



## 2014 Employment First Public Forums

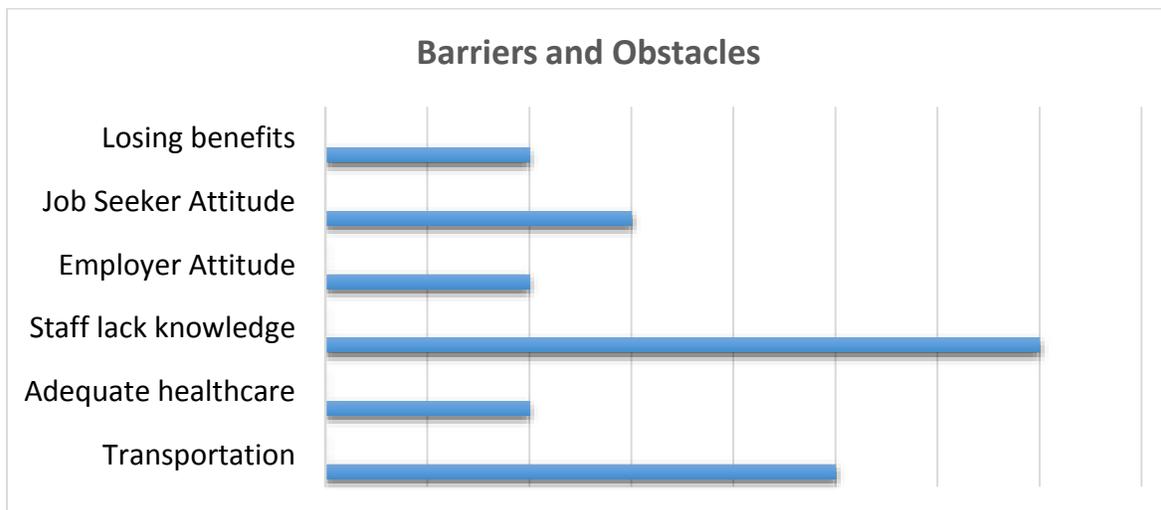
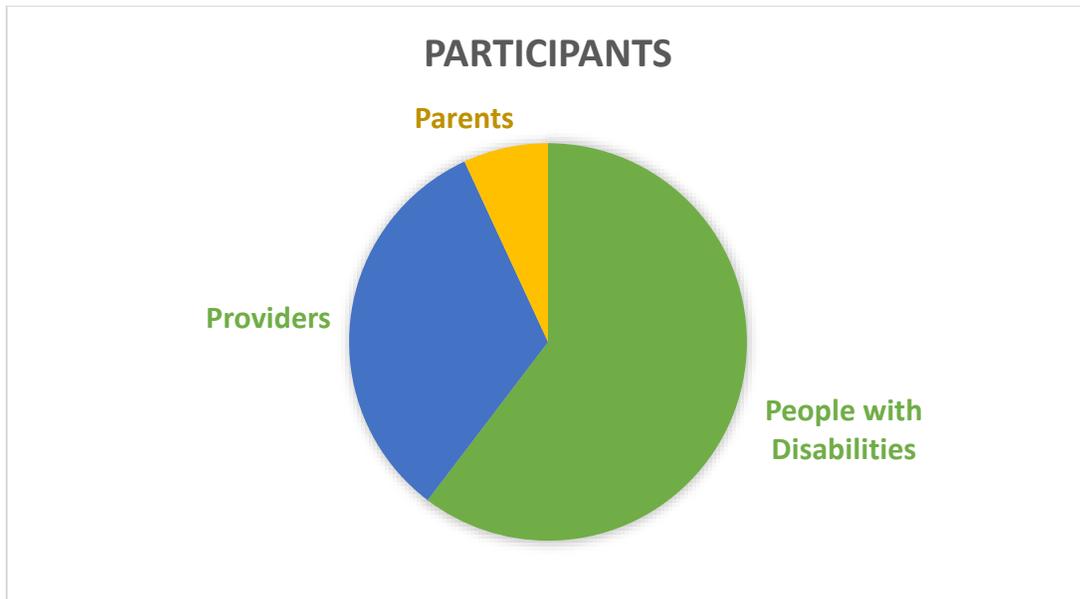
**Invitation to People with Disabilities and Others to Provide Input  
on Barriers to Employment and Employment Services in Idaho**

