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Expect Employment Report to Governor

Disability and Aging

2022

Expect Employment: 2022 Report to the Governor

Tennessee. Employment First Task Force

Tennessee. Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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EXPECT EMPLOYMENT





A NOTE FROM **GOVERNOR BILL LEE**

The past year has brought tremendous economic development news for Tennessee as companies from across the globe choose to invest in our great state. This includes Ford's Blue Oval City, which will have a generational impact on West Tennessee's workforce.

As we continue to focus on workforce development, I'm proud that people with disabilities and their desire for employment are being included in the conversation. Their contributions continue to impact not only their own lives, but those of their employers, their colleagues and the community at large.

During my time as governor, I've experienced the various ways state agencies are collaborating with community partners to prepare Tennesseans living with disabilities to join the workforce. Preparations include on-the-job internships at major Tennessee companies through Project SEARCH, post-secondary preparation at the state's eight post-secondary higher education programs across the state, and partnerships with community providers to offer job coaching and technology supports.

I commend the Employment First Task Force for its efforts to guide and lead this important work so that people living with disabilities continue to play a part in our workforce. There is still more work to be done, and I'm excited to see the opportunities ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Lee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee



EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNER AGENCIES

TN Department of
**Intellectual &
Developmental Disabilities**

TN Department of
**Labor & Workforce
Development**

TN Department of
Human Services

TN Department of
Education

TN Division of
TennCare

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

TN Council on
Developmental Disabilities

TN Department of
**Economic &
Community Development**

TN Department of
Health


The Arc.
Tennessee

 **DISABILITY
RIGHTS TN**

 **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past year has brought huge economic success to Tennessee. In Fall 2021, Ford announced plans to build its Blue Oval City and Battery Park in Haywood Co. This is a \$5.6 billion investment expected to create thousands of jobs in rural west Tennessee. More businesses continue to relocate or expand. In March 2022, Tennessee's unemployment rate dropped to an all-time low of 3.2 percent. The climate is ripe to aggressively close the wide gap that continues to exist between employment of people with disabilities and people without.

The Employment First Task Force is working toward that goal. We do this by creating an environment in Tennessee that:

- Prepares people with disabilities to enter the workforce alongside their peers at fair wages
- Educates employers about the many contributions people with disabilities can make to their companies and communities.

The Employment First Task Force was created in 2013 through Gov. Haslam's Executive Order No. 28. It is tasked with identifying and removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities. This includes people with intellectual, developmental, sensory, and physical disabilities. It also includes those who have a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse disorder. The task force is guided by a four-year strategic plan and reports its work annually in the Expect Employment Report. This 2022 report is the ninth annual report.

This year, the task force is reporting on year one of its work on a new strategic plan. This plan continues the focus on:

- Service alignment
- Employer and community awareness
- Increasing transition readiness for students leaving high school.

The new strategic plan also has a new goal on the use of technology. This is important as the COVID pandemic has brought about permanent changes in how technology is used in the workplace and in getting ready for employment.

Much of the work this year focused on collecting baseline data. This will inform future action on the strategic plan. This report contains slices of that baseline data, showing how it may be used to make measurable employment gains for people with disabilities.

Next year, the Task Force and TennesseeWorks Partnership will celebrate its 10th year and its 10th report to the governor. The community of people working together on disability employment is much larger than it was in 2013 and momentum continues to build. Our shared work ensures that people with disabilities are a vital part of the present and future workforce of the Volunteer State.

HOW IS THE STATE SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT GOALS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

TENNESSEE'S NEW EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2021-2024

This strategic plan tells how state agencies, disability groups, and college and university centers will work together to grow employment options for people with disabilities.

WHY DO TENNESSEE'S DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT PLANS MATTER TO ME?

All Tennesseans – whether you are a person with a disability, a person who loves someone with a disability, a professional in the disability field, an employer, or a taxpayer contributing to public programs – are affected in some way by disability employment.

Tennessee is an Employment First State. Employment First means employment is the preferred option for every person getting disability services. Before, people with disabilities did not have the same opportunities to work as people without disabilities. In Tennessee, we can be proud that the Employment First Task Force meets regularly. The Task Force includes professionals and citizens who all work on growing employment options for people with disabilities.

The Task Force has a strategic plan that sets goals and helps us measure progress toward making sure, someday, people with disabilities have the same employment rates as people without disabilities. A report is presented to the Governor every year.

Tennessee has an Employment First website where you can read the annual reports, see videos of real Tennesseans impacted by this work, and find the strategic plans. You can visit the website here: tn.gov/didd/e1st



[View "CLOSE THE GAP"]

TENNESSEE'S EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN:

'21-'24

SERVICE ALIGNMENT

Make sure employment programs work together so that it's easier for the customer to find and use those programs.

STRATEGIES

- Set goals for improving disability employment. Use national employment data to measure progress.
- Find ways and make commitments to work together across agencies (for example, through formal agreements, joint trainings, etc).
- Identify and fix system barriers to employment services (i.e., barriers that involve multiple agencies).
- Make sure all employment programs are based on up-to-date research, training, and resources about what works best.
- Make sure disability services are all working together at the community level.
- Work together to increase funding for the professionals supporting people with disabilities (i.e., provider agencies and direct support professionals).

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Update the “**close the gap**” infographic every year.
- Review formal agreements between agencies every year to make sure they stay updated.
- Track how often and what happens after the Employment First Task Force gives input for employment:
 - Legislation/policies
 - Partners (for example, advice on solving issues)
 - Community programs
- Track results of work to support disability service providers and direct support professionals across state agencies.

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Make sure employment programs offer technology to support people with disabilities in employment.

STRATEGIES

- Increase awareness of technology as a support for employment.
- Promote better access to and training about using technology for people with disabilities.
- Review how different state employment programs use technology now. Make recommendations for improving coordination across those programs.
- Work to have Tennessee named as a Technology First State.

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Track the number of people using technology in employment.
- Track the number of events, presentations, and other ways used to increase awareness of technology options for employment.
- Create a cross-agency committee or council to advise on using technology for employment.
- Develop an annual report that uses the same tracking to report on the use of technology supports across state agencies.

EMPLOYERS

Increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities.

STRATEGIES

- Work with the Governor's office so jobs4tn.gov can connect employers and job seekers with disabilities.
- Work with local and state Chambers of Commerce to build relationships with employers.
- Work with the Department of Human Resources to attract and better support state employees with disabilities (i.e., "State as a Model Employer").
- Use ways proven to work to get employers involved (for example, working with VR's Business Employer Consultants Program or starting a state chapter of Disability:IN).
- Set up ways to get regular input from employers.

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Tracking:
 - Number of employers who claim the TN tax credit for hiring people with disabilities
 - Number of job applicants and employees who say they are a person with a disability
 - Number of relationships agencies form with new employers
 - Number of agencies who offer pilot programs to hire people with disabilities, and how many people they hired
- Develop an annual "employer snapshot"

TENNESSEE'S EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN:

'21-'24

continued

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First. This means all Tennesseans will believe that everyone can work with the right supports.

STRATEGIES

- Develop common messaging about disability employment that all agencies can share. People with disabilities should be the top priority audience.
- Show how state partners are working together to help local communities see how to work together on employment.
- Publicly celebrate employers who hire people with disabilities.
- Use the Center for Decision-Making Support to help people plan for the future, including employment: tndecisionmaking.org.

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Track the number of organizations that are part of the Employment First communication group.
- Track awareness “outputs” (messages that promote employment) and “reach” (how many people see those messages) across agencies.
- Track the number and results of efforts to reach underserved/unserved and marginalized groups of people (for example, Black or Latino communities).
- Report on how much agencies worked together to track communication data.

STUDENT TRANSITION

Prepare students for life after high school.

STRATEGIES

- Grow local resources that help students get ready for life after high school.
- Make sure employment programs are connected to resources that help with the school-to-adult transition (for example, Career and Technical Education, Transition TN, The Arc TN, and STEP TN).
- Create employment training for high school teachers and providers who offer pre-employment services in schools.
- Help school administrators know the importance of transition and employment supports.
- Share stories of schools and programs that do a good job of connecting students to early work experiences.
- Increase paid work opportunities for students while they are still in school.
- Help students find job opportunities in their communities.

