collaboration of services within the State System
- ▶ Requires new and unified efficiency performance measures

Source: VR's Rehabilitation Information Management System. (RIMS)
 *Gainful employment occurs when a customer has job stability for at least 90 days and is placed in employment that is competitive, integrated into the community and for which they receive at least minimum wage. Though calculated here as a percentage of persons served, note that many of the others in the denominator continue to receive VR services leading to employment outcomes.
 **For every \$1 invested in rehabilitating the customer, an estimate of money returned to the economy.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) expand the array of VR services that students with disabilities may access while in high school and when pursuing postsecondary education. Core services of career exploration counseling, work readiness training, community work experiences, and self-advocacy training prepare them for successful employment. VR has recently introduced the **STAR** system where students may access core services without making a VR application. VR served **15,707** students during the 2014-2015 school year.

Third Party Cooperative Arrangements are partnerships with local school districts. The agencies braid funding to deliver community work experiences and job retention supports to students with the most significant needs. During the 2014-2015 school year, Employment Specialists with 20 School Districts served approximately 224 students who would not have otherwise received any work experience.

Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Programs provide age-appropriate opportunities for learning, employment

VR continued on following page

preparation, recreational activities, social interactions, and the development of natural supports to students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities at institutions of higher education. Many of the **16** programs across the state offer an authentic college experience while pairing youth with peer, academic, and community mentors. Some programs deliver career and technical training leading to industry recognized certifications.

Ticket to Work is a Social Security Administration (SSA) program that encourages disability beneficiaries to make informed choices about returning to work and to earn enough to become self-sufficient. VR has now partnered with **33** Community Work Incentive Coordinators to offer benefits planning services to VR customers that are eligible for the Ticket to Work Program. VR also works closely with **13** employment networks to deliver ongoing support services and ensure beneficiaries experience a smooth transition from VR.

VR Supported Employment Services are uniquely designed, providing resources so that everyone can work, even individuals with the most significant and complex disabilities. We are working with our agency partners to make employment the first and preferred option for all individuals.

Project SEARCH is a collaborative internship program between a business, a school district and VR that allows individuals with disabilities in their last year of high school to develop the skills needed for meaningful careers. This program has impressive results with almost **70%** of participants obtaining employment. Currently, there are **25** businesses hosting sites across the state. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council in collaboration with other partners is supporting the development of an additional 10-15 sites in the next school year.

VR Supported Self-Employment Services provide opportunities and supports so VR customers may pursue

dreams of owning their own business. VR provides guidance and support from the inception through business implementation. By helping entrepreneurs find success, VR is returning Florida tax dollars to the community.

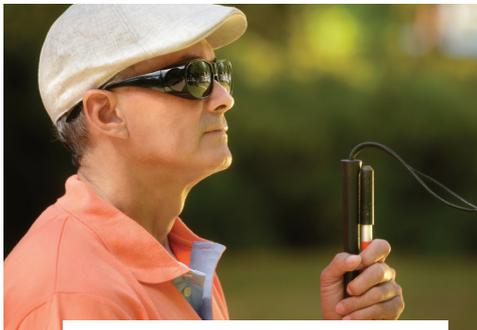
5,224 Students seeking education as a pathway to careers were served by VR in 2014-15. VR assisted individuals with the desire to attend Universities, State Colleges or Career and Technical Schools. Sixty-nine percent (**3,599**) of the individuals supported were youth ages 16-24.



DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
fldoe.org



840

Floridians with visual disabilities achieved successful employment outcomes in SFY 2015-16!

This year, the Division of Blind Services exceeded its employment goal by supporting 840 individuals in achieving successful employment outcomes. This represents a 10 percent increase from the previous year. This year's successes will make a big difference to DBS clients, their families, businesses and the community.

