



EXPECT EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE
REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR



BILL LEE
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TENNESSEE

A NOTE FROM **GOVERNOR BILL LEE**

Tennessee is experiencing a time of unprecedented job and economic growth, and we are working to make sure that all Tennesseans have the opportunity to take advantage of this success. Tennesseans with disabilities have incredibly valuable contributions to make to our state's thriving economy, and it's my hope that we continue to find ways to welcome them to the workforce.

The public-private partnership through the Employment First Task Force is an important component to ensuring these opportunities exist. We know that state government cannot achieve success alone, and we are grateful to have the support and partnership of outstanding organizations from across the state. I'm proud of how we have worked to focus our programs and initiatives for people with disabilities on employment and independence.

As a former business owner, I've witnessed firsthand how hiring a person with a disability can contribute more than a high-quality work product and a positive attitude. Studies show that people with disabilities spur higher productivity and morale as a whole. I'm pleased that so many businesses in Tennessee have already taken the step to include people with disabilities in their workplaces. But there's room to do more, and I want to challenge everyone to see how we can continue to make progress and ensure people with disabilities are a part of our growing workforce.

I look forward to working together on this important effort for years to come.

Sincerely,

Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee

EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Partner Agencies

Department of
**Intellectual &
Developmental Disabilities**

Department of
**Labor & Workforce
Development**

Department of
Human Services

Department of
Education

Division of
TennCare

Department of
**Mental Health &
Substance Abuse Services**

Council on
Developmental Disabilities

Department of
**Economic &
Community Development**

Department of
Health

 VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER

 **DISABILITY
RIGHTS TN**


The Arc.
Tennessee

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EMPLOYMENT FIRST
STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE ORDER
NO. 28

EMPLOYMENT FIRST
TASK FORCE MEMBERS

TASK FORCE
WORKGROUP PARTICIPANTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Closing the gap that exists between the employment rate for people with disabilities and those without is the overall goal for the task force.”

The 2019 Expect Employment Report, the sixth such report, is the first progress report to Gov. Bill Lee on the work of the Employment First Task Force. The task force is thankful to Gov. Lee for his leadership and vision for ensuring people with disabilities are a valued part of Tennessee’s workforce and looks forward to continuing to work in support of his goals throughout his administration.

This year marked a transition for the task force, as this reporting year spans two administrations. In 2013, former Gov. Bill Haslam signed Executive Order No. 28, which named Tennessee as an Employment First state and created the Employment First Task Force. This task force was charged with identifying barriers to employment for people with disabilities and bringing together state agencies to align resources and maximize funding to improve outcomes for people with disabilities. This work continues with the support of Gov. Lee’s administration.

The Employment First Task Force comprises people with disabilities, their families, state agencies who provide supports for people with disabilities, advocacy groups, providers, universities, and other public and private stakeholders. The task force works together to identify strategies that are effective and monitors progress to improve employment for people with disabilities, including intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities, and people with behavioral health diagnoses, including mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and co-occurring disorders.

Closing the gap that exists between the employment rate for people with disabilities and those without is the overall goal for the task force. Work towards this goal is outlined in a strategic plan, with five goals and various outcomes to achieve those goals.

This year’s report demonstrates progress on all five goals in the strategic plan, as well as identifying areas where improvements are still needed. Furthermore, the report includes stories from the people who have benefitted from the programs, strategies, and policies created with the partnership of the task force. These people include both transition-age youth and older adults who are now finding opportunities for employment because of increased self-advocacy and raised expectations throughout the state.

In support of Gov. Lee’s focus on rural areas of the state, these stories show how the work of this task force is touching all corners of the state, including rural counties. Stories feature successes in Obion and Bledsoe counties, as well as more populous areas in Nashville and Kingsport.

The task force is grateful to Gov. Lee’s continued vision for employment of people with disabilities. We look forward to showcasing the excellent work ongoing in this state and working together to address the barriers that still exist.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE HISTORY @ A GLANCE

2013

Executive Order No. 28 signed by Gov. Haslam

Employment First Task Force Includes Six State Agencies and the Council on Developmental Disabilities

Task Force Meets for the First Time

First Strategic Plan Created

2014

First Expect Employment Report Presented to Gov. Haslam

2015

First Memorandum of Understanding signed focused on Transitioning Youth

Second Expect Employment Report Presented to Gov. Haslam

2016

Employment First Task Force Strategic Plan Updated

Third Expect Employment Report Presented to Gov. Haslam

2017

Fourth Expect Employment Report Presented to Gov. Haslam

2018

Statewide Employment Goal Developed

MOU on Transitioning Youth Revised

Fifth Expect Employment Report Presented to Gov. Haslam

2019

Employment First Task Force Now Includes Eight State Agencies and the Council on Developmental Disabilities

GOAL ONE

Align Service Delivery Systems and Strengthen Coordination to Increase Employment Opportunities for Tennesseans with Disabilities

KEYS TO PROGRESS

- Unifying data to drive progress on a common employment goal
- Maintaining MOUs to streamline services and maximize resources
- Expanding and developing programs to support employment
- Abandoning silos and collaborating through a public-private partnership to expand employment
- Participating for 8 years in federal Employment First initiative has improved coordination and outcomes

Outcome 1: Collect, analyze and integrate employment data of people with disabilities.

2019 Focus: Unifying Tennessee's employment data across multiple agencies

The collection of data related to employment goals and outcomes continues to take place in all of the state agencies that participate on the Employment First Task Force. Data is a key element in allowing agencies to understand the landscape, identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and guide policy and resource decisions. In Tennessee and also nationally, the challenge is finding a common way to measure progress toward the overarching goal. Employment data points include provider reporting on employment rates, hours worked, and average wages for persons served in specific programs such as the Employment and Community First CHOICES Program and the 1915c waivers, operated by the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). It also includes tracking rates of employment outcomes for programs such as the Individual Placement and Support Program (IPS), Project SEARCH, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Many key data points from the state agencies are maintained on a data dashboard on the TennesseeWorks website, TennesseeWorks.org. Not only is this data important for the specific state agency that collects that data, but it may also be used to plan for future service needs across agencies. For instance, data on students with disabilities exiting the school system and their engagement rates post-transition can be used to identify the numbers of students who may need support from other adult disability programs and assist those programs in planning for future resources and utilization.

Our solution? **CLOSE THE GAP**

The primary focus of the Employment First Task Force over the past year has been to unify these various data points and identify a statewide employment goal. Tennessee is one of the only states to set a common goal across so many partnering agencies. The identified employment rate as defined by the United States Department of Labor for persons with disabilities is 33.3 percent. The rate for people without disabilities is 77.5 percent. The Employment First Task Force is aiming to reduce that gap by 5 percent by 2023 through the collaboration of state agencies and private partnerships. This goal is monitored routinely in conjunction with TennesseeWorks and the Employment Roundtable, and we will update progress in future Expect Employment reports.

EMPLOYMENT *for* PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

TENNESSEE STATEWIDE
EMPLOYMENT GOAL:
REDUCE THE
EMPLOYMENT GAP

5%
BY 2023

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

Monitors progress towards the strategic plan/goals and delivers the annual Expect Employment Report to the Governor.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017 for ages 18-64.

PERSONS WITH
ANY DISABILITY

33.3%

GAP of
44.2%

77.5%

PERSONS WITH
NO DISABILITY

GOALS

1. ALIGN SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND STRENGTHEN COORDINATION TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES
2. BUILD SHARED COMMUNITY COMMITMENT TO EMPLOYMENT FIRST
3. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS THAT HIRE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
4. MAKE TENNESSEE STATE GOVERNMENT A MODEL EMPLOYER OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
5. PREPARE STUDENTS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS

TENNESSEEWORKS PARTNERSHIP

Council on Developmental Disabilities
Department of Children's Services
Department of Education
Department of Health
Department of Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation
Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services

Division of TennCare
Department of Treasury
Department of Labor & Workforce Development
Department of Economic & Community Development
Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
Disability Rights Tennessee
UT-Boling Center

Self-advocates
Family members

Provider agencies
Employers

The Arc Tennessee

Want to learn more about our efforts? Visit www.tennesseeworks.org

GOAL ONE

Align Service Delivery Systems and Strengthen Coordination to Increase Employment Opportunities for Tennesseans with Disabilities

Outcome: Assess the impact of interagency MOUs that promote employment for people with disabilities

2019 Focus: Real partnerships for progress

Since Executive Order No. 28 was signed in 2013, the state agencies participating in the Employment First Task Force have worked to better align and streamline delivery of services to people with disabilities. Since programs often involve more than one state agency, those agencies have developed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to better outline the expectations, resources, and outcomes to ensure available resources are maximized and minimize duplication of efforts. Many of the programs that have been launched through these MOUs are seeing successful employment outcomes that might not have been possible without collaboration.

Many state agencies involved in providing supports to people with disabilities of all ages currently participate in an MOU to streamline the provision of supports for youth transitioning out of high school. Originally signed in 2014 to outline the roles and responsibilities for state agencies as youth transition to employment, the MOU was revised in 2018 to reflect changes in the service delivery system statewide and add partner agencies.

In addition, MOUs currently exist between the Department of Human Services' Vocational Rehabilitation program and multiple state agencies who leverage VR to support its employment initiatives including:

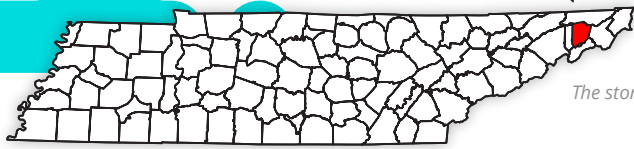
- MOU on Transitioning Youth
- The Division of TennCare and VR for the Employment and Community First CHOICES program
- The Department of Education and VR for Pre-Employment Transition Services
- The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and VR for employment of persons served in the 1915(c) waivers
- The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuses Services (DMHSAS) for the Individual Placement and Support Program

2019 Focus: Using evidence-based practice through the Individual Placement and Support Program

Data shows that nationwide, two-thirds of people with serious mental illness want to work, but only 15 percent are employed. The Individual Placement and Support Program (IPS) is a model of supported employment that has been used successfully across the nation to help people with behavioral health disorders, including mental illness, substance use, and co-occurring conditions, obtain competitive integrated employment. This program is provided in 37 counties across Tennessee through 14 IPS supported employment providers. This growth includes serving 27 rural counties, including 4 of the 15 distressed counties. Through this program, people have obtained a variety of jobs from nursing and lifeguards to warehouse workers.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

WASHINGTON COUNTY, TN



meet
JOSEPH



The stories featured in this report are those of real Tennesseans and their journey to reaching their employment goals.

Progress through Individual Placement and Support

Employment is a journey to increased independence in so many ways. Joseph Ryan's journey started a little more than a year ago when he first expressed interest in getting a job. At the time, he frequently used crisis services and was isolating himself from others. Knowing self-confidence was an issue, that's where Joseph and his employment specialist, Brittany Ledford, started.

The first position Ryan attained through the IPS Supported Employment program at Frontier Health was working part-time unloading the stock truck at Dunkin Donuts in Jonesborough. After several months of hard work both personally and professionally, Joseph was able to increase his hours and learn new positions.

"This job unlocked so many doors for Joseph. He started saving money for a car and ended up saving enough money to reach his goal. That led to a new goal of moving out on his own," said employment specialist Brittany Ledford.

The next step in Ryan's journey was another job, working at Walgreens in the pharmacy. It meant a step up in pay and new job responsibilities, but Joseph's drive and determination led him to exceed expectations there too. Joseph grew into a role as a pharmacy technician after going through the training program at Walgreens and learning the job. He always wanted a job that could become a career where he was able to grow, and Walgreens has become that job.

"Walgreens so far has been the best job I have ever had, and it makes me appreciate the people that have given me this opportunity. Much love to them," Ryan said.

"Joseph has made monumental progress in the IPS program. He has impacted and inspired me to continue to believe that given the right job with the right supports you have no limits to what you can achieve," said Ledford.

"Going through this program, it has given me hope," Ryan said.

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

2019 Focus: Using evidence-based practice through the Individual Placement and Support Program

In fiscal year 2019, IPS Supported Employment teams have served 983 people, 82 of which were transition-aged youth. Twenty-three percent of those served have worked in competitive integrated employment for 90 days or more. One of the goals of the state IPS community is to expand the availability of this service to all 95 counties in Tennessee.

