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Oct. 20, 2021

To: ODDS and VR Staff, Partners and Providers
From: Lilia Teninty, Director, Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) and Keith Ozols, Director, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
Subject: Working collaboratively together

An essential aspect of the Employment First initiative is ensuring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have the necessary supports to access community employment. Teamwork is critical to this effort: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Services Coordinators, Personal Agents and Providers work collaboratively in the best interest of the person and their employment goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained our systems in ways we never thought possible. While VR and case management offices transitioned quickly to remote and virtual services, providers face critical staffing shortages. More than ever, the people we serve need us to work together and support them in their employment goals.

In our recent National Disability Employment Awareness webinar, we highlighted again how essential employment is for the people we serve. Multiple people with I/DD expressed how devastated they were when they had to stop working after the pandemic shut down many businesses and how excited they were to return to work. One panelist, referring to the time that he wasn't working, said, "At first it felt like fun vacation, but then I felt myself go a little mad because of not being able to contribute to society!"

We must be in this together and keep our central goal in mind: helping Oregonians with disabilities to obtain community employment and achieve their goals.

Please take care of yourself and thank you for the work you do every day to support Oregonians with I/DD.

Sincerely,

Lilia Teninty
Director
Office of Developmental Disabilities Services

Keith Ozols
Director
Vocational Rehabilitation

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