State Fiscal Year	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Employment Program Customers	5,313	5,241	5,225	5,203	5,232
Rehabilitation Rate	50%	53%	56%	59%	57.38%
Successful Employment Closures	729	700	713	761	840
Transition Clients Served	299	368	395	494	445
Percentage in Competitive Integrated Employment	97%	98%	99%	98%	91.43%
Average Hourly Rate	\$12.12	\$13.88	\$13.04	\$14.34	\$12.89

Source: DBS case management system (AWARE)



"Ensuring blind and visually-impaired Floridians have the tools, support and opportunity to achieve success"

Celebrating 75 Years of Fostering Independence for Floridians who are Blind and Visually Impaired!

In 1941, the Florida Legislature created the Florida Council of the Blind, which evolved into the Division of Blind Services. For the past 75 years, thousands of Floridians with visual disabilities have benefited from the educational, vocational, medical, social and recreational services supported by DBS. As the agency celebrates its 75th Anniversary, DBS is honoring

the individuals who have achieved independence and are making a lasting contribution to their communities.

Inspiring Florida Communities to See Different!

DBS is changing perceptions about individuals with blindness to help employers and others to see the attributes they contribute to Florida's economy. This year, **DBS was awarded \$50,000 to launch the "See Different" Initiative** and host forums with

DBS continued on following page

community groups, such as businesses and schools, where self-advocates show how they overcome barriers to blindness and successfully live, work and play in their community.

Supporting Entrepreneurs through the Business Enterprise Program!

The DBS Bureau of Business Enterprise (BBE) provides self-employment opportunities in the food service sector for eligible individuals who are blind and visually impaired. During FY 2015-16, the BBE program supported nine new, recently licensed food and vending service entrepreneurs in their first facility. The 122 BBE vendors generated more than \$21.7 million in taxable gross sales for the year, with average earnings of over \$69,000 and median earnings of over \$64,000.

Partnering with Businesses to Promote Employment Opportunities!

DBS has more than 500 business and government partnerships that have employed one or more of our customers, including Wells Fargo, CVS Health, U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Pitney Bowes, NASA, and the Internal Revenue Services. DBS has trained Employment Placement Specialists throughout the state who help build these partnerships and connect employers with our “job-ready” clients who can meet their hiring needs.

Helping Individuals Compete for Employment through Work Readiness

This year, DBS launched its new **Pre-Employment Program (PEP)** at our residential rehabilitation center for the blind in Daytona. PEP is a four-week learning program, designed specifically to address the employability needs of people with visual disabilities. PEP simulates a work environment, facilitates soft skills development, provides feedback on capabilities and areas for improvement, and evaluates the individual’s readiness to work.



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



49,920
PARTICIPANTS WITH
DISABILITIES SERVED!

State Fiscal Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Participants with disabilities	51,836	52,538	50,122	49,920
Percent of total population	4.1%	4.3%	4.6%	5.3%
Participants with disabilities placed	12,556	12,290	12,925	12,886

Source: Employ Florida at employflorida.com

Disability Employment Initiative

A designated Disability Employment Specialist, or Disability Resource Coordinator, is available at each local workforce board. Their role is to facilitate seamless and comprehensive services, expedite access to

programs and services and linkages to the employment community, create systemic change and transform the culture of how local CareerSource Florida centers serve individuals with disabilities.

Staff ensure that centers are fully assessible and that all assistive technology is up-to-date and in working order. Staff conduct outreach to develop and maintain relationships with advocacy groups, community organizations and agencies that aid in the employment or provide support services to job seekers with disabilities.