MEASURING PROGRESS

- Track:
 - Number of students in post-high school employment programs
 - Graduation rates
 - Data on how many students get help in high school with transition to employment
 - Number of students with disabilities who take Career and Technical Education classes
 - Number of students doing work-based learning through the state Department of Education and Vocational Rehabilitation



**STRATEGIC PLAN
YEAR 1 UPDATES**

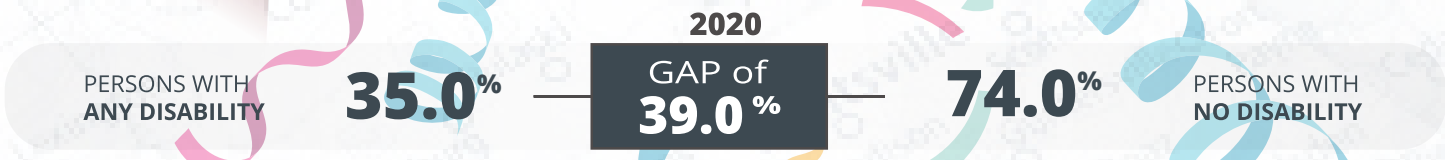
'21-'22

EMPLOYMENT *for* PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



CURRENT EMPLOYMENT RATE

According to the Institute for Community Inclusion, for ages 16-64.



The employment gap has **decreased by 5.2%** between 2017 and 2020.

SERVICE ALIGNMENT

Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination at all levels for a seamless customer experience.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

We make sure that employment programs for people with disabilities work together.

Annual Objective: Complete 2021 update of the close the gap data goal

For many years, the Employment First Task Force reviewed employment data collected by various state agencies to assess employment success statewide. In 2018, the Task Force brought together these data points and set a single statewide employment goal. That goal is to close the employment gap between people with disabilities and people without a disability by 5 percent by 2023.

That chart was updated in 2021 to show that the gap decreased by 1.7 percent between 2017 and 2019.

Annual Objective: Establish a timeline/review schedule for existing MOUs with review tool/checklist and access through a shared folder.

One of the primary ways agencies work together on employment outcomes is through monthly Employment Roundtable meetings. The Council on Developmental Disabilities started this group many years ago to increase communication between different state agencies and the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network working on employment for people with disabilities. The Council continues to lead those meetings.

There are several existing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and other agreements that are focused on meeting employment goals for people with disabilities. The Roundtable is looking at all the existing agreements to see:

- What's working well?
- Are there new ways to partner across agencies?

Annual Objective: Provide Policy Updates at each Task Force meeting

Regular policy updates make sure that all Task Force members know what's happening across state government that may affect employment for people with disabilities. This helps agencies and communities across Tennessee stay up to date on each other's work and find new ways to work together on strategic plan goals.

Annual Objective: Share successes and outcomes of Community TRC transformation pilots, CBT grants for local community transition models, the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, and DIDD pre-employment innovation models.

Community Based Transition Grants

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) University Center of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) is working to make sure young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have seamless and successful transitions to community life. Over the past year, the Whole Community Project team continued developing and piloting an innovative new "Whole Community" Transition Model. This model can be used to promote employment, education, and community involvement for people with IDD in their local rural or urban communities. VKC continued its partnerships with Progress Inc. in Davidson County and Developmental Services of Dickson County. A team was formed in each of those counties that included local representatives of:

- Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DHS/VR),
- Employment and Community First Choices,
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS) providers,
- American Job Centers,
- high school special education programs,
- higher education institutions,
- businesses and nonprofits,
- parents of individuals with disabilities,
- and self-advocates.

Through these local teams, we bring each community together to create more seamless transitions to full community life for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In Dickson County, the Whole Community Transition Team continued to wrestle with solutions to pressing issues.

- First, the team decided that the key to bringing everyone in the Dickson community together would be reaching out to local faith communities and faith leaders. VKC hosted a small group discussion via Zoom with representatives from 5 local churches in the Dickson area to discuss how churches could be more welcoming for congregants with IDD and their families. VKC provided the churches with resources and guidance on more inclusive practices.
- Second, the team focused on reaching out to local civic organizations to increase employment opportunities.
- Third, in partnership with Developmental Services of Dickson County, the Dickson County school district, and VR, the team hosted a parent information night at the local YMCA. Parents met in person with their local VR counselor to learn more about VR's benefits and supports for paid employment. Prior to this meeting, families in Dickson very rarely connect with VR services. After the meeting, the VR counselor was invited to present at an upcoming Dickson County Schools professional development day for teachers. This will help teachers share information about VR with families of their students.
- The team is now working to address the lack of public transportation in the county.

In Davidson County, the team focused on ways to bring this model to people who needed it most in such a large county. The team decided to target two underserved high schools: Whites Creek and Maplewood. From there, members of the team met with special educators and Pre-ETS providers from each of those high schools to discuss next steps. A number of key barriers were highlighted:

- lack of resources and opportunities for students
- lack of accessible transportation
- transition services are generic and not individualized
- lack of knowledge about the services and supports available to students after they graduate
- inconsistent quality of IEP meetings (e.g., students don't always attend; adult service agency representatives rarely attend)
- families are hesitant for students to work or attend college programs after graduation due to financial reasons or lack of knowledge

The team decided on a number of steps:

- provide transition-specific training and information to teachers
- meet with school administration to increase their buy-in to the importance of pre-ETS and other transition services
- increase collaboration between teachers and Pre-ETS providers to create a consistent structure for the delivery of Pre-ETS
- build relationships between school and local businesses to increase employment opportunities and employer awareness
- share more information and provide hands-on opportunities for students to learn more about transition so they can better envision what comes after high school.

This work is ongoing with the Davidson County Whole Community Team.

Individual Placement and Support Expansion

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is a highly successful, evidence-based practice for employing people living with behavioral health conditions at jobs of their choosing. IPS is a model of supported employment for people with serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar, depression). Because of its success, an expansion was approved for fiscal year 2023 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The expansion will serve 740 more Tennesseans per year. This expansion is made possible through continued partnership with the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation program (DHS/VR). It will allow Tennessee to access more federal funding. There are currently 14 behavioral health providers in the state who use IPS to support people in their search for work. In fiscal year 2022, 1,167 people with serious mental illness were helped with a supported employment goal by an IPS team in Tennessee. This expansion will result in using IPS to meet even more people where they are with a proven method to support their goals of becoming more independent and self-sustaining.

Another possible part of this expansion is covering new populations with IPS. Conversations are happening about using IPS to support people who are deaf, blind or hard of hearing. DHS/VR and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) are working on an IPS pilot to support people within this population. DMHSAS also has a program called Collegiate Recovery Initiative. With this program, DMHSAS and its partners are working to support the recovery needs of students. IPS will be one of the resources provided.



Service Alignment Objective: Take a system-wide approach to developing systems and funding support for provider agencies and direct support professionals.

For years, the Employment First Task Force and the state as a whole have focused on the challenge of hiring and keeping qualified direct support professionals. Despite wage increases, this challenge still threatens progress on supporting people with disabilities to live, work and engage in their communities.

Governor Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly have continued their commitment to increasing the average wages for DSPs in the state budget. In FY23, the budget provides for an increase to \$13.75 hourly, up from \$12.50. More importantly, this wage increase applies to all Medicaid-funded Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) programs, including the CHOICES Program, Employment and Community First CHOICES and the 1915(c) waivers.

The state is also using federal funding through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to support workforce development. This funding was used to make all rates the same across the three HCBS programs listed above. TennCare is also preparing to launch the new QuILTSS Workforce Development Program this fall. The QuILTSS Institute (TQI) is partnering with the TN Board of Regents (TBR) to offer the training for HCBS Direct Service Professionals at TN Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATS) and Community Colleges.

CODY GLASS

IPS TO INDEPENDENCE

In a workforce environment where factory jobs can be difficult to fill, East Tennessee's Diversified Power International (DPI) has found a perfect match in Cody Glass.

DPI manufactures battery chargers at its facility in Piney Flats, Tennessee. Production Supervisor Todd Austin said, "It is hard to get people in here especially in this environment that we're in right now. We have 15 open positions right now that we need to fill immediately."

Cody Glass interviewed for a job at DPI on a Wednesday, and he started the next day. In his time at DPI, Cody has earned new responsibilities and has helped train a few coworkers. Cody now works on the line testing the functionality of the finished products.

"He's worked his way from just unwrapping the boxes, and now he's the guy that says whether it ships out or not," said Austin.

Cody's IPS Employment Specialist beams with pride when she thinks about how stable employment has changed his life.

"When I started working with Cody, he didn't have transportation, but now he has a car, and he's actually moving into his own apartment. Cody has found that he can be independent, and he can be successful," said Lisa Phipps, IPS Employment Specialist with Frontier Health.

As for Cody, you won't get too many words out of him, at least not while he's on the job. "It ain't bad," he said with a smile between tasks on his checklist.

