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## **Employment First: Self-Employment**

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Statewide Employment First Coordinator Mike Maley**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

Prior weekly messages have mentioned self-employment as one way to achieve an employment outcome. This message expands on the benefits of pursuing self-employment and why this may be a good choice for some people.

Support for self-employment or business ownership is an available service option for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). While it may not be an ideal choice for everyone, self-employment is one way to achieve economic goals as a preferred path over competitive wage employment.

Self-employment is an acceptable employment outcome in the Vocational Rehabilitation system and self-employment support is an allowable service under federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Home and Community-Based Waiver guidelines.

As in other integrated employment opportunities, the path to self-employment must utilize a person-centered, strength-based process that identifies skills, interests, preferences and talents that lead to vocational options.

Unlike competitive employment, self-employment requires considerations of business and feasibility planning, accounting, marketing, sales, support operations planning, and financial strategies. Financial strategies may include exploration of Social Security Administration work incentive programs or Small Business Administration resources such as Small Business Development Centers.

While not a new concept, awareness is increasing about the possibilities of self-employment for individuals with I/DD. There is a growing body of information to help guide action. Success stories about people who have started their own businesses are on the Internet; for example, [this story](#) is about Jeff, owner of Doc Destruction.

These successes are happening in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The following websites may be helpful to those who want to start researching this employment service option:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/SelfEmploymentEntrepreneurship.htm>

<http://www.griffinhammis.com/selfemployment.html>

In addition, a group of service practitioners in Oregon have started the Oregon Supported Self-Employment Network (OSSEN). Participation in OSSEN is open to anyone interested in receiving, providing or advocating for supported self-employment (SSE) services in Oregon.

According to OSSEN, some of the advantages of self-employment for individuals with I/DD include greater customizability, unique market opportunities and the potential to accumulate assets.

The stated purpose of OSSEN is to “advocate for and support efforts to make SSE an available, meaningful and accessible employment alternative for all adult Oregonians experiencing I/DD.” OSSEN’s email is: [OSSENNetwork@gmail.com](mailto:OSSENNetwork@gmail.com).

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](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).

~ Mike