

September 10, 2013

## Oregon Employment First: News & Information for You

Welcome to the first *Oregon Employment First News & Information for You* message!

You can expect to see regular updates as we move forward to implement Governor Kitzhaber's Executive Order ([http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive\\_orders/eo\\_13-04.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/executive_orders/eo_13-04.pdf)) on Employment First and our ongoing commitment to integrated employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

As most of you know, Oregon has been a leader in providing supported employment services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in community residential settings and has set an example for other states by demonstrating its express commitment to the benefits of transitioning individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities into integrated, community residential settings.

Back in April, the Governor appointed me as the statewide Employment First Coordinator to oversee and coordinate the Oregon's Employment First policy, including all activities required by the Governor's Executive Order.

In my role, I will be working with the DHS Office of Developmental Disabilities Services, the DHS Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Oregon Department of Education staff and the Oregon Council for Developmental Disabilities to expand access to supported employment services. That work is already underway, and I'll provide more about that in the days to come. Sometimes these messages will come from me, but you'll also see messages from other partners in this work.

Today, I'd like to use our first message to talk about Oregon's history of leadership and innovation in services to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Let me begin by saying that although Oregon is one of the top states for integrated employment, we can do better.

Individuals with disabilities persistently face higher rates of unemployment than their non-disabled fellow citizens. As Oregon's economy continues to recover from the 2008 recession, we must strive to ensure that all Oregonians benefit from the recovery, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While the state cannot guarantee a job to any Oregonian, the state can and should consistently work to continue to improve its provision of employment services to provide the best possible opportunities for success and choice for individuals receiving those services.

Improving Oregon's delivery of employment services, with the goal of achieving integrated employment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, consistent with their abilities and choices, will benefit individuals with disabilities, their families, our communities, the economy, and the state.

Back in the 1980's, Oregon was able to expand the number of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in paid, integrated employment settings. . By 2008, Oregon ranked 16th of 39 states reporting on integrated employment. At the same time, however, the population receiving funded adult developmental disability employment and day services nationally has expanded to an estimated half a million persons ,

The population being served has changed in other ways. Oregon downsized and ultimately closed its two state residential institutions for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, returning more I/DD individuals to the community. .

Oregon, like many other states, began to work toward improving employment outcomes for people with I/DD. This work included significant input from stakeholders and partners. In 2008, Oregon adopted an Employment First Policy, making it one of the first states to do so.

In April 2012, Oregon was awarded a competitive grant from the United States Department of Labor to provide resources to assist in the strategic planning and implementation of the Employment First Policy, one of only three states awarded the grant. Employment First is grounded in a framework of Oregon Revised Statutes and Oregon Administrative Rules which identify increased productivity, integration, and independence as the desired outcomes of services and supports for adults with developmental disabilities. The policy also is in alignment with the stated mission of the Oregon Department of Human Services: People are safe, healthy and living as independently as possible.

The Employment First policy is rooted in the belief that meaningful employment for working age adults plays a major role in maximizing personal choices, achieving economic self-sufficiency, and contributing to the sustainability of our communities.

Employment First emphasizes the importance of being a part of the workforce, contributing to the economy, and becoming as self-sufficient as possible, helping individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to lead a meaningful and purposeful life.

Today, in order to fully realize the vision of the Executive Order, the state will partner with a variety of stakeholders to develop a plan for successful implementation, and a major part of this plan will include statewide outreach and conversation with key partners. The result will include a significant reduction over time of state support of sheltered work and an increased investment in employment services.

If you have questions or comments, please contact me.

Thank you, and I look forward to continuing to provide you with the most accurate and up-to-date information on Employment First through these *Employment First News & Information for You* messages.

Mike Maley, Employment First Coordinator  
Oregon Department of Human Services  
[Mike.j.maley@state.or.us](mailto:Mike.j.maley@state.or.us)