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Improve access to technology and enable its use to expand employment options.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Technology can help people with disabilities learn and be more independent in going after their career goals.

Since 2018, Enabling Technology has been a growing part of providing services and supports for people with disabilities. This option has been expanded recently to include those in both CHOICES and Employment and Community First CHOICES. These programs are now using Enabling Technology for either residential, community, or employment supports.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY BY THE NUMBERS

1915c WAIVER MEMBERS

(AS OF JUNE 2022)

230

ACTIVE ENABLING
TECHNOLOGY USERS

as part of their support services

40

ADDITIONAL
REFERRED

*and are in the person
centered process*

70

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY
PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS

*and supporting someone using Enabling Technology as part of
their services*

ECF CHOICES MEMBERS

(AS OF APRIL 2022)

19

ACTIVE ENABLING
TECHNOLOGY USERS

as part of their support services

70

ADDITIONAL
REFERRED

*and are in the person
centered process*

CHOICES MEMBERS

(AS OF APRIL 2022)

19

ACTIVE ENABLING
TECHNOLOGY USERS

as part of their support services

85

ADDITIONAL
REFERRED

*and are in the person
centered process*



KENNY

TCB AT GRACELAND

Embracing inclusive hiring practices improves the work environment and the workforce. That's what Showtime Photography, a third-party vendor at Elvis Presley's Graceland, learned when they hired Kenneth Shives three years ago.

"We were looking for a reliable resource for employment because one of the biggest challenges that I've been dealing with in recent years is searching for new talent and attendance," said Ertugrul Selvi, Showtime Operations Manager. "I contacted SRVS after I saw their program on tv and they called me right away."

SRVS is a service provider supporting people with disabilities across West Tennessee. Showtime was looking for employees who would enjoy talking with customers and learning new skills, and SRVS knew that Kenny would be the right person for the job. They helped train him for the position and provide support when needed.

Kenny is a Showtime greeter and photographer at Graceland. He snaps photos of visitors as they enter the historic tourist attraction. He also helps direct and answer customer's questions as they board and offboard shuttle buses. Kenny says he wasn't sure he'd ever work, but with hard work, the support of SRVS, and the engagement of his employer, he found a job he enjoys. "I'm meeting different people from all over the world, famous people. I'm just a people person. I love being around people. I like to have fun. I like laughing. I get a lot of exercise and I love moving around," he said.

Now Showtime says they encourage all businesses to embrace inclusion and utilize the largely untapped talent pool of Tennesseans with disabilities for their hiring needs. Selvi said, "They want to do the work. Why not give them a chance? You know, they already ready for the job."

Pre-Employment Innovation Pilot

The Pre-Employment Innovation Project launched in April 2021. The project broadens the way people engage in pre-employment services to include virtual/remote job exploration and discovery activities. Using technology to engage in pre-employment services will allow people to explore work opportunities safely and effectively. DIDD partnered with four technology vendors that offer innovative pre-employment-focused software using videos, training, assessments and other tools to help people learn about work. Participants in the project could use one or all four technology solutions to:

- learn about different kinds of work,
- identify their job interests and skills, and
- gain a better understanding of what supports they need to be successful in the workplace.

Through the project, there were several successful job placements and people were able to discover new job interests.

Further Expansion

DIDD and TennCare are finding new ways to promote and expand the use of Enabling Technology. Technology is embedded in the assessment and person-centered planning process. DIDD holds monthly roundtable meetings with the managed care organizations, who administer services in the CHOICES and ECF CHOICES program, to support the expansion and further educate them on best practices to support people with Enabling Technology.

DIDD is also developing virtual reality training environments that will teach job skills and how to safely travel in the community. The first virtual reality environment will be released at the end of June and will teach people how to ride the bus.



Enabling Technology Summit

After a one-year hiatus due to the pandemic, DIDD once again brought providers, advocates and other leaders together for the fourth annual Enabling Technology Summit in November 2021. Approximately 250 people, including IDD leaders from other states, gathered to hear about best practices in supporting people using innovative technologies like virtual reality, the non-traditional speech recognition app called Voiceitt, transportation, and hear from a national leader about the future of supporting people with IDD using enabling technology. DIDD looks forward to gathering people together in November 2022 to continue the conversation with a focus on employment and travel technologies.



SHIRLEY PRE-EMPLOYMENT INNOVATION WORKS

Shirley Casson was happy that she had a job, but she wasn't always happy with the work she was doing. She wanted a job where she could be around people and better connect with her community; she just wasn't sure what kind of employment would suit her. That's what she told her direct support staff at Core Services of Northeast Tennessee, and together, they came up with a plan to help explore her options.

Core Services partnered with DIDD's Pre-Employment Innovation Project to give Shirley the opportunity to participate in virtual and remote job exploration and discovery. In the program, Shirley was assessed to determine her career interests and skills. She then used software to participate in virtual job shadows, which allowed her to see firsthand what the work would be like in various roles and environments. Through that process, she decided she wanted a job that involved customer service relations.

Shirley applied to Food City in Johnson City and landed a job bagging groceries, returning and cleaning shopping carts, and helping customers. She says she's much happier and that she looks forward to growing within the position. "I like the job. I get to talk to customers," she said. "I say hi!"

Shirley's support staff say she has customers who come in just to see her each week and that she has become an integral part of the Food City team.

MAPs

MAPs for Transitioning Youth

Enabling Technology and innovative strategies to increase independence are at the core of the new MAPs program, which will be offered to people with disabilities this fall.

The new Medicaid Alternative Pathways Program (MAPs) will set people living with intellectual and developmental disabilities on a path to learn skills to help them work, live independently, learn about their neighborhoods, and find hobbies that interest them.

Enabling Technology is a critical component of this program starting with the first step: plan development. MAPs will provide services that help persons supported identify community interests and resources by building their own Virtual Community Resource Map (VCRM). The map will help them identify community partners, including job opportunities, transportation options, community outings and other places of interest. Through MAPs, the goal is to refine skills and support people to foster their own functional independence, travel independently, build natural support networks, and develop independent living skills.

MAPs has funding to serve up to 1,250 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program will serve students exiting the school system or people who have recently exited and may be waiting for traditional waiver services. Participants in MAPs will receive an annual cap of \$20,000 for up to 3 years while enrolled in the program.

Program services will be provided by network providers of IDD services who demonstrate a commitment to building pathways to independence for persons supported. Preferred providers will have accreditation or organizational qualifiers in Technology First (SHIFT Accreditation), Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL), Employment 1st, and Person-Centered Organizations.

MAPs

Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence

MAPs is a new program that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want to increase their independence at home, at work, and in their community.

So, who is MAPs for?

MAPs is a diversion program. That means it is mostly for people who may not be eligible for Medicaid or long-term supports and services, but who need additional support and resources to be successful.

MAPs

So, who is MAPs for?

It's for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who want to:

Get around the community more independently...



Assistive Technology for Vocational Rehabilitation Customers

On-the-job supports can also include assistive technology for many people with disabilities. One of the ways the Vocational Rehabilitation Program supports its customers is through a statewide contract for assistive technology (AT) services through the STAR Center.

Assistive Technology services available through VR include:

- AT assessments and reports,
- training,
- and delivery and installation of AT.

AT assessments and training can occur in a variety of settings to best meet the needs of the customers. Services may occur in:

- dedicated STAR offices,
- reserved spaces such as community libraries,
- customer homes,
- job sites or other locations.

Some training may occur virtually as well.

The STAR Center provides reports containing recommendations after the assessments, and VR staff work with the customers related to their plan and potential purchase of the recommended AT.



APRIL CASE TAKING A CHANCE ON EMPLOYMENT

April has always been hesitant about employment and not motivated to try anything, as she was sure she would fail. However, others around April saw her potential. With her slight interest in volunteering, she decided to pursue Exploration, pre-employment service, to make an informed choice about whether employment was right for her. With the assistance of provider employment staff, April had the opportunity to shadow others working at various jobs to see what she might be interested in. She also had the opportunity to try out some of the tasks, one of which was rolling silverware at a local restaurant. “I could do this all day,” April announced. She seemed to take a liking to the food service industry and later toured Russell Catering. After management at Russell Catering witnessed April’s skill for rolling silverware and catching on quickly, they wanted to hire her immediately! April received some job coaching and training from the provider in the early stages of her employment and has since become independent, only needing periodic check-ins. She works 15 hours per week and is now helping with cleaning tasks, as well as rolling silverware. Additionally, April is training to help at catering locations setting up for banquets with tables, tablecloths, place settings, and decorations, as well as helping with food preparation and packing meals. April has found her match for employment and is thriving in her position!