**Report Presented May 22, 2014**

Local forums conducted by Noll Garcia working with  
the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities



## Summary of Input



### Barriers and Obstacles Mentioned

- Untrained, unprofessional employment support staff (job coaches)
- Transportation
- Attitude of job seeker
- Attitude of employer, worried about cost of accommodations
- Losing benefits – SSI and Medicaid
- Adequate healthcare and support for physical and mental health needs
- Finding a Job
- Keeping hours – job hours cut back
- Keeping hours after job coaching ends
- People don't know about services available
- Interviews are difficult

- Stuck in job training programs – don't get hired from there
- Attitude of parent/family and support team
- Client fear of unknown, change to daily life/schedule
- Lack of employment support professionals in rural areas
- Lack of funding for services, waitlists
- Buildings/community not accessible
- Overqualified for jobs available/offered, pay too low
- Physical and mental health issues



### How Things Could Be Improved

- Increase the quality of employment support professionals
- More training for job coaches, requirements, certification
- Working with vocational rehabilitation, understanding VR services
- Work with employer and co-workers to provide natural support
- Job coaches advocating for individual in workplace, building communication
- More hands on learning in high school for employment
- Smoother transition – connection to adult services
- Cross reference between systems so individual knows all options and support available
- Transition straight to employment – don't refer to day services right out of school
- More benefits planning
- Increase employer awareness of abilities of worker with disabilities and low cost accommodations
- Award/recognize employers who do a good job
- Job fairs and workshops to build work skills

## **What Works Well**

- Having job coach support
- Volunteering
- Career exploration online and in community, job shadowing and volunteering to explore
- Job developer help with applications/interviews
- Strong support team
- School support to be ready for employment
- Some employers are willing to hire and provide accommodations
- Employer incentives, like tax credit

## Outline of Outreach Activities:

- Several E-mails sent to entire Employment First Consortium with flyers to distribute
- Collaborated with Individuals to set up meeting times and locations
  - Boise – Trina Balaloff (University of Idaho)
  - Idaho Falls – Dean and Heather (LIFE) and Lori Gentillon (DWI)
  - Pocatello – Dean and Heather (LIFE)
  - Moscow – Olivia Lebens, Jessica Smith, Nick Stallins, (CDHD)
  - Twin Falls – Cherree Hite
- Sent out and posted flyers for each forum (attached)
- I only received a few phone calls. A couple were asking for more details about the forum such as where it was located and what the person should bring. One phone call was with an individual who wanted me to mail her a survey. I have not yet received her completed survey in the mail.
- Boise - January 16, 2014 at 6:00pm
  - Located at the University of Idaho Water Center in room 150
  - 13 People in attendance
    - 5 people with disabilities
    - 6 service providers
    - 2 parents
- Idaho Falls – March 6 at 2:00pm
  - Located at the Living Independently for Everyone office in Idaho Falls
  - 22 people in attendance
    - 19 people with disabilities
    - 3 service providers
- Pocatello – March 7 at 2:00pm
  - Located at the Living Independently for Everyone office in Pocatello
  - 2 people in attendance
    - 1 person with a disability
    - 1 provider
- Moscow – March 29 at 11:00am
  - Located at the CDHD conference room
  - 11 people in attendance
    - 5 people with disabilities
    - 2 parents
    - 4 providers
- Twin Falls – April 11 at 2:00pm
  - Center for Independent Living
  - 5 people in attendance
    - 5 providers
- 1 Interview by Telephone, 1 Interview in person
- 1 Written survey received
- 4 emailed stories received (attached)

## Responses to Survey Questions at Forums and from Interviews

### Boise

#### **Barriers to finding and keeping jobs**

One person said that finding a job was the hard part. Keeping it isn't really difficult. He filled out a lot of applications but only got two call backs. He also went to job fairs. It was difficult to keep his job once his job coaching ended because of the transition from constant assistance and supervision to doing it all on his own. It has been hard for him to keep his hours because they keep getting cut.

