

2-24-17

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Rebecca Sexton, Manager, Employment Policy and Innovation

Re: [Employment First](#): Oregon Statewide Transition Conference

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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The Oregon Statewide Transition Conference, sponsored by the Oregon Association of Vocational Support Needs Personnel (OAVSNP), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Oregon Youth Transition Program (YTP), and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), was held Feb. 16 and 17 in downtown Portland.



Karen Gaffney, keynote speaker, at the Oregon Statewide Transition Conference.

Photo: Cassy McCartney

More than 600 attendees had an opportunity to learn, network, and share innovative approaches regarding transition practices in Oregon.

Karen Gaffney, a self-advocate and founder of the [Karen Gaffney Foundation](#), was the first day's keynote speaker.

In addition to her nonprofit work, Gaffney also works part-time at the Oregon Health & Science University at the Institute on Development and

Disability. Gaffney, who experiences Down syndrome, spoke about the importance of inclusion in schools, workplaces and the community.

“Students with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities are being included in sports, graduating from their high schools, some even going on to colleges, and finding their way to jobs in the community,” she said. “We are showing what is possible for so many others.”

She went on to address the importance of a seamless transition from school to work.

“For way too many of us, life after high school can be very difficult,” Gaffney said. “Can you imagine what your life would be like if you went to bed every night having done nothing with your day, only to wake in the morning without a purpose in front of you? The employment rate for people like me is less than 20 percent, which is less than our graduation rate. Full inclusion at school is a bridge toward employment for us.”



Heather Lindsey from the Oregon Department of Education was part of a session on mock sheltered workshop policy.

Photo: Cassy McCartney

sheltered workshops; and Transition Network Facilitators Margie Blackmore and Kriss Rita sharing ways to increase goal achievement and self-determination in student’s IEPs.

An awards ceremony held on the first night celebrated educators, students and staff excelling in transition education. A photo slideshow from the awards celebration is available at: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskSajjwK>

Employment related sessions were weaved throughout the two-day conference. Sessions included: ODDS employment staff addressing funding and services for transition-age youth and adults; Nicholas Von Pless with Community Access Services speaking about finding the right job match with low-tech modifications and reliable supports; the ODE team discussing policy on mock



VR counselor Lain Ham (left) receiving an award with VR Director Trina Lee and YTP Director Keith Ozols.

Photo: Cassy McCartney

The awardees were:

- **Outstanding Administrator of the Year:** Michelle Markle, Portland Public Schools.
- **Stephaine Parrish Taylor Award:** Lain Ham, VR counselor in Curry County
- **Outstanding Student of the Year:** Manuela M. Garcia Flores, student in North Wasco County Youth Transition Program.
- **Outstanding Student of the Year:** Daniel Diaz Rodriguez, student in the Gladstone Youth Transition Program.
- **Outstanding Teacher of the Year:** Terri Nickens, Hillsboro School District's Miller Education Center, Independent Transition Services
- **Innovative Agency Provider:** Lon Thornburg, Transition Network Facilitator for Eastern Oregon
- **Extraordinary Support Staff:** Maureen Leigh, instructional assistant for Brookings Harbor school district's Youth Transition Program.
- **Exceptional Program:** Sisters Transition Program