EMPLOYERS

Increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Working with businesses will create more jobs for people with disabilities.

State as a Model Employer Initiative

Last year, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a law creating the State as a Model Employer (SAME) program within the Tennessee Department of Human Resources. The goal of the law is to ensure that Tennessee state government is “walking the walk” when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. The work began in earnest this past fiscal year, and several of the annual objectives for the Employment First Task Force focused on putting this new law into practice.

Annual Objective: By October 2021, capture baseline Tennessee workforce self-identification data.

- Captured Baseline of 3.69%.

Annual Objective: By December 2021, implement a communication campaign to increase awareness around self-identification and its importance for applicants and employees.

The following action steps were completed for this objective:

- Updated Edison to allow employees to voluntarily disclose a disability
- Sent a communication to all state employees about the importance of self-identification
- Held a kick-off for the “This is Me” Campaign
- Planned ongoing communications to state employees about this important program



Other Efforts and Work on Annual Objectives

Annual Objective: By June 2022, increase employer awareness by partnering with Chambers of Commerce to highlight the benefits of employing people with disabilities.

- The Employment First Task Force has identified 131 Chambers of Commerce in State of Tennessee
- Next steps will include developing a plan to engage and partner with the Chambers of Commerce.



SAME LAW PUTTING WORDS INTO ACTION

Sundi Wright, Department of Human Resources

When the State as A Model Employer (SAME) bill passed in May 2021, DOHR was put in charge of the program. The purpose of the SAME bill is to make sure that state agencies and departments use best practices for the recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of qualified people with disabilities. With this goal in mind, DOHR began the process of learning how many people with disabilities were currently working as state employees. The first step was an update of the state's human resources information system, which was completed in February 2022. This allowed employees to disclose disability so the state can track this data. Tanika Arms, the director of the State as a Model Employer program, developed a plan to share with employees the importance of voluntarily disclosing their disability status. That initial request resulted in about 3,500 employees disclosing their disability status. Tanika then created the "This is Me" campaign. The campaign is focused on creating a sense of belonging. It highlights aspects of our identities that make us who we are and encourages voluntary disclosure of disability. The goal is to reduce any possible stigma about disabilities. Voluntarily sharing different aspects of our diversity will help DOHR gain a better understanding of the state's workforce. This will help us better align programs and benefits to meet the needs of our employees. In mid-May, DOH hosted a "This is Me" campaign kick-off event. Sen. Becky Massey, sponsor of the SAME bill, and DIDD Commissioner Brad Turner shared their views on the importance of the State as a Model Employer program. They encouraged being willing to disclose disability status. State employees shared their "This is Me" stories.

In a recent employee experience survey for the state workforce related to disability, the primary reason given for not disclosing disability status was a concern about privacy. But this concern was followed closely by a fear of the stigmas attached to people with disabilities. The update to the system, which now allows for disclosure through a secure log-in, addresses some of the privacy concerns. This disability information will only be used to make sure we are moving in the right direction in our recruitment, hiring, advancement and retention efforts. The "This is Me" campaign will help reduce the stigmas that are sometimes related to having a disability. Through this campaign, the state wants to show everyone how to look at people with disabilities with different eyes, valuing them for their abilities.

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS TO CREATE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

In October, Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month by hosting two webinars. The first, Maximize Your Workforce: Inclusive Employment Practices, was hosted by Lisa Primm, DRT's Executive Director. This panel discussion with business leaders from the community allowed employers to learn how other businesses in Tennessee are creating more inclusive workplaces and enhancing their business at the same time by focusing on areas like the hiring process and workplace culture. The second webinar shared information about DRT's two employment programs: the Client Assistance Program (CAP), which serves customers of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living, and Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS), which assists with resolving barriers to successful competitive integrated employment. Both webinars are still available for anytime viewing on DRT's website!

Expanding Windmills Training

Last year, the Expect Employment Report contained information about a new strategy for employer engagement: "WINDMILLS" training. "WINDMILLS" is a high-impact training on changing the perception of disability. This program uses a train-the-trainer model. The program consists of 12 modules that use participation and discovery as learning vehicles. WINDMILLS is based on the concept that attitudes about people with disabilities are instrumental in forming behaviors toward people with disabilities. The WINDMILLS program promotes the employment and advancement of people with disabilities. It has a proven history of helping those with and without disabilities to better understand the culture of disability in the workplace. It is an employer-employee training designed to change barriers and create a new perspective on the unique abilities of individuals.

Last year, the Vocational Rehabilitation Business Services Unit received this employer-focused training. DIDD has now also trained its employment team on this method. Together, these two units are rolling out a statewide outreach effort to train employers on disability inclusiveness. As this training rolls out, the task force anticipates there will be metrics to report in next year's report. In addition, the trainers will also be training TNAchieves students, who complete a set of tasks and mentoring in exchange for two years of tuition at one of the state's community colleges, to make sure future employment leaders are learning the benefits early.



NOAH MCGEE

PROJECT SEARCH TO FULL-TIME WORK

Noah is a 22-year-old man who's been in ECF CHOICES since January 2019. He lives with his mom and twin brother in Ooltewah, Tennessee, and participates in Consumer-Directed Services and Supports, which have helped him become more active in the community in terms of participation and socialization. Noah is a graduate of the Project SEARCH® program, a global program that helps facilitate employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Since 2015, more than 75% of its program participants are employed in year-round, non-seasonal employment with competitive wages.

"We started discussing Project SEARCH in my first interaction with his family," said Aimee Rogers, Long Term Services and Supports Employment Services and Supports Specialist. "They explained he was currently attending Ooltewah High School in Hamilton County and participating in Work Based Learning. He and his mom attended the session about Project SEARCH that year, but Noah didn't end up applying for the program until January 2020." Noah was excited when he found out he was approved in May 2020, but he was also apprehensive due to COVID-19 cases sweeping the nation.

Rising Above Uncertainty

Noah learned mid-summer that Project SEARCH was moving forward, but it would relocate from BlueCross to the YMCA and Dawn School in downtown Chattanooga. He started at the YMCA location a few weeks later. Within weeks of starting his new job, the management team at the YMCA asked Noah if he would like a permanent job at their facility. Noah preferred to continue with the Project SEARCH program. Around this time, the Greenbriar Cove location of Life Care Centers of America contacted his teachers within Project SEARCH to see if any current students were interested in full-time work in housekeeping. Noah was more than open to the idea of working full-time somewhere.

Getting the Job

Noah was ultimately offered a job on a trial basis at Greenbriar, and after some time with a job coach, he was offered the job permanently. Soon after starting, his mom found out her company could no longer support her position. Noah went to his mom independently and asked to help pay their household bills. He told her he wanted to help and had no problem contributing as much as she needed to ensure their bills were paid. Noah has become a very valuable member of the team at Greenbriar, who is known for completing his work faster than any other housekeeper they've ever had. "When I asked if he would participate in sharing his story, he had his consumer-directed personal assistant take numerous pictures of him at work," Aimee said. "He's always positive, upbeat and full of energy!"