Another person has worked at Ross for 6 years. She says that full time was too difficult so she had them cut it down to 1 day a week.

A person from Oregon was hired as a grocery clerk. He did not use employment services. People knew him and wanted to give him a job so it was easy for him to find.

Another concern is that the hard part was knowing what to expect. You fill out applications, then it's hard to get ready for the interview. He would practice questions and things, but he just never knew what would happen.

#### **Obstacles to going to work**

Everyone thinks transportation is a major barrier. They discussed how we need more routes and they need to be more flexible. They also think express buses would be very helpful. It was mentioned that it is difficult to fill out the paperwork for access but if they had help, it would be good.

#### **Things that currently work well**

The job developer teaches how to fill out applications, do assessments, and prepare for interviews. They did a good job going to the interviews with him to help him where needed.

One person said that one of his job coaches was extremely helpful. She let him know when he was "off his game" and worked hard to help him understand how to get a job.

#### **Things that could be better**

One complaint is that some job coaches left early, were pushy or negative, and just used the time to chat. Several of them lacked professionalism. Having a consistent person is important to getting the best work done. Fill-ins don't know him well enough and were usually not very good. There needs to be a way to make sure the employment specialist is compatible with the person they are serving.

The group then got interested in what training Job coaches get. If they are required to have training, then they are not getting enough of it. Job coaches need to be trained on different disabilities and how those affect the work environment. They also need to get to know each individual person they work with so they can best help them. There should be training on professionalism and how to conduct themselves in public.

There needs to be cross referral between systems. If there are options for a person that might be helpful, even if they are elsewhere, that person should be informed about them. He wants to know ALL his options.

There will be discrimination by employers. All employment specialists need to be advocates for the people they serve. They should show how the employer would benefit by hiring the individual and not focus on the disability.

The person from Oregon is from a small community. He was hired by people who knew him. He had no job coach or anything. The company didn't bother to make the training accessible to him or give him any extra help to figure things out. He just kind of went in and did his own thing. Finally a coworker started giving him specific tasks and explaining how to do them. That was just what he needed. The

store did not see what he could and couldn't do. He was more of a token to them. He needed the extra help his coworker gave him. His dad said it was important to realize that his son didn't just need training on how to do the work, he needed training on how to take a break, how to act socially at work, how to clock in and out, and so on.

## **Idaho Falls**

### **Barriers to finding and keeping jobs**

Almost everyone in the room said they wanted a job in the community. One respondent said that she needed money to start up a restaurant. Without the start up money, she won't have a job. Another girl said that she tried a few jobs in the community, but she didn't understand how to do her jobs, so they didn't work out.

Attitude was talked about as a barrier in different ways. The job seeker's attitude can be a barrier if they are negative and don't get along with others. They need to have patience because it takes time. The support team's attitude is key. One girl said that her mom didn't think she was ready to get a job even though she wanted one. The employer's attitude is the other big barrier. They said that employers don't want to hire people with disabilities because they don't see the abilities. They also aren't willing to provide assistive technology, accommodations, or extra help.

### **Obstacles to going to work**

Transportation is a major barrier to going to work. They can't even find a job without transportation. Taxis are too expensive and buses don't run on weekends. Family has provided transportation, but has other things going on. They would like to see more bus routes. They also need to know how to use the buses correctly. The way the buses operate recently changed in Idaho Falls so the people who use them need to be re-trained.

### **Things that currently work well**

Job coaches help to learn the right and wrong way to do things as well as teach new skills. It is also good to have help filling out applications and going to interviews. High school work experience was also helpful.

