

5-9-14

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

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

**Re: Employment First: WA Transition Conference**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

On May 2, members of the DHS Employment First team, along with some of our colleagues in Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Developmental Disability Services, attended the Washington State Transition Conference in Vancouver, Wash. This message is to inform you of what we learned.

The event opened with remarks by Terry Redmon, manager of Developmental Disabilities Administration's Employment Partnership Program and Marsha Threlkeld with the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE). They framed the day in terms of how far Washington has progressed on employment for transition-age students, and how many challenges still lie ahead.

The keynote speaker for the morning was by David Mank, Ph.D., director of the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University. Mank, a former Oregonian, is one of the founding board members of the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) and received the Franklin Smith Award for National Distinguished Service from The Arc of the United States.

Mank discussed the "tyranny of the moment," or just trying to get through the day. He said many families who have children with disabilities focus on just trying to get through each day, and that service providers need to be aware of that as they serve and communicate with families.

Mank also encouraged "the dignity of risk," by allowing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to take chances like everyone else.

Mank's biggest take-away message, however, was that multiple job and volunteer opportunities while in school is the key to employment success for a young person, especially those with I/DD.

"The best predictor of a student having a job five years out is the number and variety of job experiences they have while still in school," Mank said.

The final speaker of the day was Eric Matthes, a self-advocate who works full-time for the Arc of King County. He also is the president of People First of Washington. Eric gave an inspiring talk, chronicling his journey to employment, as well as his struggles to live more independently. Eric emphasized how important it is for educators and service providers to work directly with the individual.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions, and don’t be afraid to ask for help,” he said. “If you aren’t sure what kind of job someone wants, or what skills they have, ask them. Don’t talk about us; talk with us.”

In the afternoon, participants had the choice of different breakout sessions. Topics at the sessions ranged from a training program for younger families to prepare their children for work, to a session on a program for rural school districts in Oak Harbor, Wash.

Attending conferences such as this help Oregon’s Employment First team to learn about best practices from other states engaged in supported integrated employment, as well as the challenges that states such as Washington have encountered. We learned a great deal, and met with some state leaders in Washington who provide expertise and insight as we move our Employment First agenda forward.

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

- Many people expressed enthusiasm about our message last week about Alternative Work Concepts. As a follow-up to that, I just wanted to share a photo slideshow from part of that visit. Hope you enjoy it.  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dhsoregon/sets/72157644056476999/>