In 2017, the DMHSAS and the Vocational Rehabilitation program through the Department of Human Services (DHS) signed an interagency agreement, which has further defined and strengthened the collaboration between the two agencies and their goal to expand IPS throughout the state. During the 4th Statewide IPS Conference in May 2019, DMHSAS Commissioner Marie Williams and DHS Commissioner Danielle W. Barnes both provided opening remarks that acknowledged the work of the IPS community and affirmed the partnership between the two agencies.

2019 Focus: Setting expectations and preparing for work in high school

As a part of the state plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), there has been an increased focus on engaging students and preparing them for transition at an earlier age. Both DHS/VR and the Department of Education, along with Local Education Agencies, are working together to ensure five pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) are made available to students starting at the age of 14:

- Job Exploration and Counseling
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Training and Education Opportunities
- Workplace Readiness Instruction
- Self-Advocacy Training

Students may choose any or all of them, and they are delivered through VR's contracted community rehabilitation providers (CRPs). Utilization of these services has increased exponentially over the past three years. During the 2016-17 fiscal year, 1,964 Pre-ETS services were provided to students across the state. That increased to more than 10,000 in the 2017-2018 school year. During the 2018-2019 school year, 42,616 pre-ETS were delivered, representing a 300 percent year-over-year increase.

In addition, the state has partnered with Vanderbilt University and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to develop a portal on the Transition Tennessee site that focuses specifically on Pre-Employment Transition Services. Launched in spring 2019, this site expands the state's capacity to provide high-quality, evidence-based pre-employment transition services that lead to successful post-secondary and employment outcomes for students with disabilities. The Transition Tennessee Pre-ETS Blueprint serves as an online hub for professional development and resources on Pre-ETS and offers guidance on the components of Pre-ETS to assist providers in the delivery of these services. This new portal includes two courses on the foundations of Pre-ETS:

- The Power of Early Work Experiences
- Overview of WIOA and Pre-ETS

Each course features free video modules, downloadable resources, webcasts, and information about upcoming conferences and trainings. Additional courses will be added that focus on Interagency Collaboration, Connecting with Employers and Families, the Student-Centered Approach to Transition Instruction, and each of the five pre-employment transition services.



JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

OBION COUNTY, TN

meet
JOHN



Persistence Pays Off

John's story is one of persistence.

John Griggs and his employment specialist, Brandi Long, worked together for a full year before they found the right fit. John and Brandi did a resume, filled out applications online, visited employers in person, and nothing seemed to work.

"All the other people we tried, they didn't accept me," Griggs said.

"At our year to date, April 10, 2018, he received a call from A&J Salvage about a job offer," said Brandi Long, employment specialist, Carey Counseling Center, Inc. "He really was interested in working with tools, and this gave him the opportunity here at A&J Salvage."

After a successful year on the job of learning new tasks, developing natural supports, and even getting a raise, Griggs is leaving his mark.

"Right off the bat, I was impressed with John from the interview," said Jock Johnson, owner of A&J Salvage. "It's a very fast-paced business out here, but John has adapted really well. He has learned the jobs that we've given him, and he's picked up his speed. He does a great job."

In Johnson's line of work, it's hard to hire good help. Griggs has been the exception to that rule.

"We'll go through 25 to 30 people just to land two good employees," said Johnson. "Since the first day John came to work here, he has been energetic. He wants to be here. He's excited to be here, and it's rubbed off on the other employees."

For employment specialist Brandi Long, Griggs was the first person she supported in the Individual Placement and Support process. In the two years since they started working together, she's seen the benefits of employment for Griggs and her other clients.

"Employment just, it balances everything," said Long. "They have an income. They feel like they have a purpose. That's ultimately the goal of IPS, I believe."

After a year of hunting and now a year of working, you can guess what's next for John Griggs

"This is my home," said Griggs. "This is where I'm staying. I'm not going nowhere."

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

Outcome: Track implementation and impact of WIOA combined state plan sections focused on people with disabilities

2019 Focus: Connecting disability employment efforts with the broader workforce system

On April 1, 2016, as a requirement for the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Tennessee submitted the Combined State Plan. The plan communicates how Tennessee will implement WIOA and lays out the strategic and operational plans geared towards improving the alignment of federally funded services related to job training and education. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development-Division of Workforce Services is the state agency authorized to receive WIOA funds but collaborated with multiple agencies, including those who provide employment supports for people with disabilities. By recognizing that people with disabilities are essential members of the Tennessee workforce, it represents a large step towards the greater success and access of workforce development support and funding.

In addition to Pre-ETS, there are several other components of the Combined State Plan that relate specifically to persons with disabilities.

One of these areas of WIOA that concentrates on disability services is a limitation on the use of subminimum wage under 14(c) certificates (pursuant to Section 14(c) of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act), which allow employers to pay less than the minimum wage to their employees with disabilities, according to their speed and productivity. Tennessee has made significant headway in encouraging its service providers—which are eligible to obtain 14(c) certificates—to abandon the practice of paying subminimum wages. According to the United States Department of Labor, as of April 1, 2019, there are no private businesses in Tennessee that hold 14(c) certificates, and 15 community rehabilitation providers (CRP) that hold 14(c) certificates, down from 40 in 2018. This represents significant progress made through technical assistance from the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to transition people working in sheltered workshops into competitive integrated employment and a commitment from the Vocational Rehabilitation program to modernize the service delivery model of its 17 community rehabilitation centers located across the state.

In fiscal year 2019, Tennessee was one of 18 states that participated in the WIOA Cohort on Disability and Employment. The state and local teams were comprised of a cross-section of WIOA stakeholders that focused on three topic areas: employer engagement, customer service, and accessibility. The team in Tennessee included representatives from the Department of Human Services-Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce programs, the Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD).

Over the course of the six months, each of the teams engaged in peer learning activities and worked with national subject matter experts to research, brainstorm, discuss, and collaborate across states, and to develop and pilot capstone products addressing issues including:

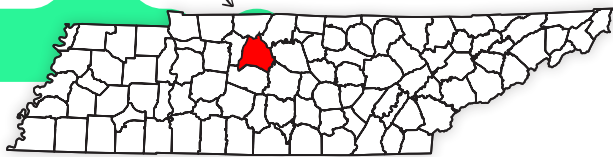
- Effective employer engagement as a part of the American Job Center (AJC) Service Delivery
- Improvement of customer service across WIOA programs at the American Job Centers
- Maximizing physical and programmatic access for people with disabilities at the AJCs

Through the examination of those issues, cohort members collaborated to develop specific tools to further maximize seamless service delivery, universal access and improved employer outreach.

Also, following TDLWD, the Department of Human Services Vocational Rehabilitation program realigned its nine geographic regions. Today each of these state partner workforce agencies is operating out of the same regions, fostering greater collaboration and consistent participation on workforce initiatives across the state.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

DAVIDSON COUNTY, TN



meet
GRACE



A Passion for Art and a Passion for Work

Before the introduction of Employment and Community First CHOICES, the future for Grace Goad, like many young adults with ID/DD, was on a somewhat hopeless trajectory with very few opportunities. Fortunately, the summer Grace turned 22, the Employment and Community First CHOICES program opened and provided successful employment within a few months. With the assistance of a dedicated and compassionate job coach, Grace has worked as a backroom associate unpacking clothing at TJ Maxx for almost two years. She is a devoted, reliable, hard-working and valued employee. Her personal assistants provide Grace transportation to work, help integrate her into community activities, and enable her to keep creating her first love: art.

Grace began painting when she was four, a year after her diagnosis of autism, intellectual disabilities and severe speech-language disorder. Her advanced use of color and composition has been praised and featured on the 2007 autism episode of ABC's "The View," on Al Jazeera America, on the cover of The American Journal of Psychiatry (among other magazine covers), on the cover of the book Making Sense of Autism, and in The Art of Autism: 2012 Edition and other books. She has also been highlighted in numerous local and national newspapers, including the New York Times, magazines, television segments, and other online media. Her work is also in the Tennessee Arts Commission's permanent artists' collection managed by the Tennessee State Museum. Grace has exhibited in Washington, D.C., New York City, Seattle, Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Massachusetts' Berkshires. Grace is represented by Shimai Gallery of Contemporary Craft in Nashville and Spring Hollow Gallery and Studio in Ventura, California.

Grace exemplifies that while she may have substantial challenges, her art is all the more significant because it demonstrates that art is a window to the beauty and possibilities of people living with disabilities. In the near future, she will be using Employment and Community First CHOICES career advancement services to further build her art business.

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

Outcome: Assess the impact of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program

2019 Focus: Growing opportunities through the nation's first employment-focused managed care waiver program

The Employment and Community First CHOICES program was launched in 2016 to provide supports to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Tennessee. This program was designed specifically to encourage people with disabilities to reach their employment and community living goals. This is evident in the program design, which includes 14 different employment services and an employment informed choice process designed to give people opportunities to explore what employment looks like and what types of jobs they may be interested in before deciding whether to pursue employment. The Employment and Community First CHOICES program also provides supports necessary to obtain and maintain employment as well as advance in their careers.

As of June 30, 2019, almost 2,800 people were receiving supports through the Employment and Community First CHOICES program. The program has experienced a rapid increase in the number of working-age persons participating in competitive integrated employment. In July 2018, 20 percent of working-age persons enrolled in the program were working at 297 businesses across the state. That number jumped in January 2019 to 23 percent at 481 businesses. In May 2019, the number had risen to more than 25 percent of those enrolled working in competitive integrated employment at 547 different workplaces.

One of the strategies implemented to ensure success in the program was the development of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with DHS-VR in 2017, which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties, including managed care organization (MCO) support coordinators and VR counselors, in providing high-quality employment services in a seamless manner. Both agencies continue to participate in an ongoing implementation workgroup to ensure the MOU's successful operation. Additionally, as a part of its statewide Systems Transformation Initiative, TennCare updated the Person-Centered Support Plan templates to include additional employment-focused questions and prompts to support employment planning and track progress toward achieving employment outcomes.

Understanding the roles that internships and post-secondary opportunities may play in providing a path to employment, TennCare has worked with the MCOs to continue to expand the number of internship programs that can be utilized in the Employment and Community First CHOICES program. This includes:

- Project SEARCH
- Walgreens REDI Program
- The BEST Program
- The Union EDGE Inclusive Higher Education Program
- Next Steps at Vanderbilt University Inclusive Higher Education Program

Numerous youth receiving Employment and Community First CHOICES services have already been able to participate in these programs, which has resulted in some receiving successful offers of long-term employment, while others have gained valuable skills and experience that will support their continued journey towards employment. TennCare MCOs continue to serve as Project SEARCH sites, with multiple persons successfully transitioning into employment opportunities, including some within the health plan operations.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

OBION COUNTY, TN

meet
DONALD



Finding the Right Job

Donald proudly shows off his work uniform from his first and only job at Sabin's Café at Discovery Parks of America in Union City, TN. He is 61 years old and loves working, listening to the Beatles and getting out in the community with his family and Employment and Community First CHOICES worker. Before the life he currently has, Donald lived with his elderly mother and rarely got to get out in the community. He now lives with his brother and sister-in-law, Richard and Beth, who have always wanted more for Donald. His mother eventually moved to a retirement community and Donald's brother takes him for regular visits, which usually ends in a stop for milkshakes.

After Donald moved in with them in 2016, a friend at a local provider, St. John's, told them about Employment and Community First CHOICES services. They were so excited and helped Donald submit his application. His sister-in-law, Beth, said it was meant to be. At that time, this was a new program. DIDD quickly sent out an intake coordinator and he was enrolled. He was soon set up with a staff person, Victoria Walton, who has worked with him since that time. She is now like family and loves working with Donald.

From day one of his Employment and Community First CHOICES services, Donald was very adamant that he wanted to find a job, according to Dwayne Webb at St. John's. Donald interviewed at Sabin's Cafe and was hired. He works in the concession area cleaning tables, sweeping, mopping and taking out the trash. The owners of the restaurant, John and Connie Babb, were thrilled to have employees working with disabilities represented in their restaurant. They have a family member with Down syndrome and understand how valuable this experience can be for themselves, their employees and the community. Although Donald's Cerebral Palsy has left him with the use of only one arm and an unsteady gate, he completes his duties with great enthusiasm and has found modifications which make his job a success.