It's good to know that if one job doesn't work out, you can go back to a developmental workshop or have help getting a new job.

Good ways to find jobs include visiting the community and asking about jobs, researching on the internet, volunteering, and job shadowing. Remember that the more you participate and give specific preferences, the better your job coach will be able to help you.

### **Things that could be better**

Job coaching was helpful but some felt that they didn't get enough time with their job coaches to be successful. It would also be helpful to have more hands on and visual learning in high school, including work experience. The transition needs to be smoother from high school to employment. The support network shouldn't depend on the day program. They should go straight to work.

## Pocatello

### **Barriers to finding and keeping jobs**

A big concern here is losing SSI and Medicaid benefits. This is a concern for both parents and those receiving benefits. Benefits planning would help people understand how working will affect their benefits and make more educated decisions based on that information.

The job market is a barrier. There are complaints that people are overqualified for the jobs that are available and that those jobs don't pay enough money. Many buildings around town are not accessible which takes several employment options off the table. Several employers also have the attitude that if they hire someone with a disability, they will have to put a lot of time and money into accommodations. They are worried that this will cost a lot of money.

### **Obstacles to going to work**

Lack of quality transportation makes it difficult to get to and from work. The bus routes are good, but they only run during the day and the timing is difficult. The bus does not run outside the city so it is not helpful to those in rural areas.

Both physical and mental health issues make it difficult to work consistently. Healthcare needs to be in place and effective in order to keep a person healthy enough to be employed

### **Things that currently work well**

There was no discussion on this topic

### **Things that could be better**

They would like to see more benefits planning offered in their area so people understand how working affects their benefits. Employers need to be better educated that accommodations aren't necessarily expensive. They need be taught to see the abilities of the person they interview rather than the disabilities. Pocatello also needs to be a more accessible town in order for the people there to be successful.

## Moscow

### **Barriers to finding and keeping jobs**

The first lady to speak said that her daughter needed help with job development. The high school did a great job getting things set up for her daughter and preparing her for employment, but once she graduated it was difficult to find help. "VR wanted nothing to do with her" so now she's on her own. She needs long term supports once she finds a job, but can't even get help finding it.

The second person spoke for her father who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He lost his job because they said he needed "too much babysitting." He basically needed to be retrained every day. He doesn't like not being able to provide for his family, but no one ever told him about the services available to him. They just gave him a check to live off of. One of the barriers is lack of education about the services available.

Another barrier that was brought up is the fact that if someone works too much, they lose their SSI benefits. They would like to see more localized benefits planning and education on how that equation works so they know what their options are. It was also brought up that Medicaid benefits decrease when more money is earned. This is seen as a huge barrier. They believe the Medicaid benefits should not change based on income.

They mentioned that there are great job training programs in the area, but that few people get hired out of those training programs so there are rarely new openings in the programs.

## **Obstacles to going to work**

Transportation is the major barrier to keeping jobs. The public transportation only runs during the day, but most of the part time jobs are in the evening. One person complained that Medicaid will not pay for transportation for work, they only pay for medically necessary transportation. There is a program that provides free bus rides, but the application is really long and complicated.

One girl felt as though she had to try extra hard to prove herself at her job because she had a disability. She felt as though she was under extra scrutiny and couldn't make a mistake.

## **Things that currently work well**

According to one person, the school did a great job at getting her daughter ready for employment. They had great job development services and got her lined up with volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering and networking work very well when it comes to finding jobs. Having a strong and dedicated support team is key to being successful.

Employment specialists can be very helpful. One example is a person who started out with a very high level of support from a job coach. As he learned the job and could be more independent with it, he received less and less support from the job coach. Now, the job coach simply comes at the end of his shift and double checks to make sure this individual completed his job for the day.