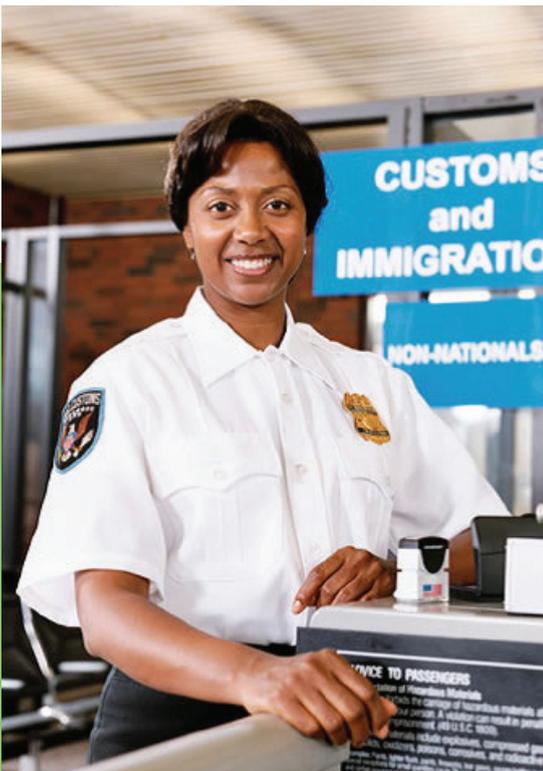
Abilities Work Web Portal

The Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) developed,

implemented and maintains the Florida Abilities Work web portal - abilitieswork.employflorida.com - which went live in November 2014.

The Abilities Work portal was a true collaborative effort as DEO worked with other agencies and held webinars for employers and stakeholders to reach consensus on the look and content. The Help Desk for the portal is managed by the Florida Department of Education Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and manned by VR staff.

The Florida Abilities Work web portal is located in and backed by the Employ Florida website at employflorida.com. The portal is designed to meet



DEO continued on following page



the needs of Florida employers who want to hire qualified job seekers with disabilities. It is also designed as a resource for job seekers, family members, caregivers and others who serve and support individuals with disabilities.

Employment Networks

The CareerSource Florida network includes 24 local workforce development boards operating more than 100 career centers across the state. Seventeen of the 24 centers are employment networks with the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program.

This program is a federally funded employment program designed to provide Social Security disability beneficiaries the choices, opportunities and support they need to enter

the workforce and maintain employment with the goal of becoming economically self-supporting over time.



DCF OFFICE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH



OFFICE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE
AND MENTAL HEALTH
MYFLFAMILIES.COM



1,934

persons served
in supported
employment!

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) provides employment services predominantly through two covered services: 1) Supported Employment, including Individual Placement and Support (IPS), an evidence-based - practice; and 2) Mental Health Clubhouse Services.

State Fiscal Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Total Persons receiving services	233,518	322,173	327,423	303,768
Sheltered Employment	48	40	10	0
Supported Employment	1,040	1,247	1,737	1,934
Total Persons Receiving Employment Services	1,078	1,287	1,747	1,934
Average annual days worked for pay for SPMI*	23.89	34.41	35.07	58.78
Percent of SMI competitively employed**	28.69%	35.78%	37.67%	44.95%

Source:

* This metric is limited to individuals who meet the criteria for severe and persistent mental illnesses.

** This metric is limited to individuals who meet the criteria for serious mental illnesses.

Supported Employment

The provision of Supported Employment services to individuals with mental health, substance use, and/or co-occurring disorders relates directly to the Department’s mission, which states in part that it will “...work in partnership with local communities to ...promote strong and economically self-sufficient families...”

Supported Employment services as defined by the DCF SAMH Office are evidence-based, community-based

services in an integrated work setting which provides regular contact with non-disabled coworkers or the public. A job coach provides longer-term, ongoing support for as long as it is needed to enable the recipient to maintain employment. These Programs should include:

- Consumer choice;
- Integrated services;
- Competitive jobs;
- Benefits counseling;
- Timely support;
- Continuous supports; and
- Consumer preferences.

SAMH continued on following page



Transitional Employment Placement (TEP)

The Mental Health Clubhouse model is defined as the structured, evidence-based delivery of services designed to strengthen and/or regain the individual's interpersonal skills, provide psychosocial therapy toward rehabilitation, develop the environmental supports necessary to help the individual thrive in the community and meet employment and other life goals, and promote recovery from mental illness. TEP is included among those services.

Services are typically provided in a community-based program with trained staff and (Clubhouse) members working as teams to address the individual's life goals and to perform the task necessary for the operations of the Program. The emphasis is on a holistic approach focusing on the individual's strengths and abilities while challenging the individual to pursue those life goals. Clubhouses are designed specifically for people with mental illnesses.

