

# The Arc of the Bay Supports Staff to Transform Employment Services



*The Employment First Florida Success Stories Series highlights examples of innovative employment services, creative state agency employment practices, and individual employment success stories in Florida.*

Community rehabilitation provider leadership, employment specialists, and day habilitation staff are all key partners in supporting individuals with disabilities to obtain and maintain a job in the community. At the Arc of the Bay, staff and leadership work together to transform their employment and day services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Employment staff embrace working on employment dreams with individuals who are perceived as unemployable. This work includes learning about each person's life outside of Adult Day Training (ADT) services, what they enjoy doing and where they might enjoy working.

## Meeting the Mission

The Arc of the Bay's board of directors developed and implemented a plan to transform the agency's ADT to support employment in the community as a priority outcome. "We decided to play offense and lead the way," said Ron Sharpe, the Arc of the Bay's executive director during a recent presentation about this transformation for [Employment First Florida](#).

They framed ADT and employment services around supporting adults with IDD to build employment skills and find employment in the community. This led to the development of organizational goals and objectives to achieve this mission.

## Developing Skills and Increasing Confidence

One of the first steps taken was to ensure that employment staff have the resources they need to provide high-quality employment services. The Arc paid for staff to attend webinars and conference presentations to learn how to provide job development, pre-employment skills training, job matching, work readiness preparation, career exploration and Discovery. Employment staff were also trained to network with employers and provide individuals with on-site job training.

According to Sharpe, these training opportunities were of particular interest to long-term ADT staff who want to help people with IDD become empowered to achieve their personal goals. Support from the board of directors was a critical component of this initiative.

## Encouraging Dreams

Employment staff help job seekers stay motivated by supporting them to develop Dream Boards that illustrate their hopes for a job. (Dream boards are created using words and pictures to reflect employment goals and dreams). Each time an individual is hired, the staffers celebrate by taking pictures of the newly hired individual and their employer.

## Growing Together

At regular employment team meetings, staff participate in a "three ups and three downs" round robin. Each team member talks about three successes and three challenges they experienced while supporting individuals and engaging employers in the process of job development. These discussions allow staff to learn from one another about job development and networking strategies and ways to handle challenges. Employment staff now invite staff from ADT to team meetings to tell them about the employment services individuals are receiving and to encourage them to take note of individuals' interests and other information that might be useful for job development.

All Arc of the Bay staff have been challenged to examine their pre-existing notions about inclusion and the abilities of individuals with IDD. Staff are encouraged to learn about the importance of accommodations and the ways in which people's financial and emotional wellbeing improves when they are working in the community.

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