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

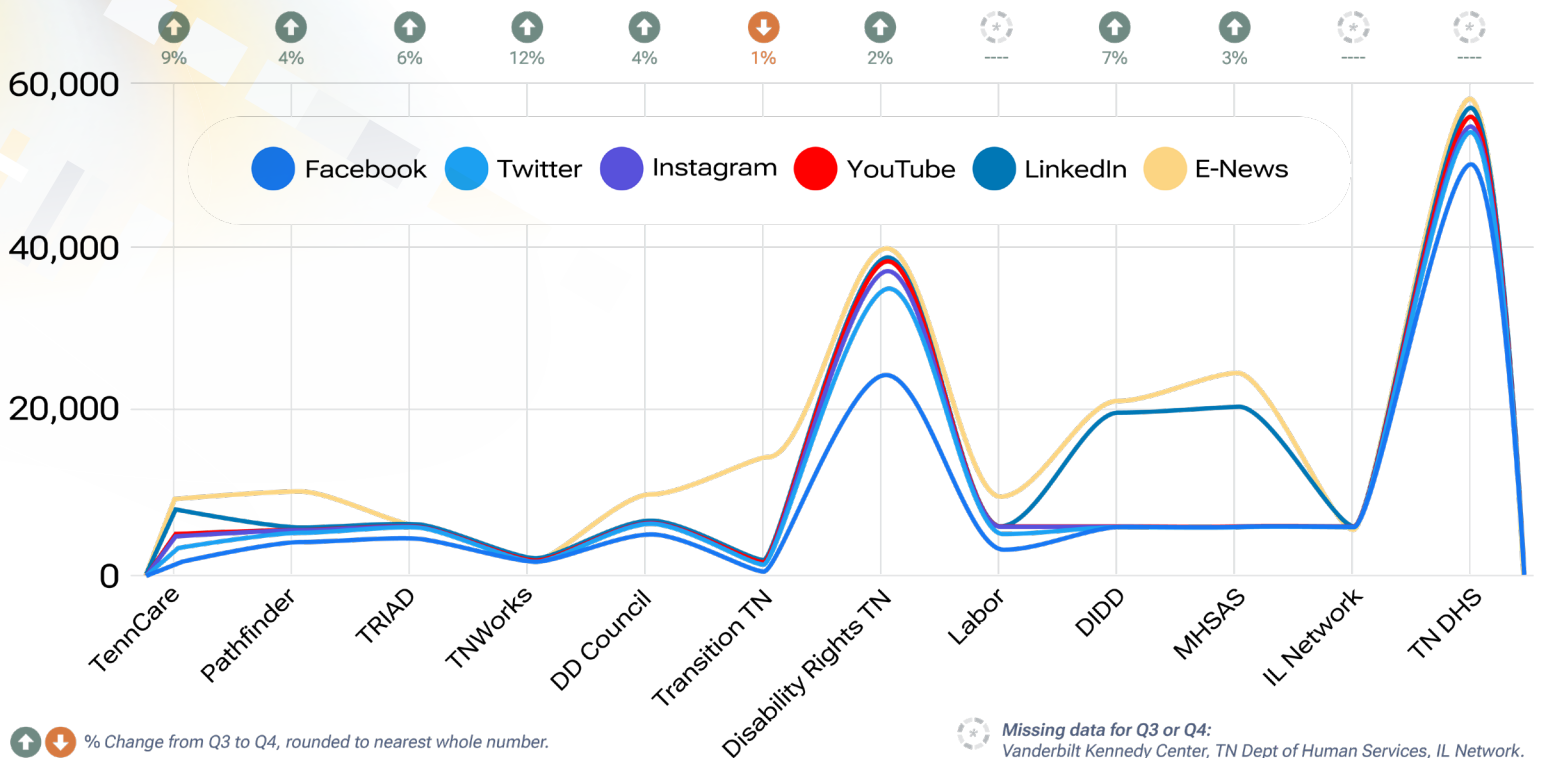
The community can help by learning and sharing about employment for people with disabilities.

The Employment First Task Force brings together a subgroup of communications professionals from various state agencies and private partners. This subgroup expands outreach by working together to share information and tell the stories of people who have found successful employment.

Annual Objective: Establish baseline data for communications outputs, reach, and engagement of unified employment messaging across E1st agencies, and processes to track and collect this data ongoing.

The communications group wanted to measure the reach of Employment First communications across the Task Force. To do this, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities built a quarterly reporting system for all members of the Employment First Communications Group to use. This allows the group to see the combined reach of employment information across Tennessee and across different communication platforms.

The following graphics show the data collected by the group through March 2022. The information this year shows large social media reach, with Facebook being the largest social media audience. It also shows how agencies used other avenues such as magazines, blogs, news releases and media coverage, and email newsletters to reach people about Employment First.



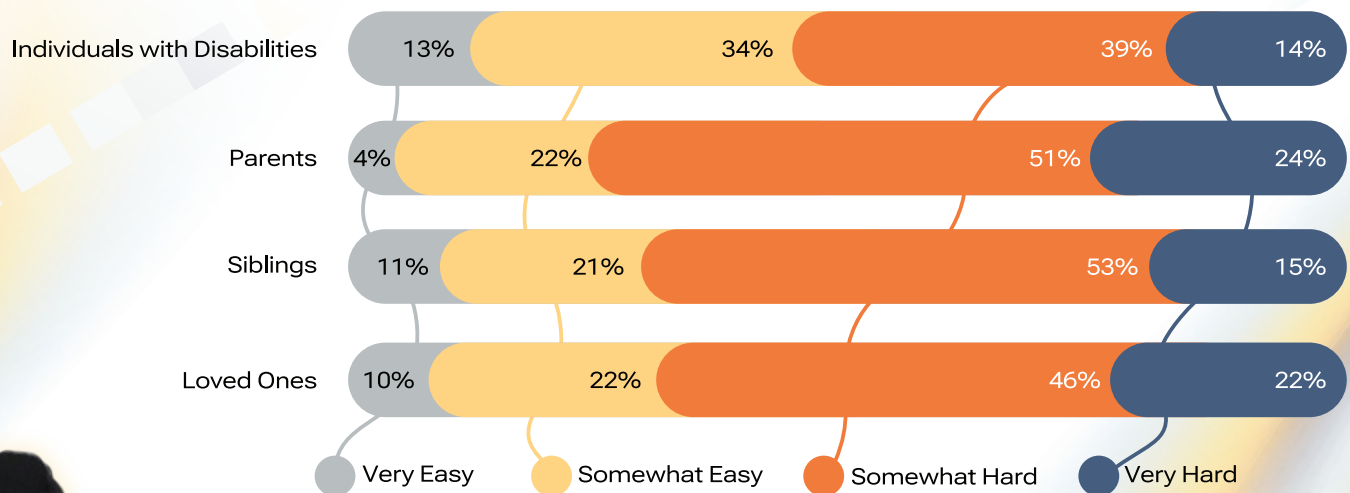
Annual Objective: Share information on communication preferences from the Disability Services Survey

The communications group also wanted to learn more about how people with disabilities and their families learn about the services and supports available to them. In Fall 2021 the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, through funding from the Council on Developmental Disabilities, conducted a one-year project. The project studied how disability and professional communities across the state are finding the information they need and how programs could make that easier.

More than 3,000 participants completed the survey, including 726 people with disabilities, 1,081 parents, and hundreds of educators, state agency staff and disability providers. Of note, a majority of people with disabilities, parents and siblings reported it was hard or very hard to find the information they needed.

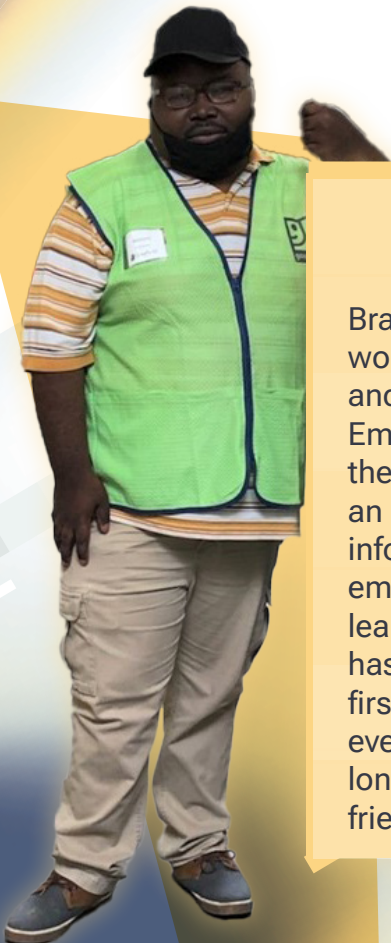
Figure D1. Comparison Across Stakeholders:

Overall, how easy is it for you to find the information you or your family member with a disability needs?



BRANDON RICHARDSON GETTING THE JOB DONE

Brandon and his grandmother have always been cautious about Brandon working. They were worried about his safety, losing his Social Security benefits, and doing something independent from his grandmother. After enrolling in Employment and Community First CHOICES in 2018, Brandon participated in the Exploration service, knowing this was not a commitment to work, but rather an opportunity to explore jobs that may interest him. He also gained valuable information around benefits counseling and job coaching and decided to pursue employment. Through another pre-employment service called Discovery, he learned more about his interests and skills and applied at Goodwill. Brandon has been employed there since 2019 and loves his job! Since obtaining his very first job at Goodwill, he has received pay raises and increased hours – and was even recognized as Employee of the Month in June 2021! He is confident and no longer needs job coaching. Brandon is loving his independence and newfound friendships through work. Grandma couldn't be more proud!



The survey also asked respondents what their biggest question or need related to disability was. The first area listed by people with disabilities was employment.

Table D1. Comparison Across Stakeholders:
What is your biggest question or need right now related to disability?

	Individuals	Families	Professionals
1st Area	Employment	Financial assistance	Finding services
2nd Area	Financial assistance	Finding services	Financial assistance
3rd Area	Medical care	Respite or homecare	Transportation
4th Area	Transportation	Unknown future	Transition
5th Area	Finding services	K-12 school	Respite or homecare

The survey also asked respondents what their biggest question or need related to disability was. The first area listed by people with disabilities was employment.