After hours, you can find Donald on his deck, usually with Beth, listening to music and occasionally breaking out the karaoke machine to sing along. Beth and Richard are fierce advocates for Donald. Beth cannot talk about Donald and their relationship without tearing up. She is a formidable advocate and Donald is lucky to have her and his brother to support him. His next big goal will be finding his own place. Donald's family, St. John's, his supervisors, co-workers and his staff will no doubt be there to support him.

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

Outcome: Propose policies, regulations, legislation, and funding that increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities

2019 Focus: Addressing factors related to employment: decision-making

In 2018, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a law intended to protect decision-making rights for all Tennesseans. The law codifies the use of supported decision-making. This is a best practice that allows persons with disabilities to retain their decision-making capacity by choosing trusted people to support them in making choices. Those “trusted people” might be friends, family members, or professionals who agree to help a person with a disability understand and carefully consider decisions and then effectively communicate them. This is an important tool people can use to make choices about when, where, how and how often they work.

With the support of national experts, the Council on Developmental Disabilities has developed training about supported decision-making and continues to educate families about planning for young people with disabilities to make decisions about their own lives as they become adults and leave high school. That education includes options for identifying a team of supporters for helping with certain areas of decision-making. The Council on Developmental Disabilities has led workshops with statewide audiences as well as local audiences with schools and parent groups across the state. Other partners in this training include the Arc Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee, and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

Throughout 2018, the Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Disabilities Services met to discuss how state agencies supported people with disabilities and identify recommendations to strengthen and streamline the delivery of those services. One of the recommendations to come from the committee included making state government a model employer for people with disabilities. In support of that recommendation, representatives with the Council on Developmental Disabilities and DIDD presented research on legislative and executive policies enacted in other states in order to create a strong foundation for future efforts in Tennessee.

In addition to the 2019 focus on supported decision-making, Tennessee undertook other substantive policy and funding changes to increase employment of people with disabilities. Based on experience from the first two years of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, TennCare submitted an amendment to the 1115 demonstration waiver under which the program operates, requesting authority in the two adult benefit groups to grant exceptions to exceed individual expenditure caps in order to ensure access to Individual Employment Supports, when needed. This change in policy will ensure the availability of employment services and supports for those being served in Employment and Community First CHOICES to help them pursue employment goals, while also receiving services needed to maintain their independence and community participation. This amendment has been approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services.

Also in 2018, TennCare worked with DIDD and with Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) providers to take many of the lessons learned from successful implementation of employment services and supports in Employment and Community First CHOICES, and incorporate them in the 1915(c) waivers operated by DIDD. Amendments to each of these waivers include separating Employment and other Day Services; creating specific, time-limited pre-employment services to assist waiver participants to obtain competitive integrated employment; developing a new rate structure for Employment and Day Services that aligns financial incentives with employment goals; incentivizing and rewarding best practice job coaching through tiered and phased payment structure that supports fading and increased independence in the workplace over time; and quality incentive payments for supported employment providers supporting individuals working in competitive integrated employment at least 15 hours per week. These waiver amendments were approved by CMS in September 2018 and will be implemented upon promulgation of new reimbursement rules.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

DAVIDSON COUNTY, TN

meet
LAUREN



Meeting Career Goals and Helping Others

Lauren has an excellent personality and has always wanted to develop valuable bonds with people in her community. She has looked for support through many different mediums to assist with different fears she has had with community interaction, employment, driving and communication. While Lauren did show dedication in getting her driver's license, she and her family realized Lauren could benefit from services offered through the Employment and Community First CHOICES program. Lauren was enrolled in December 2016 and began receiving personal assistant supports that gave her the confidence to explore public settings and pursue job opportunities that matched her wants for career progression.

Enrollment through Employment and Community First CHOICES provided a platform for Lauren to engage with and enroll in the Project SEARCH program in October 2018, where she could pursue a goal of obtaining full-time work that utilized her computer skills. Through this internship, Lauren experienced an office environment that exposed her to data entry tasks where she was able to leverage her exceptional attention to detail. She became a leader in this program and the experience motivated her to show her talents, build meaningful relationships, and pursue her goals for a career.

At the end of Lauren's Internship in Project SEARCH, she was offered a full-time position as a Referral Coordinator for Amerigroup TN. Here she is responsible for ensuring people enrolled in the Employment and Community First CHOICES program have their service needs communicated quickly and appropriately to contracted providers who are willing and able to partner with individuals in service supports. Lauren is a key cog in ensuring that people served by the program receive their services as quickly as possible. Lauren is flourishing in her job, and due to her hard-work ethic, has been able to take on other smaller projects within the department. She has a great attitude in the office and has developed into a very confident, talkative, and talented young lady who continues to develop great interpersonal communication skills.

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

Outcome: Explore workforce strategies to promote recruitment, retention, and development of disability service professionals

2019 Focus: Partnering increased wages and professional development to address the workforce crisis

While the ultimate goal for persons with disabilities is to work independently, the availability of high-quality job coaches and job developers is often critical to the success of early employment opportunities and play a key role in sustained employment. However, the nationwide shortage of disability professionals continues to impact Tennessee and is a major barrier as the state looks to close the employment gap between people with disabilities and people who do not have disabilities.

Working to ensure the recruitment and retention of high-quality direct support professionals has been a major focus for state agencies that support people with disabilities. The initiatives have been focused on increasing the starting wages of DSPs and also supporting DSPs through workforce development.

The National Core Indicators Staff Stability Survey, a national report which focuses on recruitment, retention, and wages of direct care staff in state IDD service delivery systems, indicated that Tennessee had the lowest average wage for DSPs among participating states. The fiscal year 2019 budget included an investment of nearly \$50 million to bolster those wages for DSPs who support persons in the 1915(c) waivers operated by DIDD. A comptroller survey of DIDD providers published in January 2019 found that the average hourly wage of DSPs did indeed increase because of this investment from an average of \$9.77 to \$10.36.

Recognizing that wages are not the only component to solve this crisis, TennCare continues its efforts to develop the workforce along all Long-Term Services and Supports programs through its QuILTSS (Quality Improvement in Long-Term Services and Supports) initiative.

TennCare continues to use federal State Innovation Model test grant funding to make a substantial investment in the creation of a high-quality, competency-based education and training curriculum for which people working in the field will be able to earn college credit, complete a post-secondary certificate, and apply these credits toward a variety of different degree pathways. The new program will provide an education path for direct support professionals, with an opportunity to both learn and earn by acquiring shorter term, stackable credentials with clear labor market value that are recognized and portable across service providers and settings. It will also provide a career path for direct support professionals (DSPs), as they continue to build competencies to access more advanced jobs and higher wages.

TennCare continues working with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Community Colleges and Colleges of Applied Technology to roll out the new program statewide. DSPs working in the field can use Tennessee Reconnect and Tennessee Promise funding to earn college credit while advancing their knowledge and skills for the incredibly important work they do every day with older adults and Tennesseans with disabilities. Critical to the program's success will be the ability to ensure that wages are increased as DSPs increase their level of training and competency and upon completing the certification program. Thus, a critical next step will be a comprehensive plan to provide for wage incentives that will help drive engagement and completion.

At the same time that TennCare is investing in building the competency of the workforce, they also recognize the importance of investing in providers to help them recruit and retain qualified and competent staff. TennCare has leveraged the federal Money Follows the Person and State Innovation Model test grant funding to work with a national expert to develop a survey tool and establish uniform processes for ongoing collection and reporting of workforce-related data. TennCare and Employment and Community First CHOICES providers will use that data to target and measure improvement efforts over time. TennCare used Money Follows the Person rebalancing funds to support and incentivize Employment and Community First CHOICES providers to begin collecting, reporting and using workforce data.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

MONTGOMERY CO, TN

meet
DAVID



An Offering of Hope

Tina McNemar went to Wendy's for lunch with her two young children but walked away with a life-affirming sense of hope about her 4-year-old son, Russell. Russell is on the Autism Spectrum. Before she even reached the door to enter, David was opening the door for her and asking where she would like to sit so, he could get a highchair to that location. David made sure Tina and her children were all settled before returning to his other duties. David made such a huge impression upon Tina that she took to Social Media to sing his praises.

Tina wrote:

"The Wendy's on Riverside hired a special need maintenance man and he legit just made me cry. So incredibly sweet and kind and he insisted on carrying a high chair for my baby. It really gave me hope for my son's future! And I love that Wendy's gave him a chance. If you happen to see David there, please stop and say a few kind words because he really made my day."

Tina shared with the PDI Supported Employment Department that David had given her a sense of peace about the life her son will have. David shared with her about his girlfriend and the wonderful life he is leading. She said knowing her son's future could be so bright gave her a new-found passion to help others.

Several people on social media began responding about other people with disabilities and the interactions they had had with them while working. Tina started a conversation that is raising the awareness of people with disabilities in the workforce and how valuable they are to any business.

GOAL ONE *(continued)*

TennCare is also using federal State Innovation Model grant funds to engage national experts to provide training, consultation and technical assistance to providers to support their adoption of key practices that – when coupled with higher wages – have been shown to result in more effective recruitment, increased retention, and better outcomes for people served. These practices include more effective recruitment and onboarding strategies, including targeted marketing, realistic job previews, structured behavioral interviewing, high-quality competency-based pre/early service training, and early access to mentoring by more experienced staff. Establishing a community of practice and supporting peer mentoring will help to ensure that provider successes become shared learning opportunities.

Other Improvements: Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program

2019 Focus: Eight years of leading the nation

Since 2012, Tennessee has been a Core State for the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP) through the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). This has allowed Tennessee to leverage technical assistance from national subject matter experts on a variety of focus areas over the years designed to increase competitive integrated employment and assist the state in moving away from segregated employment for people with disabilities. At present, EFSLMP has focused on the following four areas:

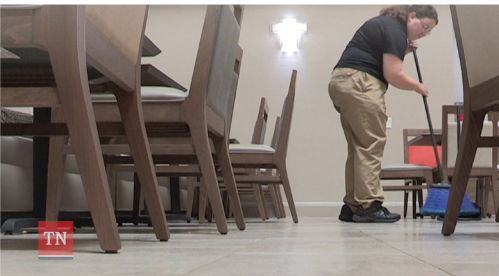
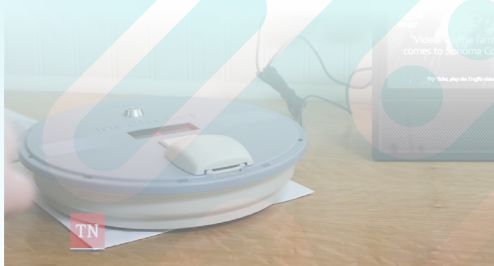
- Individual Placement and Support Expansion through Vision Quest
- The Tennessee Employment First Leadership Initiative (TEFLI)
- American Job Centers
- Improving employment outcomes for persons with a co-occurring diagnosis of IDD and a mental health disorder

Vision Quest is a three-step approach utilized by ODEP that is rooted in the values of shared decision-making, quality improvement and measurable change. This approach is being utilized to look at expanding the Individual Placement and Support program to support employment for people with a co-occurring diagnosis of intellectual and/or developmental disability and a behavioral health diagnosis. A pilot is currently underway to measure the success of this model in helping people with a co-occurring diagnosis to reach their employment goals.

Another focus is the Tennessee Employment First Leadership Initiative (TEFLI). As community-based providers continue to transition people out of segregated sheltered workshop environments into competitive integrated employment, there is a growing demand to ensure that transition leads to meaningful community and employment opportunities for people supported. Through TEFLI, staff from three provider agencies who are experienced in provider transformation mentor peer agencies that are still undergoing the transformation process. This includes discussions on developing strategic plans, developing staff and programs with Enabling Technology, and then assisting in the implementation of the changes. This model is making Tennessee a national leader and has led to productive outcomes and changes that benefit people who receive supports through DIDD.



This **IS** a **LIFE-CHANGER** for everyone!



