

To: Employment First stakeholders
From: Statewide Employment First Coordinator Mike Maley
Re: Employment First and Self-Advocates
(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

Several leadership representatives from the Department of Human Services (DHS) were recently invited to a meeting with the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition's (OSAC) Employment Committee. OSAC is a project of the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities (OCDD). It is comprised of 18 local self-advocacy groups across Oregon. OSAC's stated purpose is to bring together self-advocates to "speak with a strong, unified voice" on issues that affect people with developmental disabilities. The DHS staff attending this meeting included: Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director of DHS; Trisha Baxter, Interim Director and Chief Operating Officer of the Office of Developmental Disability Services (ODDS); Stephaine Parrish Taylor, Director of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR); and the DHS Employment First implementation team. Also attending was Jaime Daignault, Executive Director of OCDD and Cynthia Owens, Family Issues and Employment Specialist with OCDD.

In general, the meeting agenda as established by OSAC's employment committee was to (1) discuss their support of the Governor's Executive Order 13-04, (2) present and discuss the experiences of some self-advocates related to creating plans for integrated employment, and (3) discuss, from the self-advocate's perspective, what was working in the system and what needed improvement. The OSAC Employment Position Statement was provided at this meeting and can be viewed at:
http://ocdd.org/index.php/ocdd/docs/osac_employment_position_statement/

While the discussion at this meeting covered a broad range of topics, three central themes emerged. The first was that OSAC supports continued efforts to provide individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) opportunities to obtain integrated jobs. Second, OSAC committee members believe service delivery systems need to be responsive in many ways to support the intended goal of providing integrated employment opportunities. For example, topics ranged from the delivery of person-centered planning processes to the need for effective transportation supports.

The third theme focused on the need to assist individuals with I/DD to help assure their self-advocacy in addressing their desire for integrated employment. This included the need to help people gain the necessary self-advocacy skills, the knowledge to effectively navigate the system, and the confidence to effectively deploy these skills. This last discussion centered on self-advocates' desire to share knowledge and experiences. They also voiced a desire to support one another through options such as peer-to-peer networks and peer mentoring. Many states are exploring similar strategies as they implement Employment First activities.

There was agreement to have additional meetings between OSAC and DHS representatives to explore the ideas discussed. This includes follow-up discussions to identify options to create more peer-to-peer networks that will support the DHS Employment First Policy and implementation of the Executive Order. We will keep you informed as the discussions continue. To learn more about OSAC and its activities, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Oregon-Self-Advocacy-Coalition/634721156553650>

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon.

~ Mike