Table D1. Comparison Across Stakeholders:
What is your biggest question or need right now related to disability?

	Individuals	Parents	Siblings	Loved ones
1st Choice	Internet searches	Internet searches	Internet searches	Internet searches
2nd Choice	Social media	Social media	Social media; Other families; Doctors, therapists and other medical professionals	Doctors, therapists and other medical professionals
3rd Choice	Doctors, therapists and other medical professionals	Doctors, therapists and other medical professionals	Local/state disability organizations	Research articles or journals

The Employment First Task Force can use the information and recommendations in this report to better meet the needs of Tennessee’s disability community. The information also underscores the importance of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder as a central place for disability information and the need to promote awareness of this resource.

Annual Objective: Produce and present the annual Expect Employment Report to the Governor outlining progress on the strategic plan.



In October 2021, the Employment First Task Force brought back the in-person Expect Employment Report presentation after going to a virtual presentation in 2020. The presentation took place in Johnson City at East Tennessee State University (ETSU). The governor was able to meet students in the Access ETSU inclusive higher education program and learn more about how the program supports students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to fully participate in campus life. In addition, he and the First Lady met several of the program's peer mentors to learn how they help contribute to the success of the program.

Prior to the report presentation, the Governor and First Lady visited DIDD provider Core Services of Northeast Tennessee. There, they learned about Enabling Technology and how it supports people in their homes and on the job. They also heard from several people supported about their jobs and the manager of the Lowe's in Elizabethton described how hardworking and important the employees had become to his store. Overall, Gov. Lee was able to experience how inclusive higher education can prepare students for employment, hear from adults of various ages about how important their jobs are to their lives and livelihood, and learn about how inclusion benefits both people with disabilities and without.



STUDENT TRANSITION

Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Students can leave high school ready for a successful future.

Over the past five years, there has been an increased focus on starting earlier to prepare youth with disabilities for employment. Ensuring students have the tools to successfully transition out of high school to either post-secondary or employment opportunities now begins as early as age 14. As a result of the collaboration between Transition Tennessee, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Tennessee Department of Education (DOE), and the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation program (DHS/VR), significant progress has been made towards improving the transition outcomes of students with disabilities.

Specifically, the Task Force focused on:

- increased collaboration,
- work-based learning experiences,
- enrollment in career and technical education courses,
- preparation of transition stakeholders,
- and information sharing with families.

Annual Objective: Increase enrollment/training in Work-Based Learning (WBL) Career Practicum and the connection to the Career Technical Education (CTE) course.

Work Based Learning provides valuable opportunities for students to experience on-the-job skill development while they are still in school. It allows students with disabilities to learn employability skills and participate in various work environments throughout the school day. Local school districts partner with local businesses to provide real-world opportunities. This helps students learn their strengths and interests that can help them be successful in future jobs.

The Department of Education has enrolled 33,731 students in WBL/Career Technical Education from August 2021 through February 2022. Vocational Rehabilitation has delivered 6,036 WBL activities from July 2021 through April 2022. A total of 60 unique students have participated in WBL capstones from July 2021 through April 2022.

Annual Objective: By June 2022, increase the number of transition stakeholders who are trained on preparing students for postsecondary employment expectations and conduct follow-up survey with participants.

Special educators are key in helping students and families understand the various supports and services that are available after transition. Therefore, ensuring they have the training and resources necessary to support their students is extremely important. Transition TN provides those opportunities in a variety of ways.

Training has been delivered to a variety of transition stakeholders over the past year.

Transition Summer Academies

In June 2022, three in-person Transition Summer Academies were held in the Memphis area, Smyrna, and Knoxville. Special educators, administrators, transition specialists, related service providers and providers of pre-employment transition services attended employment-focused sessions including Job Development and Employment, Opportunities for Postsecondary Education, Collaboration with Career and Technical Education, and Understanding the Myths about Working and Disability. Speakers from Benefits to Work, American Job Centers, area Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology, community colleges, four-year institutions, and inclusive colleges shared their insights and guidance with the participants.

Approximately 1000 special educators and Pre-ETS providers registered for the 2022 summer academies. This is an increase from the 411 who participated in 2021.

Technical Assistance

TransitionTN provides technical assistance to districts across the state who would like individualized training and guidance. The goal is always to make sure our practices improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Creating Transition-Focused Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

This workshop emphasizes using assessments to assist the students in setting their postsecondary goals for employment, education/training, independent living skills, and community involvement. TransitionTN instructs that it is essential to first find the student's career area of interest, and then develop goals, transition services, and a course of study that will allow them to obtain their desired future.

Systems and Structure

Districts must coordinate their middle and high school programs so that all educators can continually reference a universal timeline of deliberate transition services for their students. This workshop allows the district to align the transition services, activities and instruction provided beginning when the student turns 14 until they stop receiving services. Using a checklist of 50+ items, the educators and administrations determine which grade each benchmark will take place, who will assist with implementing the item, and how it will be recorded for future reference and communicated with families. In creating this system and structure, all students in a grade, no matter which school they attend within the district, should have access to the same services and instruction.

Developing a District or Building Level Transition Advisory Board

Transition Advisory Boards are a way for individual schools or districts to include input and guidance from agencies, employers, families, community leaders, and other educators when creating transition programs for their middle and high school students. The information shared by these connections benefit the students while they are in school and provide connections for after graduation.

Webcasts

TransitionTN hosts monthly webcasts covering important transition topics. They invite speakers to share their expertise and experiences related to the transition of youth with disabilities to life after high school. Over the last year, Transition TN held 9 transition-focused webcasts for 815 attendees. Topics included:

- [Career Development for Students with Disabilities in Rural School Districts](#)
- [Summer Programming and Pre-ETS Camps](#)
- [Steps to Building Financial Wellness](#)
- [Employment Advocacy Services for Transition-Aged Youth](#)
- [Work-Based Learning Options for Students Completing the Alternate Academic Diploma](#)
- [Project Search](#)

Research to Inform our Work

During this past year, TransitionTN has engaged in a research project aimed at understanding the needs of educators who support transition-aged youth with visual impairment (VI). Employment outcomes for this group of students has remained low for the past 30 years. Further, 60% of students with VI who attempt college do not complete their college degree. To improve these statistics, we hoped to develop specific trainings and resources to better prepare educators to support these students. We surveyed 89 special educators and teachers of the students with VI and conducted follow up interviews with 18 of these individuals to understand the current needs across the state. Findings from this work are being summarized currently and resource development is underway. Early evidence suggests these teachers are not very confident in providing transition instruction nor are they knowledgeable about important transition services specific to this population. As a result, TransitionTN anticipates creating a training specifically for educators about how to support this group of students; a list of local, state, and national scholarships that would financially support students with VI to pursue their postsecondary goals of further education/training; a chart of TN colleges and universities including information about how to contact each office of disability services, common accommodations for those with VI, and any other pertinent information; and a list of resources that can help equip teachers, families, and students to be better informed about the skills that students with VI need to acquire to be successful in a range of work environments, and the state-wide opportunities that exist for individuals with VI looking for employment.

Annual Objective: By June 2022, survey families to gauge awareness of postsecondary opportunities and determine what information/resources parents need.

As a part of the Tennessee Disability Services Study, more than 1,200 family members were surveyed to gauge information and resource needs. The Vocational Rehabilitation program is also surveying families and caregivers across the state regarding their students with disabilities receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services. Lastly, focus groups were conducted with 84 parents and siblings of youth and adults with disabilities to explore challenges and facilitators to competitive integrated employment.



SYDNEY MAITLAND **PASSION TO PAYCHECK ON THE FARM**

There's no place Sydney Maitland feels more like himself than when he's on his farm in Trenton. He has always loved being around animals and knows just about all there is to know about chicken and goats. "I'm a guy who loves animals. I have watched many major documentaries since I was a kid. I like to go fishing and a little hunting every now and then. That's just who I am," Sydney said. "This farm here is really something and I'm hoping to turn it into a business."

Sydney was a premature twin and was diagnosed with autism as a child. He graduated high school with honors, but he didn't know what he wanted to do after graduation. After trying out a couple different jobs that didn't fit, his parents decided to build him a farm behind their house. He has since been working with Vocational Rehabilitation and Tennessee AgrAbility to create a business plan and get the training he needs to learn how to make a living off of what he loves, his livestock.

Sydney now has three chickens for laying eggs, dairy goats, and homing pigeons. He and his family say not only is he feeling happier while he works to build a business that will thrive, but he is also getting healthier. To them, that already feels like success. "I just want to say to the people who have autism, if you have a dream or a goal in life just go for it. People with autism, they're capable of doing things just as well as any other person. It rather means you just have to do things a little bit differently," Sydney explained.