GOAL **TWO**

Build a shared community commitment to Employment First

KEYS TO PROGRESS

- Combining public and private communications resources to speak with a unified voice on employment and maximize the audience
- Giving businesses a platform to speak out about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities
- Tennessee's disability-employment-focused **#HireMyStrengths** campaign adopted nationally

Outcome 1: Cultivate Employment First champions across Tennessee, including individuals and families, community leaders, public officials, schools, private citizens, and other organizations

Raising Awareness, Raising Expectations: The work of the Employment First Communications subgroup

Another critical component to the improvement of employment outcomes for people with disabilities has been raising public awareness about the contributions that people with disabilities can make to the workforce and the community as a whole. Not only has it been important to raise expectations among people and their families, but also employers and community members to ensure full inclusion and access.

Since 2015, the communications professionals of the agencies that participate in the Employment First Task Force have met quarterly to align messaging and maximize the available social media and communications channels to spread the message of Employment First. These results have been further bolstered by the increase in video production capabilities by state agencies, as the number and variety of video stories showcasing people who have reached their employment goals has increased over the past two years. These video efforts include stories that demonstrate how Enabling Technology can support employment and independent living, Project SEARCH, Individual Placement and Support, and the Employment and Community First CHOICES program.

Not only has this public awareness campaign been successful, but it has received national recognition. In March 2019, DIDD's Deputy Director of Communications and External Affairs was invited to present to the President's Committee for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities on Tennessee's successful Employment First public awareness campaign.



While the communications subgroup members work together on a variety of key initiatives, the main public awareness push is around National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. During that month, the members of the subgroup work together on the “Hire My Strengths” campaign, which showcases the various strengths people with disabilities can bring to the workplace. Last year, the campaign focused on also showcasing more employers to increase buy-in and business engagement. Overall, the campaign generated more than 314 tweets with the hashtag #hiremystrengths and had 46 agencies participate from all over the country.



The Department of Labor and Workforce Development also made disability employment the focus of all of its weekly web series “Tennessee Workforce Weekly” during the month of October. Guest interviews included DIDD’s State Employment and Day Services Director, who discussed the Employment First initiative, and BlueCare’s Employment Specialist, who talked about the benefits of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program.

The signature event for the Employment First Task Force also occurs in the fall, when the Expect Employment Report is presented to the Governor. This past year’s event took place at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, where Orange Grove Center partners with the university and the food service vendor to place people with disabilities in both work and volunteer activities. The event was covered heavily by the media and further highlighted the work taking place in Chattanooga to increase employment opportunities for all persons.



The Council on Developmental Disabilities continues to highlight employment stories and initiatives in their Breaking Ground magazine. In addition, the Council on Developmental Disabilities chair participated in a long-form radio interview on a local news radio site in the Upper Cumberland area about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the opportunities available for employers. A Council on Developmental Disabilities member also participated in an article for the Cookeville Herald-Citizen about the strengths people with disabilities can bring to the workplace.

A major resource for families of people with disabilities is the Rise to Work blog on the Tennessee Works website, hosted by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. This blog is distributed every other week and focuses on employment topics and other information important to people with disabilities and their families. Some of the top blogs this past year included “What is an Occupational Diploma?”, “The Dignity of Risk”, and “Making the Case for SSI Eligibility When Your Child Has Autism”.

Agencies also engage in a myriad of local community activities and events, engaging program partners to expand the capacity of state staff to share important information about employment programs and supports. During 2018, TennCare and its contracted MCOs participated in 134 community outreach events, including resource fairs, public meetings, and conferences. As of April 2019, TennCare and contracted MCOs had participated in 40 additional outreach events.

By aligning messaging, maximizing resources and working together to reach stakeholder groups, buy-in about the value employment brings to people, their families, their employers, and their communities continues to grow. This will continue to be a critical piece of the puzzle as the task force looks to make all people champions of Employment First.

GOAL | TWO *(continued)*

Outcome 1: Cultivate Employment First champions across Tennessee, including individuals and families, community leaders, public officials, schools, private citizens, and other organizations

2019 Focus: Talking inclusive business practices at the Disability Rights Tennessee Luncheon

During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, another important event that takes place annually is the Disability Employment Awareness Luncheon at the Music City Center in Nashville. This event brings together more than 300 stakeholders from the nonprofit, government, and business sectors to increase awareness about and commitment to Employment First as a sustainable business policy.

During the October 2018 luncheon, Paul Weissert of Ernst & Young's Nashville office delivered a keynote about the value of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. He also talked about the innovative business practices at Ernst & Young, and expressed the importance of the business community making employment an option for people with disabilities. The event also included a panel discussion with Sodexo managers and their employees with disabilities who work on the campus of the University of Tennessee-Martin. All of the panelists spoke about the value of work and what disability employment brought to the overall workplace culture.



2019 Focus: Enabling technology and employment leads to independence

This year brought more people with disabilities utilizing Enabling Technology to support them in achieving both their employment and independent living goals. As this movement continues to spread across Tennessee and the nation, DIDD held its second Enabling Technology Summit in September 2018. This year's summit focused on how technology is being used to change the lives of people with disabilities and how providers in other states have been able to change the culture of their organizations during their implementation of Enabling Technology.

Enabling Technology can be used to support a person's employment goals through the use of mobile applications for transportation assistance, and even to provide virtual job coaching on the worksite. Finally, as is the case with many of the people currently participating in DIDD's Enabling Technology program, when employment and Enabling Technology are combined, it allows the person to achieve both the financial means and the necessary support needed for them to live independently in a home of their own.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

SULLIVAN COUNTY, TN

meet
BRAD



Combining Employment and Technology

It was a combination of employment, enabling technology, and person-centered planning that supported Brad to finally reach his goals for independence.

A strong work ethic was ingrained in Brad as he grew up on a Northeast Tennessee farm with his parents. It was there where he decided early on that he would one day have a home of his own and would work hard to make that vision a reality.

"Since he was like 8 or 9-years-old, we used to live on a farm, and he would tell us. In our minds, it was very important because he is an only child. One day he's going to be out on his own," Brad's mom, Paulette Presnell said. "This was always all of our dreams."

These days, you can find Brad at the Kingsport Ingles grocery store focused on his job and earning the money he needs to support his new lifestyle. Once his shift is over, his job coach drops him off at his home nearby, where he lives alone with the support of various technology. From there, he can kick back and relax by watching his favorite show or he can exercise in his workout room or video chat with his parents. They live just minutes away.

When you ask Brad if he loves his new home and independence, he'll likely nod his head and say, "yes."

"His job is very, very important because it helps him pay his own bills. With Brad, that is everything. He comes from a family of very hard workers," said Raymond "Geeter" Lowe, a Direct Support Professional who's worked with Brad for more than six years.

In fall of 2018, Brad and his parents sat down with his staff and circle of support from Core Services of Northeast Tennessee and The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) Case Manager to outline his vision for his life. Core Services is a provider participating in DIDD's Enabling Technology Program, designed to utilize technology to foster independence and improve the quality of life for Tennesseans with disabilities in a way that is driven by the desires and needs of the person. Through the program, the group was able to identify several types of technology that would support Brad to communicate, schedule his days for work, keep him safe, and ultimately achieve his lifelong goals.

GOAL **TWO** *(continued)*



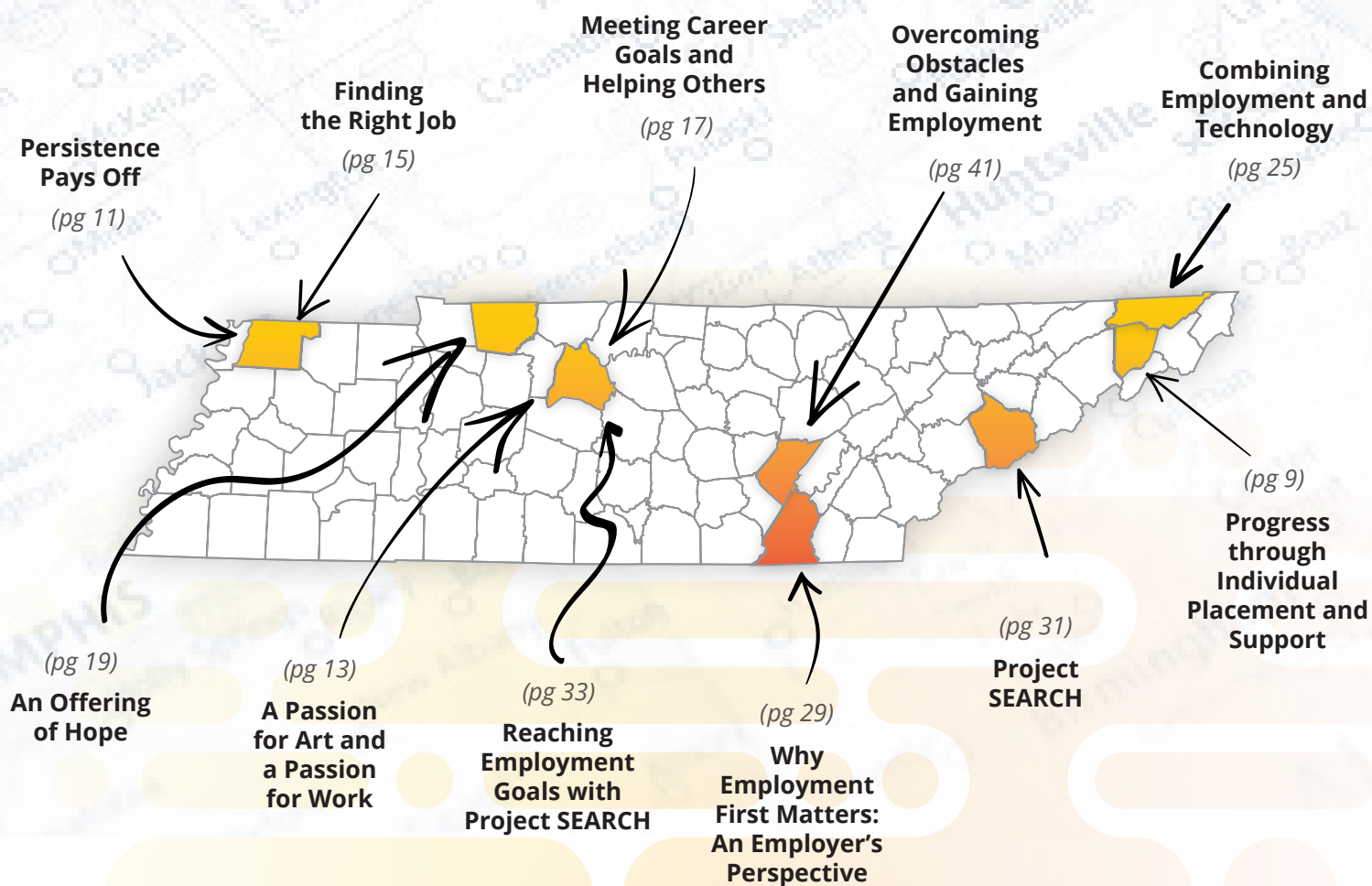
2019 Focus: Acing the interview

Part of preparing people for employment is also preparing people for the job interview. In May 2019, DIDD's Middle Regional Office held its second Employment Gathering. This gathering brings together people supported by DIDD providers who are job-ready and invites employers and other staff to participate in mock interviews. It provides opportunities for people to gain needed interview, social and communications skills with real employers and professionals. The employers and other professional staff then provide feedback for each person to help them strengthen the skills needed to compete for community jobs.

At this year's gathering, about 40 people participated, and once again the gathering provided an excellent opportunity to make employer connections while refining skills in a no-pressure environment.

