

July 27, 2018

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Acacia McGuire Anderson, Statewide Employment First Coordinator**

**Re: [Employment First](#): Update on Summer Work Experience programs**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Moises Garcilazo is working at Kik's Golf Center this summer as part of the summer work program in Umatilla County. (photo contributed)

In June 2017, summer work experience programs throughout the state funded by grants from the Department of Human Services and Oregon Department of Education kicked off. I did a [message](#) on these grants in April 2017. This collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS), and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) funds pilot programs throughout the state aimed at giving youth with disabilities experience with work.

The goal is to develop a work experience program that increases job opportunities for young people with disabilities. Contracted programs must focus on community integration and the summer work experience must include community-based experience.

In the summer of 2018, there are 23 programs statewide with more than 300 students participating. The programs range from urban programs in Eugene, Salem and Portland to rural areas such as Pine Eagle, Vernonia and Central Point.

According to C.J. Webb, Pre-Employment Transition Services Program Coordinator for VR, all the students are in paid community jobs. Many others are also experiencing job shadowing, volunteering, and job readiness preparation, such as resume-building and interview skills.

“All of the programs are structured a bit differently to meet the needs of that community and representative of the types of jobs in that local area,” Webb said.

One program has a student mentor involved who has employment experience and work hands-on with his peers. Another program involves a local community garden. To make sure there were a variety of jobs for students with different interests, the garden program includes jobs to not only harvest the veggies, but also to sell the produce at the market and create recipe books for local salsa. Other programs include county fairs, rodeos, restaurants, farming, and a variety of jobs at other local businesses.

Participating students are 16 to 21 years old and have a disability. The grants require at least 20 percent of the participants to be students with an intellectual or developmental disability. Many have never had a job before. In addition to being part of the Employment First collaboration, this program also meets a requirement of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which requires VR to set aside 15 percent of its budget for Pre-Employment Transition Services.

The contract is looking for programs that blend and braid agency funds to achieve the best employment outcomes for young people with disabilities to work. Studies show that work-based learning during school leads to greater success in adult employment for all categories of disability. Our hope is that a model program emerges from this process. All applicants must issue a report on the program and its outcomes at the end of 2018.

~ Acacia