

12-18-15

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: [Employment First](#): Final message

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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This is the season for reflecting on the past, recognizing what we are thankful for, and reaffirming a preferred future. For me this is especially true as I head into retirement. As I reflect on my professional career, I am amazed at the changes I have been fortunate to see in Oregon's service system for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families.

During the past 40 years, I have witnessed the systematic elimination of institutional services, the corresponding development of community-based services, the infusion of self-determination and person-centered principles, and most recently, the focus on integrated employment services. I am grateful to have been a part of those changes. I am thankful to all the people who have worked so diligently to make these changes possible. And I am thankful to all those I worked with over the years. This list is not short but includes many state and local officials and stakeholders, individuals with I/DD and their family members, and of course, dedicated staff in our public and private agencies.

As I visualize the future, I see a continued march toward the goal of full community integration for people with I/DD. This has been the goal for quite some time at both the national and state level. Hopefully this goal results in communities embracing the many talents and abilities of people with I/DD. I hope it also results in people who experience I/DD leading full lives – in terms of a life that comes with the same expectations and opportunities as anyone else might have. This is one reason why the Employment First initiative is so important. Community jobs can be the key to full inclusion in one's community and full citizenship in general.

In years to come there will be ups and downs in implementing this goal. The goal of full integration in some ways is the most difficult hurdle to tackle. It means confronting our own biases and preconceptions. I remember early in my career I was the director of a residential service for children with I/DD. There was a young man with significant communication issues and physical support needs living there who had been labeled as behaviorally "difficult." And I viewed him as such because that was his reputation and people expected him to act in that way. One

day after he had been provided a new communication device, I went to see how the device was working for him. To demonstrate, the first thing he did was tell me a joke. My view and understanding of him changed immediately. He taught me who he really was as a person in just the short time it took him to tell that joke. He was finally given the voice and opportunity to express himself. This story, and many others like it, have stayed with me over the years. I think I have learned more from my interactions with people with I/DD and their families than any formal training or official duties I have had.

How we accomplish full integration will be debated among various parties. But I hope we, as a society, keep clear focus on the outcome of full integration. We are now seeing that people, once given the opportunity, right expectations, and necessary supports, accomplishing this goal. I hope in the future we continue to share and learn from these success stories.

I want to end by saying how grateful I am to have had a career in supporting people with I/DD and their families. In particular I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work for the Department of Human Services and serve the people of Oregon in the important work that we do. Thank you all.

~ Mike