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To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: Employment First: Choice

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Choices in services by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families is a cornerstone of Oregon's service delivery system. In discussing the Employment First initiative, we often hear questions about the impact of policies and changes on choice. We hear from people who ask us, "What if people don't want to work in the community? What about choice?"

The Employment First policy presumes that all people want to work and are capable of working in the community – making the concept of choice a very important matter.

One critical aspect to making choices about services is to make sure those choices are truly informed. This is particularly important about employment-related services. Historically, many people have experienced limited information, choices, and experiences related to community-based employment. For some people with I/DD, this might be the first time they are hearing about, or thinking about, working in the community. Something that is new can be scary or intimidating at first. We must emphasize that a conversation about employment needs to be fully-informed choice which helps guide people through the many positive aspects of being fully integrated into the community.

That is why the [Employment First initiative](#) is designed to provide people with information about working in the community. The Career Development Plan, Discovery and Employment Path are examples of services to help people make informed choices about their work and careers.

To respect choices, there must also be an adequate number of service options available for people to access. That is why we are continuing efforts to build capacity in the number, types, and locations of services.

We sometimes hear from service coordinators (SCs) and personal agents (PAs), as well as families, that some people do not want to work in the community. While

that may be true for some, for others it may be that the concept is not clear, or that there are fears or myths about working in an integrated community job.

For those that choose not to pursue community-based employment, there are still day services available. Sometimes referred to as day support activities, these are not employment-related services but still should assist people to increase their independence and community integration. While day support services are not focused on employment, individuals will still have ongoing conversations about pursuing community-based employment.

We encourage all providers and SC/PAs to have full conversations about the many benefits of working in the community. Talk to people about their passions, skills, and interests and you may find out that there are many community jobs that might be a good fit. Individuals considering community employment should also talk to others who experience I/DD who have achieved this goal to gather information about the benefits of working in the community.

Read more about Employment First – including the success stories of people who now work in integrated community jobs:

<http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/employment/employment-first/Pages/index.aspx>.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to

employment.first@state.or.us.

~ Mike