

10-27-2017

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Trina M. Lee, Vocational Rehabilitation Director

Re: Employment First: Interstate Disability Employment Alliance forum

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Crowd of employers at the first Interstate Disability Employment Alliance forum in Vancouver on October 11, 2017.

Photo: Angela Yeager

On October 11, Vocational Rehabilitation offices in the greater Vancouver, Wash. and Portland Ore. metro areas held the first Interstate Disability Employment Alliance (IDEA) forum.

The goal of the event was to inform businesses in the Portland/Vancouver area that there are many

support services and accommodations available for those who have disabilities and are seeking work. The idea of the event was created by Darlene Terry of Washington VR and Lynne Carter of Oregon VR. According to Darlene Terry, business specialist with Washington's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the goal was to introduce businesses to agency contacts who provide services and consultation regarding the hiring, retention, and advancement of people with disabilities.

“The goal is to improve employer relationships, maximize employers’ hiring ability, and increase employment opportunities to hire Vocational Rehabilitation consumers,” she said.

More than 115 employers and Human Resources representatives from businesses in the greater Portland and Vancouver area attended. The first two hours were an open forum where businesses could ask questions from the panel of experts. The panel included: Darlene Terry, Kari Samuelson and Carolyn Frank with Oregon

VR, John LeMarte from Washington State WorkSource, Lynn Odom with the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Carla Waring with the Northwest ADA Center, and Meredith Hardin with the Washington Department of Services for the Blind.

Questions from employers ranged from concerns regarding accommodation needs to interest in how job carving can work to help fulfill business needs and hire people with significant disabilities.

“Sometimes it just takes a bit of information for employers to learn what they need in order to include a qualified person with a disability in their workforce,” said Donna Duff, Workforce and Business Coordinator with Oregon VR.

There will be a follow-up event to bring businesses together with job seekers from both Washington and Oregon VR services. In addition, Oregon and Washington VR committed to following up with all the employers that attended the October 11 forum to determine how VR services can support their companies with staffing needs.

Thank you for your service to people with disabilities.

~ Trina