Tennessee Believes Takes Off

Increasing access to inclusive higher education opportunities has been a goal of this task force for many years. This past year brought new funding that will create two ground-breaking new programs in the state of Tennessee and provide new pathways for students at existing programs.

The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) awarded the first Tennessee Believes grants to four higher education institutions across the state. DIDD received \$500,000 from the Governor and Tennessee General Assembly to launch the program during the 2021 legislative session. The grants will support the strategic planning and partnerships that will lead to the inclusion of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in classrooms and campus life.

Nine higher education institutions applied for the first round of Tennessee Believes funding, and it was awarded to four universities in early 2022.

Next Steps at Vanderbilt University: Next Steps was awarded \$103,650 for one year and possible funding of \$207,300 for two additional years to form a new interdisciplinary major called Self-Advocates in Leadership (SAIL). SAIL will be a four-year program with a focus on disability leadership and public policy and will be available to Next Steps students beginning in Fall 2022.

Dyersburg State Community College: Dyersburg State received \$327,262 over three years to create the first inclusive higher education program at a Tennessee community college. The Eagle Access Program proposes enrolling up to 10 students in its 2-year program in the first year.

Tennessee State University: TSU received a grant award of \$284,000 over two years to create a new program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The TigerEDGE Program is targeting enrollment of 8 students in Fall 2022 and will be the first public institution in Middle Tennessee to offer an inclusive higher education program. Tennessee State University is also the first historically black college and university (HBCU) in the nation to offer an IDD program. The program will partner with the state's Vocational Rehabilitation Center and students will be able to live on campus.

FUTURE program at University of Tennessee – Knoxville: The inclusive higher education program plans to utilize \$131,322 to increase career transition staff, expand outreach to underserved populations, and create the “Tennessee Believes” Kitchen! The kitchen will provide opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to learn how to cook at home and how to cook as a profession.

DIDD traveled to all four institutions in April and May 2022 to award the checks and learn more about the new programs. Gov. Lee and Tennessee General Assembly have provided an additional \$500,000 in funding for Tennessee Believes, which will target TCATs and Community Colleges.



THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYMENT FIRST

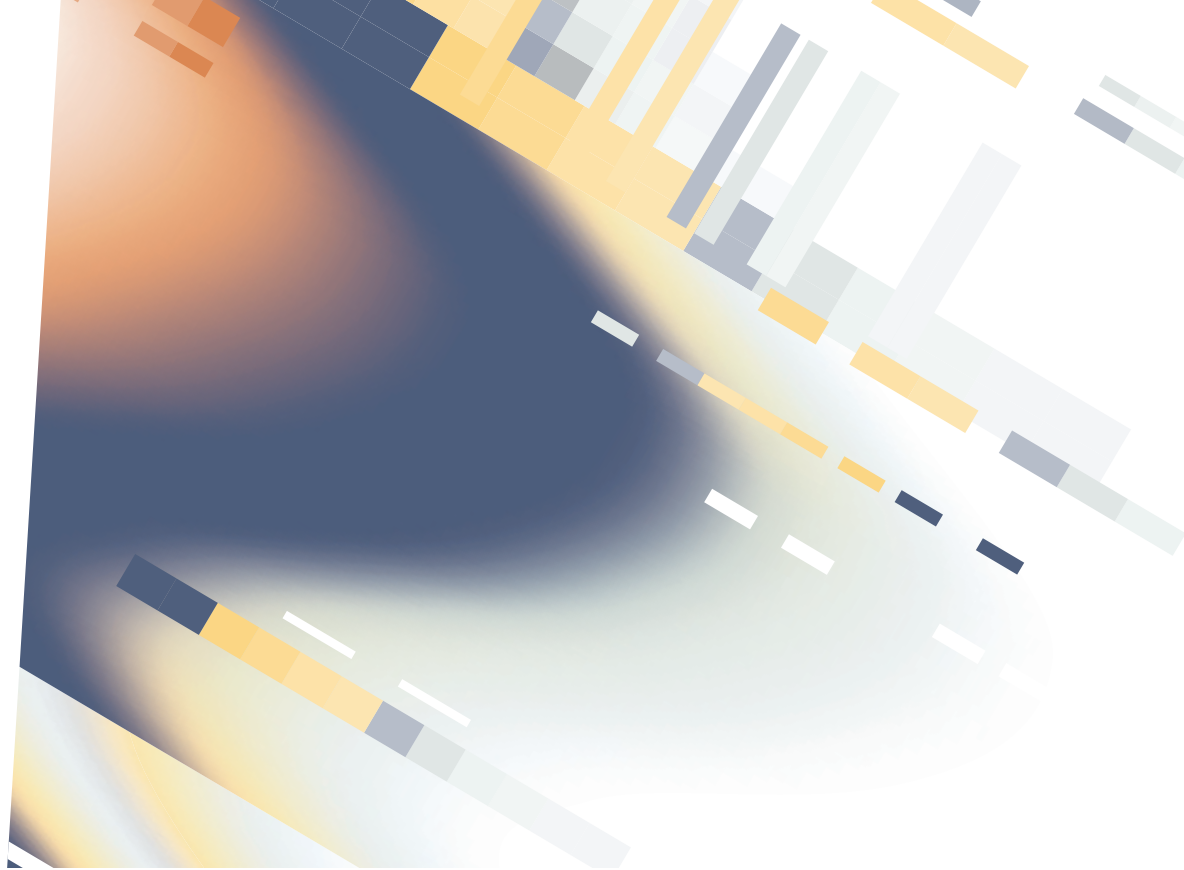
As the Employment First Task Force nears its 10th birthday, it can celebrate the immense progress Tennessee has made in expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities. There is no doubt that state agencies are working together more. They have ended duplicative processes and have streamlined services. The entire state is more aware of the importance of competitive, integrated employment – real work for real pay.

There are still areas where progress has been limited. Despite some progress, reliable transportation continues to be a challenge for many people in both urban and rural settings. The pandemic also brought new barriers to light. As workplaces moved to completely remote or hybrid, they often left behind people with disabilities who did not have the technical skills or training for remote work.

Other barriers identified by task members include:

- Providing meaningful support for entrepreneurship and self-employment
- Continued need to invest in underserved communities
- Expanding the task force work to be more inclusive of people with behavioral health diagnoses, physical disabilities, and other disabilities outside of the intellectual and developmental disabilities community

Next year, it is our hope to celebrate even more progress in the identified areas and also look back at how the employment landscape for people with disabilities has changed since the very first meeting of the task force in the summer of 2013.



APPENDICES

A / EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 28

B / EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE MEMBERS

C / FULL EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN



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

Jordan Allen,

Deputy Commissioner of Program Operations, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Carrie Brna,

Director of Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Elise McMillan,

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

Lauren Percy,

Executive Director, Council on Developmental Disabilities

MEMBERS

Kevin Wright, Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services

Sundi Wright, HR Administrator, Diversity Programs, Department of Human Resources

Emily Duchac, Mobility and Accessible Transportation Manager, Department of Transportation

Heidi Haines, 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

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

Pam Hollingsworth, Employment Services Director, Progress Inc.

Robert Nicholas, Coordinator, Project SEARCH Knoxville

Erik Carter, Professor, Vanderbilt University and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

Cara Kumari, Assistant Commissioner of Communications and External Affairs, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Krystyne Brown, Deputy Director of Communications and External Affairs, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Carly Carlton, Public Information Officer, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Nakeisha Ricks, Director of Workforce Services, Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Alison Gauld, Low Incidence and Autism Coordinator, Department of Education

Blake Shearer, Transition Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services

Jeff Fladen, Executive Director, NAMI Tennessee

Kelly Kuhns, Employment Director, Employment and Community First CHOICES, Division of TennCare

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

Cristi Blalock, Employment Services Coordinator, Frontier Health

Ann Thompson, Director of Workforce Development, Department of Economic and Community Development

Stephanie Potter, Employment Specialist, Amerigroup

Tiffany Kelley, Sensory Director, Department of Human Services

Julie Johnson, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services

Jacqueline Johnson, Section Chief, Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, Department of Health

Ellyn Wilbur, Executive Director, Tennessee Association of Mental Health Organizations