At the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna, one job-seeking skill that has been researched and implemented for students is the use of video resumes. Through the use of video resumes, people with disabilities have been able to dispel myths and demonstrate the capabilities they have to contribute to the workforce. Students at TRC-Smyrna can choose this option as a way of better showcasing their strengths. The center plans to add an advanced level elective class dedicated to the creation of video resumes and infographics to help them better display their abilities and interests to potential employers.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE



GOAL **THREE**

Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities

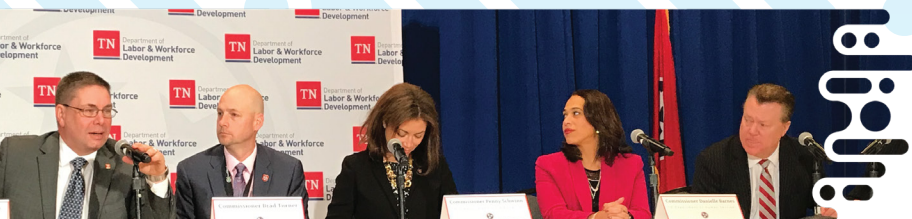
KEYS TO PROGRESS

- Connecting job-ready youth and adults to employers through Project SEARCH
- Engaging employers strategically has yielded partnerships across the state and opened avenues to employment
- Adding the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development to the Task Force has increased employer connections

2019 Focus: Increasing partnerships and engaging employers

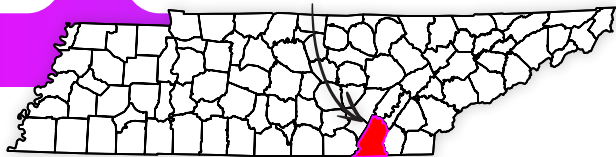
Employer engagement and education is vital to ensuring people with disabilities are included in the workforce. Not only is it important to emphasize the strengths that people with disabilities can contribute to a business, but it's also vital to educate them on the buying power people with disabilities and their families possess. State agencies and their partners continue to make the business case to employers at every opportunity.

Tennessee is a leader in connecting disability employment efforts to the broader workforce efforts in state government. During the annual Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) convening in March 2019, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development invited the Council on Developmental Disabilities to moderate a panel highlighting connections between the broader workforce system and disability employment efforts. On the panel were the Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and a local American Job Center. This effort to engage the workforce was further bolstered at the conference as a panel of commissioners, including DIDD Commissioner Brad Turner and DHS Commissioner Danielle W. Barnes, discussed with attendees the importance of ensuring people with disabilities are included in hiring conversations. Commissioner Turner also engaged with the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce about the business case for hiring people with disabilities at their annual Day on the Hill in February 2019. In addition, DIDD's Director of Employment and Day Services was the keynote speaker at the Chattanooga Disability Employment Luncheon for National Disability Employment Awareness Month in 2018. These opportunities have given state leaders a large audience of employers to spread the message about the benefits of hiring a person with disability.



JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

HAMILTON COUNTY, TN



meet
SEAN



How did you get started employing people with disabilities?

I started employing people with disabilities at Taziki's Mediterranean Café. It was a part of the culture to help those with disabilities engage with the community. We began working with Orange Grove Center in Chattanooga to find people to help us get our dining room set. It was a great partnership and allowed other employees to be able to work on other revenue-generating tasks.

How did employing people with disabilities impact your company? (company culture, profitability, standing in the community, etc.)

It was an awesome decision for every company where I have begun partnerships with our local providers. At Taziki's, we were able to increase profits and grow our catering business because we were able to shift our serving staff to catering before opening, rather than setting up the dining room. It also helped our new managers learn to communicate effectively, as they could not assume that the person they were giving directions to would understand a shorthand or incomplete direction. When they applied that to the rest of the staff members, their leadership abilities increased rapidly and dramatically. When the DIDD video came out on Facebook, our in-store sales went up as well and many people who came in mentioned they had seen how we were helping in the community.

At Creekside at Shallowford, I worked with AIM Center-Chattanooga. As a retirement facility, they had dogs that needed grooming, and one of the members was happy to help meet that need. It was a great connection for the residents who may not have had visitors very often. We had another member help us in the kitchen who was a great addition to the team with a great positive attitude that was infectious. I had employees who were consistent and appreciative of their jobs, and in my industry, that is leaps and bounds ahead of most employees. Their contributions improved morale tremendously in an environment that really needed it.

Lastly, at The Edwin Hotel I partnered with both Orange Grove and AIM Center to fill positions within the brand new hotel. Their members helped the company not only fill the need but also foster a connection to the community which is ingrained in the culture at Vision Hospitality.

How has hiring people with disabilities affected you as a manager/business leader?

It has improved my management tremendously. I am more empathetic and patient, and I communicate better as a manager to all of my staff. I taught myself not to take directions for granted and to make sure I have clearly stated what I want done. In the planning stages of bringing on these employees at each location, it allowed me to audit our workflows and become more efficient as a company. It is important for me to help all people have the opportunity to have a purpose, which in turn gives me purpose. The hospitality business can be a grind that consumes the people in it. Personally finding my purpose, helping people with disabilities find jobs and purpose in their lives, helps me to rise above the stress of my industry.

Your work to employ people with disabilities has covered multiple providers and programs in the Chattanooga area. What advice would you give providers who are working to help people with disabilities find employment?

Go to the provider agency that you feel the most comfortable working with and let them know your goals. It is important to be honest with the employment specialists at the agency as to what you like and don't like. The very few placements that I have had that haven't worked out were because the person settled for something they didn't really want. Job seekers: it is worth the wait to hold out for something you will enjoy!

What would you tell other employers considering hiring an employee with a disability?

There is no downside. I had a conversation with my dad a couple years ago when I first began advocating for employing people with disabilities. His reaction was priceless, "There is no downside." I explained how the providers help select candidates who they think would be a good fit for the position and help the employer navigate any issues that may arise. Having a supported employee who others have an interest in their success is a total game changer. It eliminates the unknown of hiring, which is generally a huge risk for an employer. It helps create a culture of service and fosters a sense of connection with the community. Leadership skills improve. Companies get an employee who is appreciative of the position and works hard every day. Customers appreciate companies that help their community and will support them. So my dad was right. there are only great opportunities ahead for companies that begin partnerships with their local providers and give their community members a chance.

GOAL | THREE *(continued)*

2019 Focus: Increasing partnerships and engaging employers

Each state agency also works to develop its own relationships with businesses to ensure people they support are matched to potential jobs that align with their skills and interests. Oftentimes those relationships are formed between the contracted community provider (DIDD, VR, Employment and Community First CHOICES, IPS Employment Specialist) and those local businesses.



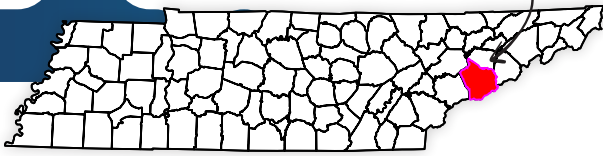
Increasing collaboration with employers has also been a main focus for the Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers. A major accomplishment came in May 2019, when TRC-Smyrna joined with CVS Health to unveil an innovative program to help people with disabilities find jobs in Tennessee's growing health care industry. The collaboration is offering a new way to receive real-world training and experience in a pharmacy setting.



Through the partnership, a mock CVS pharmacy was constructed inside TRC-Smyrna. Students now receive job training in two areas that lead to consideration with CVS Health. This includes training on customer care, which involves the retail operations of CVS, including customer service, stocking, and cashier work. The other area is training on Pharmacy Tech curriculum, which includes learning about sorting medications, creating labels, reviewing side effects and greeting customers. All students who complete the program have the opportunity to apply and interview for a position at a CVS Pharmacy.

JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

SEVIER CO, TN



Project SEARCH



Project SEARCH Success

A rich example of the benefits of Project SEARCH to both interns and employers is a program which opened this year at Wilderness at the Smokies. Wilderness at the Smokies is the Smoky Mountain region's largest waterpark resort and family entertainment center. Located in Sevierville, Wilderness at the Smokies has created hundreds of jobs in the greater Sevierville community, attracted year-round tourism, and had a major impact on the local economy. The vision for Project SEARCH at Wilderness at the Smokies started when the company hired a person referred by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. The person was so successful at her job that the company sought to hire more people with disabilities. In response, the VR Regional Supervisor, VR Business Coordinators from UT-CLEE, and the VR Project SEARCH Coordinator met with the Wilderness at the Smokies' Human Resource Director to present information on hosting a Project SEARCH site. The Human Resource Director was excited by the possibility and the company subsequently agreed to proceed in developing a program. Partnerships were then formed with Sevier County and The Access Program, a community rehabilitation provider agency, to operate the program. VR supported Project SEARCH training and technical assistance for staff and stakeholders. The development of the program was outside the school-year cycle, but the partners agreed to a shortened program for the first year. Accordingly, in January 2019, Project SEARCH at Wilderness at the Smokies started operation serving five exit-year school students with disabilities.

The first year of Project SEARCH was a positive one for the partners. Trish Cook, Talent Acquisition Manager and the business liaison for Project SEARCH at Wilderness at the Smokies, was amazed by the transformation of the interns. She said that they were nervous and reticent at the beginning but once they were into their job training sites they quickly brimmed with excitement. The Educational Transition Specialist for the program complimented the Wilderness at the Smokies staff by saying, "The managers, employees, and especially mentors at Wilderness at the Smokies have been welcoming and supportive. Our interns have really advanced their personal skills and work experience. We are so incredibly proud of them."

A former staff person from The Access Program mirrored the comment, saying that, "Wilderness at the Smokies is all in on the Project SEARCH program from top to bottom."

Cook summarized year one of the program by stating, "When we were approached by Project SEARCH about starting this program onsite, we embraced it thinking that it would be a great way to give back to the community and give some students an opportunity they may not otherwise have to learn important new skills for their future. What we didn't realize is how much we would get out of it. The participants in Project SEARCH have touched all of our hearts in a special way. It has been an absolutely wonderful experience to see them grow and their confidence skyrocket."

The outcomes for the year-one interns at Wilderness at the Smokies were very impressive. Three of the five interns graduated in May and were hired by Wilderness at the Smokies. The other two interns chose to remain in the program for one more training cycle, although one of them is working at Wilderness at the Smokies for the summer. Cook said that Wilderness at the Smokies has enjoyed being part of the Project SEARCH program so much they are hoping to have 10 to 12 students in the program for the 2019-2020 school year. She concluded by saying that she hoped more businesses will participate in Project SEARCH.

"It's a win/win situation for everyone."

GOAL **THREE** *(continued)*

Project SEARCH

2019 Focus: Expanding one of the nation's most successful internship models

The Project SEARCH model continues to expand in Tennessee. This one-year internship program is aimed at students with disabilities in their last year of high school or for young adults working with disability providers. Through Project SEARCH, interns receive hands-on training, learn work skills and have real-world opportunities to strengthen their independent living skills. All Project SEARCH participants are in Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Department of Human Services contracts with the national Project SEARCH organization for training and technical assistance.

This year, the number of Project SEARCH sites **expanded from 12 to 15**. These are:

- Downtown Sheraton Hotel, Shelby County School System – Memphis
- Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, Shelby County Schools – Memphis
- Methodist North Hospital, Shelby County Schools – Memphis
- Peabody Hotel, Shelby County Schools – Memphis
- West Tennessee Healthcare, Jackson-Madison County School System – Jackson
- Tennova Hospital, Clarksville/Montgomery County Schools – Clarksville
- Embassy Suites, Nashville Public Schools – Nashville
- Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, Progress, Inc. – Nashville
- Amerigroup, Progress, Inc. – Nashville
- Embassy Suites, Rutherford County Schools – Murfreesboro
- BlueCross/Blue Shield, Hamilton County Schools – Chattanooga
- East TN Children's Hospital, Sertoma– Knoxville
- University of TN Medical Center, Breakthrough Corp. – Knoxville
- Maryville College, Blount County Schools – Maryville
- Wilderness of the Smokies, Sevier County Schools – Pigeon Forge

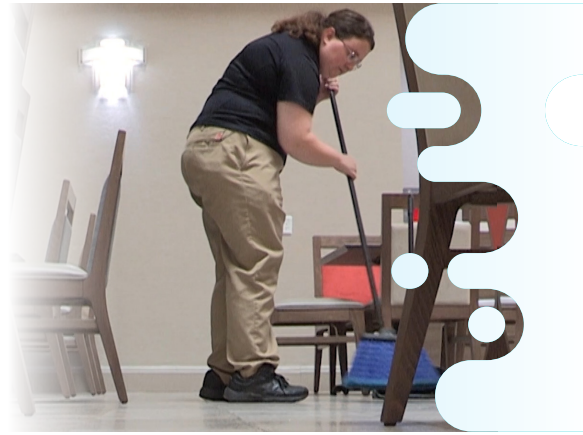
Project SEARCH continues to be highly successful in placing interns in competitive, integrated employment. In May, the new federal Commissioner on the Administration on Disabilities, Julie Hocker, visited the Project SEARCH site at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital as part of her visit to Nashville to meet with the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network. During her visit with Project SEARCH, she learned more about the success of the program and how the partnerships between employers and community-contracted providers are benefitting the Employment First movement.



JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

DAVIDSON COUNTY, TN

meet
ALICIA



Reaching Employment Goals with Project SEARCH

In less than a year, Alicia Brown graduated from high school with an occupational diploma and landed a new job. She hit the ground running to reach her employment goals and now she's on her way to making new ones.

Alicia attended McGavock High School in Nashville, where she was connected with the Vanderbilt Embassy Suites Project SEARCH program to support her to gain new job skills and experience. The program is a partnership working between the hotel, Metro Nashville Schools, Progress, Inc. and Vocational Rehabilitation to offer one-year internships for students with disabilities in transition from their last year of high school into meaningful, competitive employment.

One week into the internship, Alicia landed a job with Culinaire International at the Embassy Suites. She began working part-time with the company, bussing tables and assisting customers at the hotel, as she continued her internship rotations with Project SEARCH and working toward her graduation in spring 2019.

"Caring for others, that's a good skill to have," Alicia said. "This program is a good program to be in because it will help you. It helped me and look where I'm going. It makes me feel proud of myself."

Alicia lives on her own and is now working more hours at Culinaire as she decides what her new career aspirations will be. In the meantime, she says she's excited to continue excelling at her current job and plans to attend college one day soon.

GOAL **FOUR**

Make Tennessee state government a model employer of people with disabilities

KEYS TO PROGRESS

- State agencies host internships for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Opportunities for state government to hire people with disabilities still exist as there continues to be growth needed to meet this outcome

As mentioned in Goal One, a top recommendation made by the Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Disabilities Services included making state government a model employer for people with disabilities. Work is ongoing to address and meet that recommendation.

One area where the state has experienced success is in growing the number of internships for people with disabilities in state agencies. This effort was originally led in the Governor's office when they hosted the first intern from the Lipscomb IDEAL program in their constituent services division in 2017. Since then, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Education, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development and the Department of Human Services have all provided internships to students with disabilities, which has assisted them in having work experiences in a professional office environment in support of their employment goals.

The following stories are how the interns benefitted from those internships in their own words as well as the view from an intern supervisor about how it benefitted him and his agency.

FIRST PERSON STATE INTERN STORIES

meet MORGAN



Morgan Thompson ~ DOE and DIDD

I was in the IDEAL Program for 2 years at Lipscomb University. I graduated this year on May 3rd, 2019. I learned independent living skills when I was in the IDEAL Program at Lipscomb. My internships on campus were at Alumni Relations and the College of Education. My internships that were off campus were at The Tennessee Department of Education in the Fall Semester, and Spring Semester at The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

At my internships, I took on a lot of clerical work, assisted in setup of events, presented at statewide conferences, video editing, internal and external communications work, and much more. I have learned from those experiences that you need to be polite for the customers. I get things done that need to get done and I like to keep busy and stay organized. I also like to learn new skills, meet new people, and make money that I work for at my job.

Now I continue to work at Our Place Café in Hendersonville, where I've worked since July 25th, 2016. I also have been volunteering and working with Animal Rescue Corps for a couple of years now.

In the future, I want to live independently and live on my own or with roommates in a few years and keep paying my own bills. I also plan on having a fulltime job one day, so that I can save money and afford things that I need. My dream job is to do work in an office.



FIRST PERSON STATE INTERN STORIES

meet
NATE



Nate Riddle ~ DIDD

I feel extremely fortunate that I am now a college graduate from the IDEAL Program at Lipscomb University. During the two years I attended, I learned all kinds of social skills, adult living skills, and employment skills. I also learned some life lessons. I am grateful for it and the internships I worked at as part of the program.

My internships were great. I had two that were on campus and two that were off campus. My on-campus internships were in the Lipscomb Security Department and Information Technology Department. In the fall semester as a second-year IDEAL student, I interned at the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). I got better at my writing skills there and built strong relationships with the people I worked with. Every Thursday, I would walk into that office with a smile on my face and I would be determined to work hard.

Then in the fall semester as a second-year student, I was an intern at the Nashville Soccer Club. That was interesting because I had never worked with a major league sports team, but I gained some skill in clerical work and organizational skills in their office. I also got free tickets to any game I wanted to go to.

I am currently employed at Lipscomb University in the Events Operations Department. I help set up for events on campus and it is a lot of work, but I enjoy it because it keeps me busy. I'm happy that I could continue being a part of the Lipscomb community because I love being there. It feels like a second home to me.



THE VALUE OF INTERNSHIPS THROUGH THE SUPERVISOR LENS

LANDON COOK

Director of Customer Service, Department of Human Services

Erin began her 6-week TRC internship with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Public Information and Legislative Office (PILO) in June 2018. In preparation for that date, the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna frequently spoke with me and visited our office to ensure all necessary accommodations for Erin's internship would proceed smoothly. They coached me on awareness to Erin's visual impairment, adjustments for Erin to consider in our workplace, and technology that would assist Erin in being successful in her job. Each of these pre-emptive efforts led to an easy transition into Erin's internship.

As an employee, Erin was a fantastic addition to the PILO team. As a colleague, she granted me an entirely different perspective on our work. On the first day of her internship, she eagerly and openly shared the story of how she began losing her sight as an infant. Her story was one of future-thinking and forgiveness, and on day one I knew this would be a powerful experience with her internship; not only for her but for the PILO team as well. On the job, she acquired new skills rapidly, introduced us to assistive technologies she had mastered, and unintentionally created a very compelling case for the impact that Rehabilitation Services can have on the lives of individuals with disabilities. She talked openly about how she overcame the challenges of losing her sight, and she even guided me in her techniques to navigate our building and downtown streets using only sound and assistive technologies. She was always prompt, thoughtful, and eager to engage, and even at her young age, she showed exceptional maturity and responsibility with her work.

After the initial TRC internship, Erin earned a full-fledged paid internship with our DHS for up to one year. She mastered new challenges and gained significant experience in a large state government office environment (her only working experience prior to TRC was a brief stint as a cashier at a grocery). She was chosen to speak at her TRC graduation, and I helped echo her voice and story on several speaking engagements as well. True to her self-awareness and maturity, she also responded extremely well to coaching, and it was during these coaching sessions that she discovered her true purpose: she wanted to further her education and become a social worker just like all those who had helped her get here. We continued talking for many months about her career, and Erin became more and more focused on and excited about her future. Instead of only working for each individual day, she began planning her transition into college – full-time!

Though the internship eventually came to an end, Erin still shares how much she learned during her seven months with DHS PILO. She solidified the work she wanted to spend her career on, and I am very proud to state that she completed her enrollment for UT Martin and begins in August 2019. Leading up to her first day of college, I have continued coaching and encouraging her, and she continues to remind me that any disability never means incapability. What was originally a visual impairment eventually became a purpose for her to champion and an eye-opener for me. I believe her internship is a keen example of the mutual benefits that await employees and managers alike in the opportunity to work with people with disabilities.

GOAL FIVE

Prepare Students for Employment and Post-Secondary Success

KEYS TO PROGRESS

- Addressing “the cliff” of no engagement after graduation with a primary focus of getting students to work
- Increasing high school diploma options to focus on job and post-secondary readiness
- Launching a first-in-the-nation teacher prep resource for supporting transition to adulthood
- Growing post-secondary programs for youth with disabilities on college campuses across Tennessee, including rural areas

Outcome: Expand the use of Transition Tennessee among educators and other stakeholders

2019 Focus: Tennessee’s public-private partnership for online professional development

Transition Tennessee is a partnership between the Department of Education and Vanderbilt University and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, and serves as a hub for training and resources on preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. First launched in February 2017, the number of users continues to grow with 5,256 current subscribers. As mentioned in Goal One, Transition Tennessee has expanded to include a companion site on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

In addition, through Transition Tennessee blueprint, the team provided technical assistance to ten school districts across the state, helping them improve their transition outcomes through goal-setting and data-gathering. The team is also conducting communities of practice in three different communities across the state.

In May 2018, the Transition Tennessee Leadership Team was established to steer movement on transition on a statewide scale. The team identifies needs, rallies resources, coordinates efforts and spurs improvement. This team is comprised of exceptional education directors, teachers, state agency representatives, advocacy groups and other stakeholders.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the team met three times. Additionally, a small group attended the National Technical Assistance Center Capacity Building Institute. Through that work, the team set goals of increasing parental engagement, creating a transition “bill of rights,” identifying schools and districts that want to improve transition planning and supporting those districts in their efforts.

In addition to the resources available on Transition Tennessee, the Department of Education created a series of Principles of Transition courses on self-determination, planning for post-secondary education, and focus on adulthood. School districts may choose whether to offer these courses.



PIE Conference: Passport to the Future

2019 Focus: Tennessee's first-ever conference dedicated to transition from high school

Every year, the Department of Education holds the Partners in Education Conference, which is a statewide conference for special education. The 2019 conference included a special pre-conference focused on transitioning students, called Passport to the Future.

During the Passport to the Future pre-conference, attendees learned about best practices in preparing students for life after high school and building community partnerships. The goal was to equip educators, pre-employment transition service providers and others with the skills and knowledge to provide exceptional transition services and supports for students with disabilities. This included sessions on:

- Conducting an age-appropriate transition assessment
- Developing a high-quality transition plan
- Building self-determination skills
- Identifying meaningful early work experiences
- Partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation to deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Preparing students for postsecondary education
- Collaborating with community supports

Approximately 460 educators and pre-employment transition specialists attended the conference.

Outcome: Educate stakeholders on diploma options and assess impact

The state has developed diploma pathways for students with disabilities outside of the traditional diploma. The first is the occupational diploma, the use of which continues to expand throughout schools and districts in Tennessee. This diploma provides a roadmap for students to prepare for employment and includes completing two years of work-based learning as a requirement to earn it.

The second is the alternate academic diploma (AAD), which was approved in early 2018. The 2018-19 school year was the first where students had the option to begin working towards this diploma. Implementation of this diploma is critical to increasing the employment rate for Tennesseans with disabilities.

The alternate academic diploma is designed for students who have a significant cognitive disability, are learning content linked to state content standards, and require extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum.

To earn the diploma, a student must:

- Participate in the alternative assessment
- Earn the 22 credits required as outlined in the state high school policy
- Receive special education services or supports
- Make satisfactory progress on an individualized education program (IEP)
- Have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct
- Complete a transition assessment that measures postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community involvement

Eligibility and participation are made by the student's IEP team, but overall, states are held to a one percent participation rate. If the student earns the AAD within the first four years plus one summer of high school, it will count towards the school graduation rate. This is an important incentive to ensure that schools are implementing the diploma.

For the first time, teachers have clear guidance on the high, but accessible, expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities. As a result, students are increasingly provided opportunities for learning more skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and strategies for learning new information. It is expected these experiences will support the students in achieving more employment goals and increasing access to postsecondary education and training opportunities.



GOAL FIVE *(continued)*

Outcome: Increase work-based learning opportunities for transitioning students

2019 Focus: The rapid expansion of on-the-job learning in high school

Work-based learning has become a key component of preparing students with disabilities to transition into competitive, integrated employment. Because of its success, its use has grown rapidly, with enrollment increasing more than 600 percent in the past three years.

Work-based learning allows students with moderate to severe disabilities to learn employability skills and participate in various work environments throughout the school day. Local school districts form partnerships with local businesses to provide real-world opportunities, which help students learn their strengths and interests that can help them be successful in future job endeavors.

'18

'17

'16

600% INCREASE IN ENROLLMENT

2019 Focus: Inclusive higher education programs and preparing for employment in a post-secondary environment

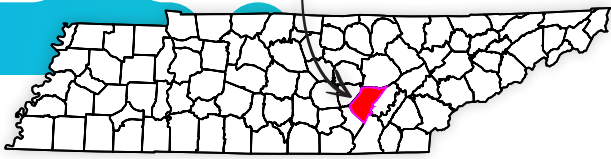
Tennessee currently has five inclusive higher education programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities on college campuses. A sixth school, East Tennessee State University, is pilot a program fall 2019. These programs are between two and four years and provide students with post-secondary education and the opportunity to experience college life while learning important skills to support them in their independence and employment goals.