## **Things that could be better**

This group had a lot of suggestions when it comes to employment specialists. They believe they are sometimes over helpful and sometimes not helpful at all. They suggest that the employment specialists receive more training about their job as well as how to work with those with different abilities and how to be professional. There should be certifications to become an employment specialist. They would also like to see more selective hiring practices and more selective matching of employment specialists with the clients. There needs to be more oversight and accountability to ensure quality services are being given. There need to be incentives to employment specialists when they successfully place and train their client and transition them to natural supports. There is currently a disincentive for this because if an employment specialist is successful, they will no longer be needed and therefore no longer receive income from that person. Employment specialists need to understand that they are there to help their client, not themselves. The group thinks that employment specialists need higher wages and full benefits so that the well qualified employment specialists can keep this as a career that will support them and not just a part time job. The employment services need to be very individualized and should be helping their clients to learn networking to find jobs and setting up natural supports on the job.

Transition from high school needs to run smoothly in order to be successful. All the supports needed should be in place before graduation.

The group would like to see job fairs to help network, workshops to help build skills, and a workshop to help discover existing skills to put on a resume.

One suggestion is that there should be training available for a representative from different companies to learn how to support people with disabilities in the work place. This way, if a company wants to hire a person with a disability, they are better equipped to help that person succeed at their job without as much extra support from employment specialists.

Another suggestion is that employers who go out of their way to support those who need a little extra help are recognized and rewarded somehow for going the extra mile. One idea was to create a list of these employers so that they get recognition. This will give incentive for other employers to step up and help out a bit more.

## Twin Falls

### **Barriers to finding and keeping jobs**

This group was made up of providers only. They say that they don't have the resources to help those who need it most. Services are limited because of budget cuts so the wait lists are horrendous. It is very difficult to access the programs. Many individuals lose get discouraged because the process to sign up for these services is very slow and time consuming.

A person needs to be in good health physically and mentally in order to be successful in the workplace. This requires good healthcare.

A big barrier for their clients is fear of the unknown. They are scared to change from their known routine to go to something unknown that could be better or worse.

### **Obstacles to going to work**

Lack of funding for extended employment services makes it difficult for some to keep a job. Lack of transportation also plays a big part. This area is working on getting a better public transportation system. Currently there is an option for unlimited transportation for \$120 a month. \$50 of that is paid by another agency for those who have disabilities.

### **Things that currently work well**

There is an opportunity tax credit that employers can take advantage of if they hire people with disabilities. This can work as an extra incentive to employers.

They told a story of a person they know who is visually impaired. This person wanted to be a graphics designer. This person got the training needed and an employer hired him. The employer got him the biggest computer screen he could find and the new employee sits with his face against the screen. This person is able to do the job they want because the employer was willing to work with him.

### **Things that could be better**

There needs to be more human supports on the job who can help with reminders, organization, etc. Natural supports tend to work best.

Job coaching is unregulated. Different agencies have their own qualifications. This needs to be standardized to ensure everyone gets the same quality services. On the self-direction program, somebody needs to ensure that qualified job coaches are hired. Clients need to know that if they aren't satisfied with their services, they have the right to find someone else.

Companies need to be educated on disability issues. They need to be shown the potential outcome if they hire a person with a disability rather than the potential problems. It was suggested that we could have employers come to an open house to educate them and mingle with potential employees.

The bottom line is time is money. Employers want people who will benefit their company. We must show employers that the benefits of hiring a person outweigh the costs.

## Mailed in Survey Answers

**1. Has it been hard for you to find or keep a job? Can you tell us why?**

No, it was easy. (My supervisors) all helped me focus and not talk during work time. They instructed me.

**2. Are there things that stop you from working? What are those things?**

Yes, I cry and can't concentrate sometimes and get "pissed off" and talk to myself instead of following instructions.

**3. What kinds of support to you need, or have you used to find and keep a job?**

Job developer, job coach, High school work experience, mentor, coworkers, boss/supervisor at job, and Developmental Therapy. I need a job coach to find me another, better job like in a clothing store.

