

12-11-15

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: [Employment First](#): Rural area concerns

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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When we discuss challenges and opportunities around building service capacity to move the Employment First agenda forward, we know that capacity-building has specific challenges in rural areas of the state. We also know that building capacity for employment specialists, job developers, job coaches and other providers in rural areas will require creativity and flexibility.

Whether the solutions are technology-based (such as making more trainings available online), developing new providers, or looking at different service models to help meet demand, we understand there is not a “one size fits all” answer to this issue. We may need to increase our ability to hold meetings remotely, hold “on-demand” or web-based trainings, and tap into workforces not typically used (school staff working in summer months, people with disabilities or other barriers to employment, aging/retired individuals wanting part-time work, etc.) to fill much-needed capacity.

DHS Employment First, along with our partners at the Oregon Department of Education, are currently in the process of putting together a stakeholder workgroup made up of people from rural and frontier areas around the state to clarify issues in the five following areas: Capacity, Practice Challenges, Training, Employer Engagement, and Rates.

The goal for this workgroup is to come away with specific recommendations on strategies around those five areas that will make an immediate impact. For instance, when we talk about service capacity needs, what are the specific issues to be addressed? In one region of the state, there may be plenty of job developers, but no coaches once a person has landed a job. In another, the reverse may be true. We must understand the specific issues before we decide on strategies to address the needs.

There are related issues to address as well, including transportation, a limited labor market and diversity of job fields. These are not simple issues that can be solved overnight. However, working together in collaboration with local agencies and our

local Employment First leadership teams, we can creatively find solutions to help increase job opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the state.

As we have traveled the state and discussed issues with stakeholders, we have been provided a lot of feedback and suggestions on how to address service capacity needs. We can always hear more creative and innovative suggestions. Please feel to use the Employment First email listed below to forward ideas or comments you have on service capacity needs. Comments received will be forwarded to the workgroup.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to employment.first@state.or.us.

~ Mike