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

Nichole Phillips, Statewide IPS Trainer/Supervisor

Tiffanie Whitaker, Statewide IPS Trainer

Sebby Edwards, 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

Bruce Keisling, Executive Director, UT Center on Developmental Disabilities

Martina Stump, Transition Services Director, Department of Education

APPENDIX - B

FULL EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

THREE YEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goals	SERVICE ALIGNMENT:	TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION:	EMPLOYERS:	COMMUNITY AWARENESS:	STUDENT TRANSITION:
<p>Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination at all levels for a seamless customer experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Continue to set employment targets, and use national employment data to monitor statewide progress. -Expand and update MOUs/Interagency Agreements as needed to provide interagency coordination and system improvements. -Identify and seek solutions to public policy and regulatory barriers to employment. -Partner with TennesseeWorks and other public and private organizations relevant to research, training and services. -Create and support initiatives to promote service alignment at community level. -Take a system-wide approach to developing systems and funding support for provider agencies and direct support professionals. 	<p>Improve access to technology and enable its use to expand employment options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expand the availability of devices, internet, software, and training so more people are equipped with technology needed to access services. -Increase awareness of technology resources and supports through Pathfinder and other venues. -Assess cross-agency use of technology resources and methods available through Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD), Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS), TennCare, Department of Education (DOE), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Children's Services, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and TN Technology Access Program (TTAP) to identify areas for improvement and opportunities for collaboration. -Identify employers to incorporate technological innovations toward inclusivity for building awareness and collaboration for employment. -Pursue designation of TN as a Technology First State. 	<p>Increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work with the Governor's Office to enhance jobs4tn.gov to connect employers and job seekers with disabilities. -Work with local and state Chambers of Commerce to build relationships with employers. -Work with Department of Human Resources (DOHR) to create & support agency specific pilot programs that increase employment opportunities across the state. - Research and replicate best practices in engaging employers (such as working with VR and their Business Employer Consultants Program and starting state chapter of Disability:IN) -Get baseline, set targets and monitor progress for TN as a Model Employer in collaboration with DOHR. -Seek input from employers to learn how best to connect with them. -Survey regional job landscape to identify job opportunities for students in their area. 	<p>Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop a cross agency awareness campaign to feature success stories about individuals, employers and local communities. -Highlight state level partnership successes to promote local community collaboration. -Recognize employers as integrated part of focus on employment in local communities by working with local Chambers. -Increase awareness and support for implementation of Supported Decision Making through the Center for Decision Making Support: www.tndecisionmaking.org. -Compile and review existing communication resources across departments and leverage those channels to create unified messaging. -Increase communication channels with self-advocacy organizations to share employment-related information. 	<p>Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expand transition-focused projects like ACL Community Based Transition Planning Grant to the local level. -Leverage existing resources such as ARC of TN and STEP to increase awareness of transition/employment at younger ages with students, families and educators. -Leverage Transition TN as a resource to strengthen transition planning. -Coordinate with CTE for preparation of teachers to work with students. -Provide more training for HS teachers/Pre-ETS providers to help students prepare for changing work environment. -Develop materials aimed at education administrators to show importance of investing in transition and employment. -Collaborate with transition stakeholders (e.g., VR, DOE, Transition Tennessee, Family Engagement, etc.) to showcase schools and programs in the state that effectively connect students to early work experiences. -Increase paid work opportunities for students while they are still in school. 	
<p>Three-Year Strategies</p>	<p>Mission: Create and expand employment opportunities for all Tennesseans with disabilities Vision: People with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities</p>				

METRICS

SERVICE ALIGNMENT: Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination at all levels for a seamless customer experience.	TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION: Improve access to technology and enable its use to expand employment options.	EMPLOYERS: Increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities.	COMMUNITY AWARENESS: Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.	STUDENT TRANSITION: Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual review/update of “close the gap” infographic - Annual review schedule of MOUs - # legislation/policies provided input - # and outcomes with partners - # community level initiatives & results - Results of efforts to support providers and DSPs across state agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of people using technology solutions in an employment environment - # of events, presentations, awareness activities - Establishment of cross-agency committee or council - Annual cross-agency report with consistent tracking/standards - Annual employer snapshot - TN designated as Tech First State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of employers that claim TN Tax Credit (determine source for this data) - # applicants that self-ID as individuals with disabilities (IWD) - # relationships with new employers - # of agencies participating in pilot programs and # of hires - # of employees who self-ID as IWD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of organizations participating in the Employment First (E1st) communication group - Awareness outputs and reach across agencies - #/Results of strategies for accessibility to reach underserved/ unserved & marginalized populations - Extent of coordination for data tracking among E1st members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # students in post High School programs - Graduation rates - Quality indicators for transition assessment, planning & services (Easy IEP, Indicators 13 and 14) - Outcomes for Transitional Professional Development modules - # of students with disabilities participating in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and as CTE concentrators - # of students engaged in work-based learning through DOE and VR

Goals

Metrics

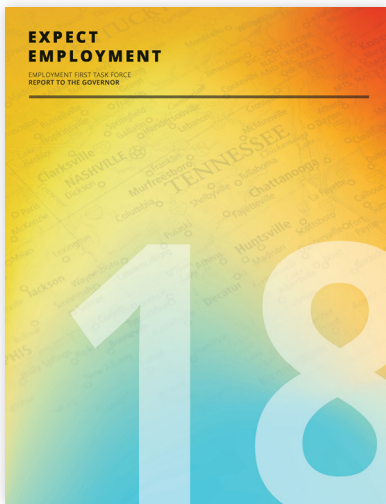
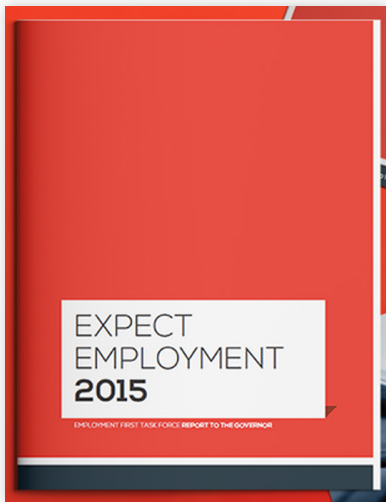
Mission: Create and expand employment opportunities for all Tennesseans with disabilities
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FULL EMPLOYMENT FIRST STRATEGIC PLAN

ANNUAL OBJECTIVES: July 2021 – June 2022

<p>SERVICE ALIGNMENT: Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination at all levels for a seamless customer experience.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete 2021 update of the close the gap data goal. 2. Establish a timeline/review schedule for existing MOUs with review tool/checklist and access through a shared folder. 3. Provide Policy Updates at each Task Force meeting. 4. Share successes and outcomes of Community TRC transformation pilots, CBT grant for local community transition models, Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, and DIDD pre-employment innovation models.
<p>TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION: Improve access to technology & enable its use to expand employment options.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a universal reporting tool with clear definition of terms for assistive/supportive technology to capture the use of technology in employment. 2. Establish a baseline of how agencies monitor and increase awareness of technology resources. 3. Create a committee of stakeholder agencies to assess technology resources, strengths and opportunities and develop an initial plan of action for the committee. 4. Obtain designation of TN as a Technology First State.
<p>EMPLOYERS: Increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By October 2021, Capture baseline TN workforce self-identification data. 2. By December 2021, Implement a communication campaign to increase awareness around self-identification and its importance for applicants and employees. 3. By March 2022, Determine the baseline number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities (through TN Tax Credit and/or Chambers of Commerce). 4. By June 2022, Increase employer awareness by partnering with Chambers of Commerce to highlight the benefits of employing people with disabilities.
<p>COMMUNITY AWARENESS: Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Add 2 additional organizations as regular participants in the E1 Communications group. 2. Establish baseline data for communications outputs, reach, and engagement of unified employment messaging across E1st agencies, and processes to track and collect this data ongoing. 3. Share information on communication preferences from the Disability Services Survey (Erik Carter, et al). 4. Produce and present annual Expect Employment Report to the Governor outlining progress on the strategic plan. 5. Conduct at least one cross-agency coordinated social media campaign with shared employment messaging (e.g. #HireMyStrengths for Disability Employment Awareness Month). 6. Develop two stories on state level partnership successes and employer successes to feature in cross-agency platforms (e.g. social media, <i>Breaking Ground</i> magazine, agency newsletters).
<p>STUDENT TRANSITION: Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase enrollment/training in Work-Based Learning (WBL) Career Practicum and the connection to the CTE course. 2. By June 2022, increase the number of transition stakeholders who are trained on preparing students for postsecondary employment expectations & conduct follow-up survey with participants. 3. By June 2022, survey families to gauge awareness of postsecondary opportunities and determine what information/resources parents need.

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VIEW OUR PREVIOUS EXPECT
EMPLOYMENT REPORTS
BY VISITING OUR SITE:

tn.gov/didd/e1st