The Model includes:

- A work-ordered day;
- Participation in consensus-based decision making;
- Opportunities to obtain paid employment in the local labor market via (TEP);
- Assistance in accessing community-based educational resources;
- Access to crisis intervention services when needed;
- Evening/weekend social and recreational events; and
- Assistance in securing and sustaining safe, decent housing.

Pilot Project Partnership

In Broward County the local Managing Entity and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation partnered to implement a supported employment pilot project using the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. IPS is an evidence-based practice that requires providers to focus on individuals' strengths, and is based on the premise that employment promotes recovery and wellness. Currently, a total of 74 individuals are being served by two providers.

FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.



168
INDIVIDUALS
EMPLOYED!

Employment First
FLORIDA



The mission of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., is to **advocate and promote meaningful participation in all aspects of life** for Floridians with developmental disabilities.

Federal Fiscal Year (10/1-9/30)	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total Employed	78	137	249	248	168
CODIE	NA	NA	5	NA	NA
Project ACHIEVE/ VERTICAL					
➤ Number completing program	NA	NA	17	20	10
➤ Percent completing program	NA	NA	76%	71%	77%
➤ Number employed	NA	NA	9	6	5
Project SEARCH					
➤ Number completing program	DNA*	DNA*	DNA*	138	189
➤ Percent completing program	DNA*	92%	86%	87%	DNA*
➤ Number employed	78	137	235	230	109
➤ Percent employed	DNA*	DNA*	68%	72%	58%
Rural Routes to Employment	NA	NA	9	11	54

Source: State Plan 2012-2016/Program Performance Report
*DNA-Data Not Available

FDDC continued on following page

Project Achieve

The Council has collaborated with the Florida State College at Jacksonville and Duval County School District to create an inclusive career and technical education program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Project TOPS

This is an inclusive postsecondary program at a school district technical college designed to provide innovative, supportive strategies for students ages 18-22 with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Students are enrolled in career and technical education (vocational education) programs at Robert Morgan Education Center and Technical College.

Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH High School transition program is a one-year internship program for students with disabilities that takes place in a business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Florida currently

leads the country with 26 sites, and the average post-program employment outcome is at 66% over the past three years, which is at least twice the national average for all transition age youth. This next year, the Project plans to expand to 15 new sites representing a minimum of 20 counties.

Rural Routes to Employment

The Florida Rural Routes to Employment Project is designed to create and sustain capacity for quality Customized Employment by providing competency-based training to project participants, as well as side-by-side mentoring with employment teams and job seekers. The 40-hour classroom course in Community Employment is approved by the Association of Community Educators (ACRE), for a National Certificate in Community Employment. This program is currently in 20 Florida counties and is in the process of expanding to two more.

Employment First Website

Through FDDC's Employ Me 1st project, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) created and maintains a website for Employment First Florida. The purpose of this website is to serve as a repository for materials and information; market Employment First as the primary goal of all adult services; and provide a web presence to reflect and represent Florida's Employment First collaborative efforts. The URL for this site is www.employmentfirstfl.org

Employment First Collaborative Training

In Year 1 of the Project, the Center for Social Capital (CSC) developed the Employment First Collaborative Training Toolkit, which provides a guide for all employment service professionals to assess their current capacity and training needs and to identify options for addressing them. In Year 2, CSC piloted the Training Toolkit, and subsequently used it as the foundation for completing collaborative regional training needs assessments with EFCT

partner agencies in six Florida locations. Plans for Year 3 include the development of a “train-the-trainer” curriculum and the provision of a series of “train-the-trainer” seminars and technical assistance sessions.

Employment First Collaborative Pilots

New local level Employment First pilot sites were launched in Florida at three new locations, including the Central Florida Career Coalition, Miami-Dade, and Nassau County. Each site received on-site and follow along technical assistance from the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) throughout the year. Based upon requests from these pilot sites, a series of cross-pilot Communities of Practice (COPs) training and technical assistance will be conducted in 2017. These will be in addition to the Grassroots Group online meetings and will address cross-pilot barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities.





