

Nov. 30, 2018

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Acacia McGuire Anderson, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

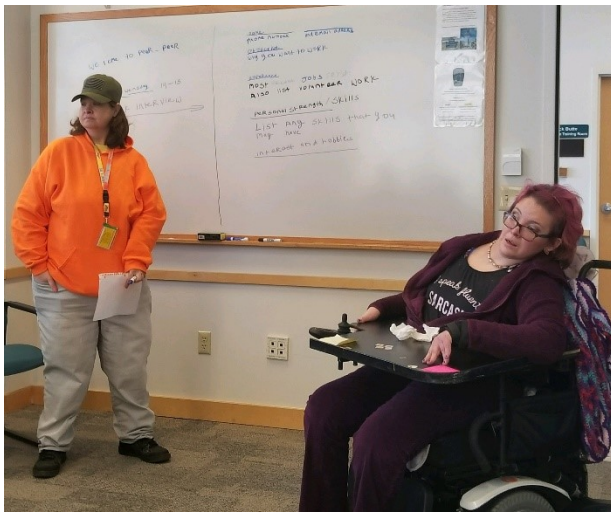
Re: Employment First: Peer Mentoring in central Oregon

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

[Like Us](#) on Facebook!

Please check out this video about the Peer Mentoring Project online at:

https://youtu.be/o0I1_D8vWEs



Misty Holman (left) and Nicole Hinds teach a peer mentoring session.

Photo: Erica Drake

One of the most powerful tools for helping a person through the employment process can be the guidance and support of a peer who has already taken that journey.

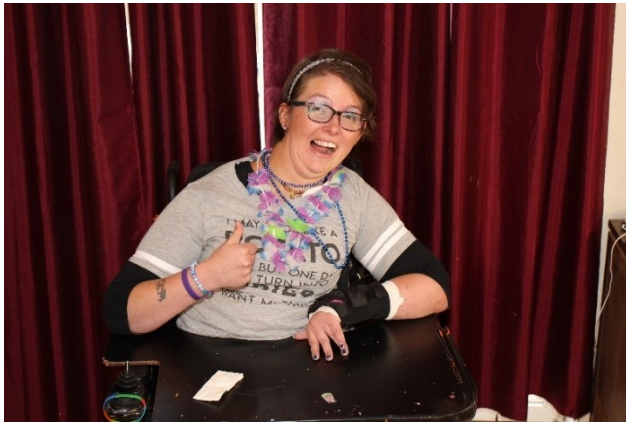
For that reason, the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) and the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition (OSAC) launched a peer-to-peer (P2P) education project called “P2P for Employment” in 2016. The project was funded by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and OCDD.

The project was so successful in central Oregon that after the initial P2P was completed, Opportunity Foundation of Central Oregon decided to find a way to keep the momentum going.

Seth Johnson, executive director of Opportunity Foundation, posted a job description for a peer mentor position. While he originally planned to hire one, he ended up hiring three people – Jordan Ohlde, Nicole Hinds and Misty Holman.

“The interview committee was so impressed with all three of them that we decided to hire three peer mentors,” Seth said. “We found with the previous project that peer mentoring really helped to get people fired up about community employment.”

The peer mentors hold monthly support group sessions with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities on community employment. The sessions include everything from resume building to talking through issues and fears about community employment. They also bring in guests, such as local transportation leaders, to talk about issues. The peer mentors are creating the program, and their own jobs, through the process.



Nicole Hinds is one of three peer mentors employed by Opportunity Foundation of Central Oregon.

Photo: Andre Harboe

Nicole Hinds, 31, lives in Bend and is a peer mentor.

“I enjoy working with people on their goals and helping open up doors,” Nicole said.

Nicole often shares her personal story to help inspire people to knock down limitations others might set up for them. She was in a serious car accident when she was 15 years old and was given a 7 percent chance of living. She spent her 16th birthday in a coma.

Eventually, she worked her way back and graduated from Redmond High School in 2005.



Misty Holman is a peer mentor with the Opportunity Foundation.

Photo: Andre Harboe

“Whenever people say you can’t, remember ‘Finding Nemo,’ and think, ‘Just keep swimming,’” she said. “As long as you say you can, then you can.”

Misty Holman, 40, lives in Culver, Ore. and was a participant in the first round of Peer to Peer classes. She said she was so inspired by what she learned from the other peer mentors, that it inspired her to not only pursue community employment but also apply to be a mentor. She worked for Opportunity Foundation, first in a sheltered workshop then in Employment Path Community, for 14 years.

“There are a lot of things I would like to do,” she said. “Work at Grocery Outlet, or Wal-Mart, or work outside. I like working with kids, or with seniors.”

Now Misty wants to help inspire others to try for community employment, the way she was inspired when she took the peer mentoring classes.

“I want to tell them, ‘Be bold. You can succeed in life. Be who you are,’” she said.



Jordan Ohlde is a peer mentor and employee at Regal Cinemas in Bend.

Photo: Andre Harboe

Jordan Ohlde, 34, is the experienced leader of the peer mentoring group. Jordan has had the same community job, working at Regal Cinemas in Bend, for 18 years. Jordan is a strong voice in the Bend area who not only has promoted community employment, but also advocates for transportation and safer sidewalks for people with disabilities.

“People with disabilities should not be afraid,” Jordan said. “Community employment means more independence. It means more money to spend and being involved in your community.”

The peer mentoring sessions are held monthly at the local Worksource center. About eight participants are currently signed up. The positions are funded for one year, but Seth said if the project is successful, Opportunity Foundation will consider continuing to fund peer mentoring.