

Employment First means that having a job in the community should be what we expect and plan for people with developmental, intellectual, and other disabilities. It is a national movement and many states have changed their policies, services, and systems to align with Employment First principles.

Right now in Idaho 67.4% of working-age adults (16-64) are employed compared to only 24.8% of working-age adults who have an intellectual disability. Many people with disabilities who want to work are not able to for various reasons including public and employer misperception about the talents and skills of people who have disabilities and what they can bring to increase their bottom line. Other barriers include the time needed to do person-centered planning and community-specific job development to make a good job match; inadequate access to training and support needed to learn job tasks and be successful in the workplace, and lack of information about work incentives and benefits planning.

The Idaho Employment First Consortium was established and is supported by the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities for the purpose of improving how employment services and systems work in Idaho so that people with developmental disabilities are able to reach their career goals. It includes representatives from state agencies, advocacy organizations, service providers, parents, and self-advocates. Seventeen Consortium members met for the first time in April 2012 and continue to meet monthly on an ongoing basis. The group has finalized an Employment First message with defined common values and a vision for our state:

“All Idahoans with disabilities have the right and responsibility to work and contribute to their community.”

A Positive Vision for Idaho

- All communities expect people with disabilities to work
- Everyone can work and there is work for everyone
- Full employment results in higher quality of life and strong economy for Idaho
- People have equal opportunity for meaningful work and career growth and...
 - ...are supported and accommodated in the workplace
 - ...are empowered to contribute to their community and the community values that contribution
 - ...have the opportunity for advancement, responsibility, and a fair/equal wage
 - ...have the opportunity, training, and support to realize financial self-sufficiency

Working Towards a Better Future: The Consortium has completed an outcome-driven strategic plan that includes gathering information from Idaho systems and services, public awareness and educational activities, identifying policy supporters, and forming self-advocate and employer advisory groups.

Consortium members are committed to work together towards these **objectives**:

- Increase in the number of individuals with developmental disabilities working in community employment
- Increase in the number of employers hiring individuals with disabilities
- The state of Idaho will officially adopt and support, through policies and funding, an Employment First philosophy
- Increase the employment rate of young adults with disabilities completing high school
- Increase in the number of individuals using work incentives
- Increase in the number of employers creating internships and mentorships

Many **strategies** will be used to achieve these outcomes some of which include:

- Create or re-align policies that support individual funding and the provision of services that support integrated community employment
- Identify data collection needs and improve processes as needed
- Educate the community
- Provide training on best practice for supporting community employment
- Build awareness with employers on the value of a diverse workforce
- Ensure employment goals are included in transition planning for youth
- Implement or enhance customized employment practices
- Promote self-employment opportunities

We will be sharing reports and recommendations with the legislature for policy improvement and will continue to work with agency administrators, service providers, schools, families, and most importantly, employers and individuals with disabilities, so that more people are able to work at local businesses, earn a living wage, and contribute to their communities.