**4. If you have used employment services, what about those services worked well for you?**

Never used the services of Idaho Employment

**5. What would you change to make it easier to get and keep a job?**

I would need to change my attitude and behaviors.

**6. What else do we need to know about people with disabilities getting a job?**

I need help to listen to instructions and directions. I need help following directions

## Stories that were E-mailed to Me

**Story #1** I recently received an email flyer concerning the upcoming Idaho Employment First Public Forum and your organization's interest in hearing from individuals with disabilities regarding their personal employment issues. While I am not an individual with a disability, my son is, so I am writing this on his behalf.

My son, is 44 years of age and has Developmental Auditory Aphasia, a severe language processing disability, and also has some restriction to the use of his left arm and hand. Both conditions are permanent and a result of birth trauma. Of the two, his language-processing difference is the primary barrier to securing employment as well as to his growth and development on the job in recognition of his generally overlooked potential.

He is a high school graduate and, with some natural supports, has lived independently for most of his adult life. He owns and drives his own vehicle, has always participated in "mainstream" activities, and not long ago became a married man. He makes good use of his smart phone and a laptop and, in addition to email and texting, is comfortable with several different technology-based modes of communication such as Video-Relay and Skype. His abilities allow him to thrive in the community, but have always been far from fully explored in the work environment.

Because of his primary disability, Developmental Aphasia, he communicates most effectively with sign language, American Sign Language (ASL) for the most part. Over the course of roughly 25 years, his employment needs were addressed by four different job service organizations, all of which were very aware that his primary barrier to employment was communication. All of which were very aware that he communicated largely via sign language and that any teaching/learning process would require the same, which is why he was placed in the programs for the hearing impaired throughout his entire public school experience in spite of the fact that his need was the result of a processing difference rather than a hearing loss. And yet, of the host of job developers and job coaches that were assigned to support his employment needs, not one, not even one of them had any signing skill beyond rudimentary finger-spelling.

I'm guessing that by now you have identified the issue I am attempting to present with this writing. Over the years, many years, I repeatedly posed this question: "Why is it that an individual who lives independently in the community, balances his own monthly budget, owns and drives a vehicle, participates in athletics and social events, independently makes appropriate and productive use of technology and has a work ethic that would be appreciated by any employer, relegated to job after job after job collecting grocery carts, picking up trash in a parking lot, washing dishes, and cleaning toilets? The answer is clear and simple, because there are no Job Developers or Job Coaches available that possess signing skills, the very tool that would allow them to teach/train my son the task performance necessary to acquire and maintain a job that is commensurate with his potential. Of course there was the possibility that an ASL interpreter could have been hired to work alongside him and his Job Coach, but in a work setting that would be a bit excessive. Funding alone would be an issue. The bottom line with all of this then is that regardless of the best intentions of his job service providers, they all missed the mark, the singularly most important mark.

I would venture to guess that most Job Developers and Job Coaches are skilled and dedicated individuals, but they do not all possess the same talents. Some are hired because they work well with the cognitively impaired, others because they work well with the emotionally disturbed, others because they work well with the blind, and still others because they work well with the physically exceptional. Individual clients require coaches with specific skill-sets including those individuals challenged by a severe language processing disability, such as my son. For him, skill in American Sign Language could have made a world of difference in the likelihood of approaching his potential in the vocational world.

When a client's primary barrier to full and appropriate employment is a language issue, that should also be the primary focus of barrier dissolution. If the client's native language is Spanish, chances are that a

bi-lingual Job coach would be hired and assigned. Likewise, if a client's "native" language is Signed English or American Sign Language, a job coach with the appropriate signing skills should be hired and assigned. However, if what I have been told for many years is, indeed, a fact, one is not to be found.

And there you have it, a story of good people trying to do good things for a good man . . . but who just simply do not have access to the necessary tools. And that, to me, as a parent and an Exceptional Child Educator (retired), seems like a training need that should be worthy of attention from the Idaho Employment First Consortium.