These programs continue to grow in size and students who graduate experience very high employment success rates. Because of this success, TennCare, DHS-VR and the Department of Education worked together to better understand any barriers that may exist for students to obtain post-secondary education and explore ways to expand the available supports to help increase opportunities to participate in post-secondary education after graduating from high school. A survey has been developed and distributed in hopes of identifying and addressing these barriers to help lead to more post-secondary opportunities and increase employment for students with disabilities.



JOB JOURNEYS ACROSS TENNESSEE

BLEDSON COUNTY, TN



meet
HARLEY



Overcoming Obstacles and Gaining Employment

Harley Reges, now 22 years old, was referred for Pre-employment Transition Services at Bledson County Transition School-to-Work (TSW) by his special education teacher when he was an 18-year-old senior in high school.

In addition to having a learning disability and mental health diagnosis, Harley's home life has been a challenge. When Harley started with TSW, his special education teacher reported that Harley had truancy issues. TSW staff assisted Harley with job exploration activities, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and post-secondary counseling. They also counseled Harley on the importance of attending high school regularly, as it impacts a person's ability to pursue further education after high school. Harley was informed that, if he would attend school regularly, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) would be able to better assist him with attending vocational school after high school. VR counselor Randall Allen met with Harley and began working with him to develop a vocational plan following high school.

Because he enjoyed welding and his welding teacher, Harley settled on welding as his vocational objective. TSW staff assisted Harley with getting his FAFSA completed and choosing a vocational school. Harley chose to attend the Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) in Crossville. TSW staff assisted Harley with his TCAT application, and Mr. Allen met with him review what assistance VR could provide while he was in training.

Harley began the welding program at TCAT in June of 2018 and graduated the program with honors in less than one year. Shortly after graduating from the program, Harley accepted a position with a construction company that installs and repairs guardrails. Harley states that he has a wonderful job, is currently engaged to be married, and will be moving into his own home soon. Harley credits his success to his VR counselor, TSW staff, and his welding teacher who encouraged him to press forward to obtain the training he needed to have a better life.

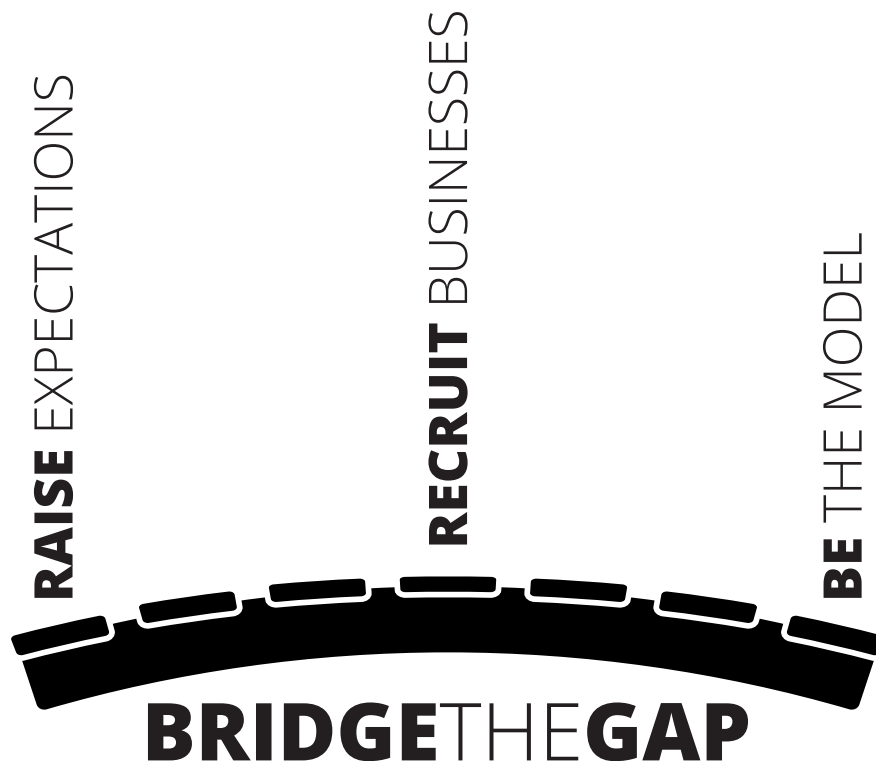
NEXT | STEPS

The state as a whole has experienced success in aligning programs, funding, and resources to improve the experience and the outcomes for people with disabilities. Some of the programs that are supporting people to achieve their employment goals may not have been possible without the vision and collaboration stemming from the Employment First Task Force. However, it is impossible to ignore that overall, people with disabilities are still experiencing a significantly lower employment rate than people without disabilities. While those numbers are disappointing, it is not disheartening to the members of the task force. Instead, it provides motivation.

The barriers that remain are not new. They include:

- Raising expectations about employment among families, employers, and the community
- Increasing expectations about postsecondary engagement, including employment, among teachers and local districts
- Recruiting both large and small businesses to think inclusively about hiring
- Identifying how to make state government a model employer for people with disabilities

That's not to say nothing has improved in these areas. More businesses are seeing the value that people with disabilities can bring to the workforce. And many people, families and employers do have higher expectation for people with disabilities. However, it is still not uncommon to hear doubts that a person with a disability can work and/or live independently. Until the community at large embraces that all means all, this task force will still have work to do.



CURRENT EMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017 for ages 18-64.

PERSONS WITH
ANY DISABILITY

33.3%

GAP of
44.2%

77.5%

PERSONS WITH
NO DISABILITY

APPENDICES

A › *EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN*

B › *EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 28*

C › *EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE MEMBERS*

D › *TASK FORCE WORKGROUP PARTICIPANTS*

EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN

MISSION

Create and expand opportunities for employment for all Tennesseans with disabilities

VISION

People with disabilities have the same opportunities for employment as anyone

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 28

An order establishing the Tennessee Employment First initiative to expand community employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities

GOALS

1. Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities (#Data #Coordination #WIOA #Policy #Legislation #Workforce)
2. Build shared community commitment to Employment First (#Self-Advocates #Families #Community #Communication)
3. Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities (#Businesses)
4. Make Tennessee state government a model employer of people with disabilities (#Government #Leadership)
5. Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success (#Education #Transition)

GOAL 1

Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities (#Data #Coordination #WIOA #Policy #Legislation #Workforce)

OBJECTIVE

Collect, analyze, and integrate employment data of people with disabilities

STRATEGIES

- Maintain employment data dashboard on TennesseeWorks website with regularly updated data from public and private sources, which may include but is not limited to: DIDD, DHS/VR, DOL, TennCare, DOE, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, DMHSAS, TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model) TN, Health, Children's Services, TennCare, Treasury, Project SEARCH, etc.
- Explore the possibility of integrating additional data sources into the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (TLDS), including ways to maximize use of TLDS data
- Evaluate progress annually on statewide employment goal
- Utilize data (e.g. from DOE student data) to make decisions and plan for services in other agencies
- Analyze available data (e.g. Easy IEP, Indicator 13, and Indicator 14) to answer important key questions related to the quality of transition assessment, planning, and services.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Data workgroup
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
- Respective state agencies
- Employment Roundtable

OBJECTIVE

Assess impact of interagency MOUs that promote employment for people with disabilities

STRATEGIES

- Continue assessing impact of MOUs regularly at Employment Roundtable meetings. MOUs to be assessed include, but are not limited to:
 - Youth Transition
 - VR/TennCare (ECF CHOICES)
 - VR/DMHSAS (IPS)
 - VR/DIDD (Supported Employment)
 - VR/DOLWD (employment data sharing)
 - VR/TDOC (Day Reporting Community Resource Centers)
 - VR/DOE (pre-employment transition services)
- Clearly delineate state and local agency roles and responsibilities in planning, services, and coordination, and clearly communicate to help individuals and families better understand state and local systems
- Explore the development of a universal form/plan built around the individual
- Utilize customer survey data to assess the efficacy and alignment of local service delivery systems, including with Customer Focused Government (CFG) state goals

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Employment Roundtable
- Respective state agencies

OBJECTIVE

Track implementation and impact of WIOA Combined State Plan sections focused on people with disabilities

STRATEGIES

- Revisit WIOA combined state plan (e.g. presentation by DOL at the Employment Roundtable) to ensure agencies are aware of progress, challenges, and agency roles/responsibilities
- Strengthen partnership and collaboration between DOL and entities that have a disability focus

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- VR
- DOL
- Employment Roundtable

OBJECTIVE

Propose policies, regulations, legislation, and funding that increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities

STRATEGIES

- Monitor implementation of Supported Decision Making legislation
- Continue educating stakeholders (e.g. self-advocates, families, educators, medical practitioners, judges, etc.) about supported decision making options for people with disabilities, including recently passed legislation
- Propose legislation and/or seek state/federal funding to support a career ladder strategy for staff who work for provider agencies
- Pursue additional funding for Individual Placement and Support (IPS)
- Continue exploring strategies to increase the penetration rate of IPS statewide
- Continue pilot and explore additional strategies to effectively support individuals with dual diagnosis (IDD + behavioral health diagnosis) in the workplace
- Continue monitoring the use of sub-minimum wages, under 14(c) certificates, for people with disabilities

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Policy workgroup
- Mental Health Workgroup
- Advocacy organizations
- State agencies (as appropriate per funding/lobbying requirements)
- Employment Roundtable

GOAL 1 ... CONTINUED

Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities (#Data #Coordination #WIOA #Policy #Legislation #Workforce)

OBJECTIVE

Assess the impact of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program

STRATEGIES

- Continue reporting on ECF CHOICES outcomes, including additional data fields (e.g. wages, industries, demographics of employed individuals, etc.)
- Continue implementing communication strategies to ensure ECF CHOICES information is available and consistent for all stakeholder groups.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- TennCare
- Individuals/Family Workgroup
- Communications Workgroup
- Advocacy organizations
- Employment Roundtable

OBJECTIVE

Explore workforce strategies to promote recruitment, retention, and development of disability service professionals

STRATEGIES

- Review promising practices nationally
- Share information about new initiatives in Tennessee to provide training at community colleges

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- TennCare, VR, DIDD, and other state agencies as appropriate
- Provider workgroup

GOAL 2

Build shared community commitment to Employment First (#Self-Advocates #Families #Community #Communication)

OBJECTIVE

Cultivate Employment First champions across Tennessee, including individuals and families, community leaders, public officials, schools, private citizens, and other organizations

STRATEGIES

- Host self-sustaining Think Employment Summit (s) including regional summits
- Host Community Conversations across Tennessee and share results
- Complete and share findings from employer expectation survey
- Continue implementing awareness campaigns about the benefits of employing people with disabilities (e.g. social media videos, #HireMyStrengths, etc.)
- Implement strategies to recognize businesses that employ people with disabilities
- Maintain updated content for the resource web page on the TennesseeWorks website
- Convene the Employment First Communications Workgroup quarterly to coordinate strategies for materials and information to support individuals and families in securing employment.
- Consider using “education ministries” model through faith communities
- Ensure parents/caregivers have access to information regarding respite and other related services
- Continue outreach and education about importance of benefits counseling and available resources

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Individuals/Families Workgroup
- Employer Workgroup
- Provider Workgroup
- Communications workgroup
- DOE
- DIDD
- VR
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

OBJECTIVE

Improve and expand communication channels to individuals with disabilities and their families

STRATEGIES

- Continuously seek input from families and stay current in our understanding about what they want and need
- Engage community and grassroots organizations regularly to learn from them and support their work
- Effectively distribute materials/information to support individuals and families in securing employment
- Ensure resources appear in format(s) that are accessible to individuals and families
- Coordinate linkage and messaging across state agency websites
- Continue biweekly blog on TennesseeWorks about issues important to families around employment, independent living, policy, etc.
- Raise awareness among individuals and families about ABLE TN, ECF CHOICES, and VR services
- Use existing forums (e.g. Arc Family Forums, Family Coalition meetings, etc.) to discuss employment topics with families
- Use existing forums (e.g. DIDD regional focus groups, TennCare advisory groups, etc.) to discuss employment topics with individuals with disabilities
- Implement communication strategies to ensure stakeholders are aware of AJC services
- Consider adding specific portals/sections for people with disabilities on sites like Jobs4tn.gov

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Communications workgroup
- Individuals/Families Workgroup
- Provider Workgroup
- DOE
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
- DOL/AJCs
- VR

GOAL 3

Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities (#Businesses)

OBJECTIVE

Cultivate Employment First champions among business leaders across Tennessee

STRATEGIES

- Recognize businesses and individual business leaders who hire people with disabilities (e.g. Governor's Award, highlighting businesses on social media monthly, etc.)
- Seek opportunities to present the "business case" for employing people with disabilities (available on the TennesseeWorks website)
- Share the Employer Outreach Initiative (EOI) materials in the TennesseeWorks website employer section
- Explore training programs that help businesses assess needs, tasks, and opportunities within their company
- Use available data from ECF CHOICES, VR, DMHSAS, DIDD, etc. to identify businesses that hire people with disabilities and approach them about becoming part of the broader Employment First movement. Tap into the experiences and expertise of these businesses to continue refining our business engagement practices.

