

5-4-18

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Acacia McGuire Anderson, Statewide Employment First Coordinator**

**Re: Employment First: Breaking Barriers Conference**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Note: A photo slideshow from the conference is at: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmjPNQvK>



Tami Leonard with her son Logan at the Breaking Barriers conference.

Photo: Andre Harboe

[The Breaking Barriers – Life Beyond](#)

[Labels](#) conference was held Friday, April 27 in Redmond, Ore. More than 500 attendees – many of them families and people with disabilities – came out to the all-day event for networking, keynote speeches, performances, vendors and sessions.

The vision for Breaking Barriers is for an inclusive community where barriers don't exist and labels such as disability have no meaning. The conference serves as a platform to share the unique and diverse perspectives of all members of the community.

Julie Huber, employment specialist with the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services, served as the host for the event. The conference opened with a poem by parent Noelle Sisk. Parent Tami Leonard then shared her journey supporting her son Logan to become more independent.

“He has a lot of labels put on him, but he can do anything,” Tami said.

Logan is nonverbal and experiences multiple significant disabilities. Tami said her son was yearning for a more independent life, but she struggled to let go of control.

Eventually, Logan moved out and found happiness in another home and taught his mother what he wanted.

“Logan had his own way of telling me he wanted his own life, but I wasn’t listening,” she said. “We have to dream big for our kids.”



Jordan Ohlde won an award for advocacy.

Photo: Andre Harboe

Sessions throughout the day ranged from an introduction to the Lifecourse framework, an employment focus group held by Lane Independent Reviewer Cathy Ficker Terrill, a session on the Peer 2 Peer Mentor Project and a self-employment adventure session with Vocational Rehabilitation counselor Cortney Gibson.

During lunch, an awards reception was held. Awards were voted on by the Conference Planning Committee. Jordan Ohlde was recognized as Outstanding Advocate for his passion for helping other people with disabilities. Jordan works at a movie theater, serves on a regional transit

committee and is president of High Desert Advocates.

Jill Hannemann with Abilitree and the Work Incentives Network, was honored as an Outstanding Service Provider.

Margie Blackmore, Transition Network Facilitator, was recognized as Outstanding Educator. The Outstanding Legacy award went to Paul Moore, an educator and parent who passed away in February.

Alexis Wineman was the lunch keynote speaker. She is an autism advocate who was named Miss Montana 2012. She won the "America's Choice" award at the Miss America 2013 pageant and is the first known contestant with autism to compete in the Miss America pageant.

Breaking Barriers focuses on the families, advocates, providers and educators who are working to help support people to live and work independently in their communities. We are excited to share the conference's message of inclusiveness and living a life beyond labels.

~ Acacia