**Story #2** Hello

I have a Certified Family Home and have had several residents who have developmental disabilities over the years I have been doing this.

I was very excited for my client when I read your purpose for the forum. My client is 41 and has worked at part-time jobs for much of her adult life. Her service coordinators and other service providers have encouraged her to train and apply for better jobs, but she has stated that she is not interested and says she is very content doing janitorial work and low-level office work like shredding papers.

As her caregiver for over seven years, I truly believe that were she given training as a matter of course (without a big buildup that would frighten her off), my client would do well in a job with more challenges.

Another caregiver, who also has a Certified Family Home, points out that it would be very helpful if there were a job coach stationed up here in Bonners Ferry. She said that in the past she has tried to get job coaches at DD agencies as close as Sandpoint to come here and they refused.

**Story #3** I have been reading about different programs around the country that are designed to support opportunities for inclusive employment for students with disabilities in the workplace and am always amazed. I think the general culture in Moscow would support the idea of inclusive employment for all, yet limited opportunities exist. From my perspective, I feel like being able to see programs that have been successful or hearing from people who have been able to develop such programs would be tremendous. I think in order to promote this idea, advocates need better to be better prepared, better trained, and have more tools to promote a change in the culture. Or, maybe just I need more of these. I can go in to a business and talk to people in the community, but I feel like I need more support to "sell" the idea of inclusive employment for all. I need to have a better idea of what a successful program "looks like" to help promote the idea.

**Story #4** Working with Vocational Rehab has been extremely frustrating and not the best experience when working with someone who has disabilities.

When we were referred to VR, it was to see about further education for my son or looking at a career opportunity they might be able to help direct my son into for a lifetime of self support and improvement. After talking to the VR representative my son decided he would like to see about getting more education and if college would be a good fit or avenue for him to get a better education with VR's help and assistance. When my son did get his first appointment with the VR counselor he was told to find something that interested him and then find out what courses were needed to get his bachelor's degree in this field. Also needed to find out if there was a demand for that job now and would there be a demand for it in 4 years when he would finish his educational program. We left that day and my son had some homework items to look into and clarify before VR could help us with his educational program.

My son did the homework asked of him and came back with what he thought were adequate answers for the counselor and the counselor said that my son needed to declare a major and have the appropriate classes set up to work towards that degree. The VR counselor did say that the major could be changed later if needed, but that the counselor and my son needed to agree on one before proceeding with the VR program. The other problem was that the VR program would only help if they student was taking a full student class load. If the person with the disability has some question about their ability or the load is too great for them, is this not setting up failure for the participant and the VR program? Does the VR program have testing or aptitude development tests that might be able to be taken beforehand to determine if the student can handle the workload or time management stress?

After the second appointment my son had found that the VR program could not assist him currently because he was not taking enough credits and he was already using the Pell grant program. If there was something that the Pell grant program would not cover in his expenditures then he might be able to get some assistance from VR. It was decided with the VR counselor and my son to close out his active case and have my son contact VR again if he thought they might be able to assist him sometime in the future. The VR counselor explained they could not keep cases open without any active action taking place and they asked to close out my son's case as he was already going to school and using a Pell grant for his education and the VR team didn't seem to be able to assist him any further at this time.

We did go back to the VR staff after my son completed more classes and asked what was needed to get his case activated again after it had been closed out and were told that because he still had the disabilities he initially was diagnosed with earlier we should be able to have his case reopened within a few weeks. In truth it took almost a month to six weeks and if we had really needed the VR assistance to get him enrolled in school it would have been too late and most likely would have forced him to enroll in the next semester of school, not the current one he was already signed up for and had classes scheduled.

As we used the VR folks and their services it became apparent they try to customize their services for most of their clients and that is very commendable. But with our past experience's I would make some suggestions for them to consider in the future when working with their clients.

Have an aptitude test that has been used by other state services to help clients determine what areas of education or vocation would be the best fit and use for the client. (If the client wants to do a job or vocation they are not suited for/or would not be a good fit for them and would frustrate them greatly, why put the effort and expense in having them try it and fail or get very frustrated.)