1,269

individuals
employed!

Florida ARF is a 501(c)(3) organization that represents Community Human Service Provider Agencies making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities across the state. The Association also serves as the Central Nonprofit Agency that manages the RESPECT of Florida Program which creates job opportunities for individuals with disabilities who produce goods and services for governmental entities.

Fiscal Year (10/1 - 9/30)	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Individuals Employed	1,268	1,369	1,339	1,269
Number in Competitive Employment	139	179	59	22
Number in Supported Employment	41	21	21	11

Source: RESPECT Annual Recertification Data

Legislative & Policy Concerns

Florida ARF continues to encourage state agencies to review the financing and contracting methods for Supported Employment Services. Only about one quarter of our member agencies now provide supported employment services - the percentage was well over 50% when rate structures were more responsive to the cost of the service.

- Recommendations to amend the Supported Employment rate structure were forwarded to the

Agency for Persons with Disabilities, and the Association sits on an advisory group that is reviewing the Supported Employment rates.

- Florida ARF recommended to the Agency for Health Care Administration that statutory language limiting the number of hours of Supported Employment services individuals can receive be deleted to support the Agency's Home & Community Based Services Waiver Transition efforts.

Florida ARF successfully advocated for statutory language that includes the transportation needs of individuals served via the APD Medicaid Waiver to be part of their iBudget cost plans.

Microenterprises

Florida ARF dba RESPECT of Florida awarded a third microenterprise grant in September 2016. The grant was awarded to an individual working with an Employment Center and will assist in the funding of a photography micro-enterprise business.

The most recent recipient is an individual with visual impairments who has exceptional photography skills.

EOP Training

Florida ARF offers Employment Outcomes Professional (EOP) training sessions to Community Rehabilitation Providers to train agency staff on how to enhance competitive job placements for individuals with disabilities.

Employment 1st

Florida ARF continues to serve on the Employment First Strategic Workgroup and actively communicates the Employment First message to Community Rehabilitation Providers across the state.

Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act

Florida ARF works closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop transition opportunities for youth with disabilities who are still in the school system.

Improving Employment 1st Options

Florida ARF dba RESPECT of Florida is the entity that manages the States' preferential buying program that offers service contracts and commodities to governmental entities that are produced by individuals with disabilities. Job creation activity is tracked through RESPECT's annual reporting processes; and, the program is funding microenterprise initiatives.

Growth in the RESPECT program is encouraged in the Services Contract area since these jobs tend to be at minimum wage or above and promote community integration.

The baseline number used for individuals employed through RESPECT and earning minimum wage or above jobs is 736 individuals (FY 12-13 data). As of FY 14-15, employees working through RESPECT Employment Centers and earning minimum wages or above totaled 842 individuals.

Compared to the previous fiscal year's numbers, RESPECT wages increased on average by four percent (35 cents per hour) which exceeded Consumer Price Index increases.

A close-up, artistic photograph of a bicycle's front wheel and frame. The spokes are thin and metallic, creating a complex web of lines. The frame is a light, possibly white or silver, color. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the side, which creates strong highlights and deep shadows, giving the image a textured, three-dimensional feel. The background is dark and out of focus.

CONCLUSION

Individuals with disabilities want to participate in the workforce, and Florida has everything to gain by supporting them to do so. In 2016, visionary policies promoted by the Employment First Act were the tipping point in a collaborative movement to increase positive employment outcomes and fundamentally shift employer perspectives toward inclusion. Florida's efforts to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities for community employment as their peers without disabilities have been strengthened and enhanced by Employment First Florida achievements. The Employment First Partnership has not only embraced Employment First as a collaborative, it has led the way in advancing the Governor's Commission recommendations by developing consistent messaging, providing employer resources and encouraging new employment practices within state government and at local levels. Employment First Florida is meeting the challenge of establishing employment as the best course to independence by investing in solutions to a statewide vision "in the interest of Floridians with Disabilities, and the public as a whole."