GOAL 3 ... CONTINUED

Increase the number of employers that hire people with disabilities (#Businesses)

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Employer Workgroup
- Provider workgroup
- Policy Workgroup
- VR, DOL, and other state agencies as appropriate

OBJECTIVE

Establish baseline and set goals for the number of Tennessee businesses that employ people with disabilities

STRATEGIES

- Develop a system to collect and analyze data about businesses that employ people with disabilities in Tennessee
- Establish relationships with Workforce 360 (ECD) and American Job Centers (AJCs) at the local level
- Increase awareness and use of AJC system

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Data workgroup
- Employer workgroup
- DOL/AJCs

OBJECTIVE

Create and expand partnerships with existing workforce initiatives

STRATEGIES

- Consider implementing strategies to establish local/regional “single points of contact” for employers
- Consider adding Disability:IN (formerly Business Leadership Network) group in Tennessee

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Employer workgroup
- DOL, VR, and other state agencies as appropriate

OBJECTIVE

Create additional partnerships between employers and school transition programs

STRATEGIES

- Establish additional employer partnerships, (e.g. Project SEARCH, Walgreen’s REDI, Sam’s Club/Waves training program, etc.)
- Use DOE modules content to meet professional development needs of transition stakeholders

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- DOE
- Employer workgroup
- Provider workgroup
- VR

GOAL 4

Make Tennessee state government a model employer of people with disabilities (#Government #Leadership)

OBJECTIVE

Develop initiatives that increase internship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities within Tennessee state government ("Phase 1")

STRATEGIES

- Engage the TN Department of Human Resources as a partner in making TN a model public sector employer
- Work with the Commissioner of TN Department of HR on the possibility of expanding paid and unpaid internships and employment opportunities within state government
- Develop a toolkit for starting internships
- Continue conversations with TN state parks systems about hiring people with disabilities
- Tennessee Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services (LAEDS)
- Explore how lessons/practices learned at the state government level may be applicable to local/county governments.
- Gather a baseline of how many state employees self-disclose having a disability
- Define disability and other key terms for purposes of using a "common language"
- Create strategic plan that includes evaluation of current practices
- Partner with VR to develop pipeline of candidates interested in public service

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Policy Workgroup
- DD Council

OBJECTIVE

Create toolkit that serves as a resource for TN communities to work towards becoming a model public sector employer of people with disabilities ("Phase 2")

STRATEGIES

- Identify and support communities (city/county governments) that want to become model employer communities
- Define characteristics of successful model public sector employers
- Explore the possibility of using/adapting the public toolkit for private businesses
- Exchange best practices with employer engagement group (i.e. which best practices are relevant for public and private engagement)

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Policy Workgroup
- DD Council

GOAL 5

Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success (#Education #Transition)

OBJECTIVE

Expand use of Transition TN among educators and other stakeholders

STRATEGIES

- Highlight various TransitionTN resources and lessons through Transition Tennessee listserv
- Encourage school districts in need of assistance to access TransitionTN as the first step in taking a proactive approach to improving student outcomes
- Develop regional communities of practice (CoP) and leverage the resources in TransitionTN as a means to support the CoPs
- Ensure students and families have access to information that lists and explain all options/programs available upon exiting the school system.
- Consider adding video/module about benefits and how they are impacted by working
- Identify and showcase local success stories in counties around the state
- Use Community Conversations model to invest and learn from families

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- DOE
- VR
- Communications workgroup

OBJECTIVE

Educate stakeholders on diploma options and assess impact

STRATEGIES

- Start a study of the new diploma options (e.g. occupational and alternate academic diploma), their implementation, and their impact on student outcomes

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- DOE
- Communications workgroup

OBJECTIVE

Provide technical assistance and coaching for transition professional development modules

STRATEGIES

- Implement and evaluate a plan for professional development that includes both live training and online resources through Transition Tennessee.
- Develop a “talking points” series that focuses on superintendents, school administrators, and other professionals that importance of investing in transition and employment, including Career Technical Education (CTE)
- Showcase schools and programs in the state that are effectively connecting students to early work experiences.
- Establish baselines and measure outcomes for transitional professional development modules
- Develop a set of district and school level reflection tools addressing best and recommended practices in transition and employment

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- DOE
- Communications workgroup

OBJECTIVE

Increase work-based learning opportunities for transitioning students

STRATEGIES

- Focus on equipping partners around the state to implement workbased learning (e.g. courses/resources available for high school students and educators about WBL and transition)
- Increase paid work opportunities for students while they are still in school
- Continue to recruit WBL Coordinators to serve on the WBL Leadership Council and train additional WBL coordinators across the state
- Develop regional communities of practice (CoP) with a goal of determining how to increase WBL in local school districts
- State agencies representatives to participate on Business Advisory Committees for Project SEARCH, Next Steps, IDEAL, etc.
- Identify and connect school, community, and postsecondary education partnerships aimed at increasing certified TN Pathways opportunities for students with disabilities.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- DOE
- DOL
- VR

STATE OF TENNESSEE
EXECUTIVE ORDER
BY THE GOVERNOR
No. 28

AN ORDER ESTABLISHING THE TENNESSEE EMPLOYMENT FIRST INITIATIVE TO EXPAND
COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES

WHEREAS, Tennesseans with disabilities, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders and other disabilities, disproportionately experience high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and dependence upon publicly funded programs; and

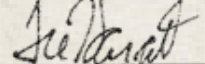
WHEREAS, my Administration is committed to supporting the Employment First Initiative establishing competitive and integrated employment, where work is performed in a typical work setting for a competitive wage.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bill Haslam, Governor of the State of Tennessee, by virtue of the power and authority vested in me by the Tennessee Constitution and the laws of Tennessee, do hereby order and direct the following:

1. State agencies coordinate efforts to increase opportunities for integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, substance abuse disorders and other disabilities.
2. The Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities convene an Employment First Taskforce ("Taskforce").
3. The Taskforce shall consist of representatives from the agencies administering disability services, family members of persons receiving employment services, vocational rehabilitation, workforce services and education, as well as consumer advocates and third party disability service providers.
4. This Taskforce shall:
 - a. Identify state agency policies and procedures that create barriers and disincentives for employment of people with disabilities and develop recommendations to reduce or eliminate those barriers and disincentives to better meet the needs of individuals who desire employment;
 - b. Identify best practices, effective partnerships, sources of available federal funds and opportunities for shared services among existing state agencies to increase integrated and competitive employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities;
 - c. Review and consider the recommendations of the Office of Disability and Employment Policy (ODEP) to increase opportunities for integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.
 - d. Develop training on disability employment for state agencies, provider agencies, individuals being supported and their families in order to raise awareness of effective strategies for achieving integrated and competitive employment outcomes.
5. The Taskforce shall convene for its initial meeting on or before August 1, 2013. Thereafter, the Taskforce shall meet quarterly and provide an annual progress report to the Governor.

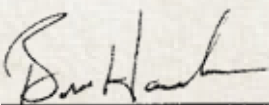
IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have subscribed my signature and caused the Great Seal of the State of Tennessee to be affixed this **19th** day of **June, 2013**.

ATTEST:



SECRETARY OF STATE





GOVERNOR

EMPLOYMENT FIRST **TASK FORCE MEMBERS**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Seth Pedigo,
Director of Employment and Day Services, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Wanda Willis,
Executive Director, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Elise McMillan,
Co-Director, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

Mandy Johnson,
Assistant Commissioner, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services

MEMBERS

Carrie Hobbs Guiden, *Executive Director, The Arc Tennessee*

Stephanie Connell Cowherd, *Associate Director, University of Tennessee- Center for Literacy, Education and Employment*

Doria Panvini, *Parent Advocate*

William McMillan, *Self Advocate*

Lauren Percy, *Director of Public Policy, Council on Developmental Disabilities*

Dwayne Webb, *Director of Day & Employment, St. John's Community Services*

Pam Hollingsworth, *Progress Inc.*

Robert Nicholas, *Coordinator, Project SEARCH Knoxville*

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Lisa Primm, *Executive Director, Disability Rights Tennessee*

Matthew Parriott, *Director of Communication, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services*

Janet Shouse, *Disability Employment Specialist, TennesseeWorks*

Ruth Brock, *Program Supervisor, Supported Employment, Department of Human Services*

Mary Fultineer, *Division Director, Frontier Health*

Cristi Blalock, *Employment Services Coordinator, Frontier Health*

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Tiffany Kelley, *Sensory Director, Department of Human Services*

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Jessica Awsumb, *Research Associate, Vanderbilt University*

Rachael Jenkins, *Research Associate, Vanderbilt University*

Mark Liverman, *Director of Wellness and Employment, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services*

Nicole Phillips, *Statewide IPS Trainer/Supervisor*

Cassie Belter, *Statewide IPS Trainer*

Carla Garrett, *Youth Grant Program Manager, Department of Labor & Workforce Development*

John Camperlino, *Employment Specialist, United Healthcare Corporation*

Naveh Eldar, *Employment Specialist, BlueCare*

Tina Jones, *Employment Specialist, Amerigroup*

Kendra Mitchell, *Program Director, Department of Health*

TASK FORCE **WORKGROUP PARTICIPANTS**

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- Jeremy Norden-Paul
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- Ned Andrew Solomon
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- Sheila Moore
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- Will McMillan
- Tonya Bowman
- Susan Bryant
- Shontie Brown
- Jenness Roth
- Jamie Perry

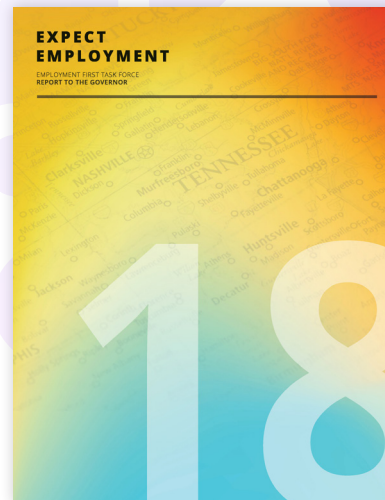
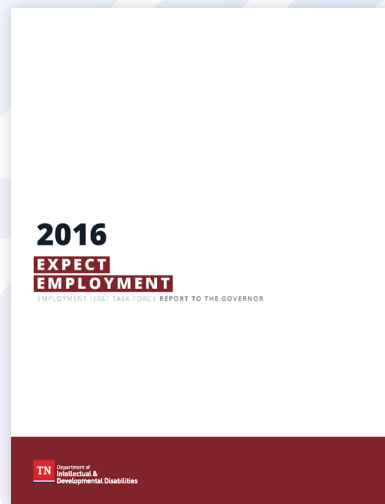
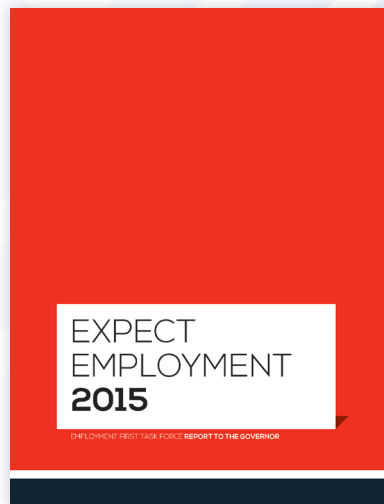
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- Mark Liverman
- Ellyn Wilbur
- Nichole Phillips
- Tom Starling
- Cassie Belter
- Christopher Morant



VIEW OUR **EXPECT EMPLOYMENT REPORTS** FROM
PREVIOUS YEARS BY VISITING OUR SITE:
tn.gov/didd/e1st



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