VR has been assisting folks for a long time, why not have lists of degrees or classes that are needed to help the customers know what is within their goals? (VR kept asking for a specific degree and wouldn't want the client to get a general degree to make the client more marketable to the job market.)

The client is coming to the VR staff for assistance and guidance on how to get better prepared for a working job with a successful outcome, help the client and give them clear guidelines of what the VR staff needs from them. Having the client do research on jobs, future job availability, and pay range is a little like putting the cart before the horse....get the education for a good job, make sure you can do the classes and then look at a degree. Most of the first 2 years of the clients classes would be core classes and just about all of the students would need to complete them before making a clear degree choice and path known, concentrate on helping the clients get into school and then adjusted to the new routine. If the client is not going to be successful in school, give them a list of vocational jobs that are in the area and see if a good match can be found and work from that point. Not all clients will be good students and higher education is not a great choice for them.

One of the other points that VR needs to consider is that making new appointments for their clients is not always easy if someone has a caregiver or someone that needs to come to the meetings with them. It is not always easy for caregivers and other support folks to get time off or a quick

turnaround for appointments. If someone is a caregiver or support person, they are using time and gas to get their client to the meetings and generally would stop if the meetings are not productive from the clients point of view and if the VR folks keep asking for more information from the client to research and then come back for a follow up meeting, it seems that somewhere along the way, the case worker or client are not on the same page and the outcome will be less than successful. (I know that case workers probably don't want to use their e-mails, but sometimes just e-mailing a client on "Are there any questions on what we talked about last week." Or "How is your research going and are you finding the information you need?" Would be very helpful and keep them in touch with the client and not using the VR persons time needlessly or the clients.

The bottom line is while VR does help some people, they didn't help us or even try. And that is very frustrating to experience and watch as a parent. And it doesn't show my son anything good about the program. So it isn't a service that we recommend at all.

### **Summary of Public Input:**

My parting thoughts on being the Self Advocate Input Coordinator for the Idaho Employment first consortium are that I talked to self-advocates, I talked to providers, I talked to parents, and I interacted with caregivers and the reoccurring themes included everything from transportation and getting the individual to and from their employment. Caregivers and parents and service providers in some cases potentially discourage them from pursuing their employment because what if it affects your disability insurance or we have our own family things? So even though there are providers, it might be difficult for your family to get you to and from your employment.

One forum, I definitely felt like we heard less from the self advocates and more from the service providers because, in my mind, the service provider kind of took the role that he was going to help prime the pump on getting information from the participants. The individual took a lot of time explaining to one particular self-advocate about how the vocational system works, so there was a lot of redirecting and bringing the conversation back to employment.

One participant that sticks out in my mind shared with us that she had a strong desire to be employed but she was frequently told by her mom and caregiver that she didn't have the employment skills necessary to get a job. She was frequently discouraged to be employed. She became more comfortable throughout the forum participating in the conversation and realizing that she did have some unique abilities and we were payment able to help her build her self-confidence throughout the conversation.

I'm just glad I was able to bring awareness to self-advocates and various group members that there are services like employment planners that can assist them in making sure their benefits are not interrupted. Whether it's myself or someone else, I would like to see awareness continuously brought to individuals about what their employment options are and how they can stay protected from losing their benefits. I want to see someone to support them in losing their fears about going to work. By losing their fears, I think I mean people are there to educate them about what their different options are. Whether it's myself or someone else, I would like to see continuing education that will help them realize that they do have some unique abilities even though maybe they have been told all of their lives that for whatever reason employment for them may not be a good idea. The more awareness we're able to bring and the more we're able to assist people in letting go of their fears and becoming employed. There needs to be a continuing education process regardless of if it's done by myself or another private contractor. I would hate to see that education piece get lost. That is my final thoughts on supporting the employment efforts of the Council on developmental disabilities. ~ Noll Garcia