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2024

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EXPECT

employment



A NOTE FROM GOVERNOR BILL LEE

Employment First has seen tremendous success in expanding community employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities since 2013, including raising their employment percentage from 28% to 40.2%. As the Employment First Task Force continues to bridge the gap for these individuals by setting key goals and priorities in the next decade, I'm proud that the Task Force's 2024 strategic goals align with priorities set forth across Tennessee's executive branch departments:

Education and Workforce Development: We continue to bridge the gap between employment for those with and without disabilities while also increasing the state's workforce and number of citizens employed every single day. Further, we have improved how our schools prepare students with disabilities for employment so that they can graduate with the skills needed to secure meaningful work in their community.

Rural Economic Development: We're bringing together various Tennessee populations – including people with disabilities, families, caregivers, community agencies, employers, and community leaders – to learn, build programs, and develop policies that strengthen our economy and support employment in rural communities.

Good Government: We're bridging community partners and state government entities to provide supports and services that will deliver a welcoming workforce for Tennesseans with disabilities.

Supporting Tennessee Families: We provide on-the-job training and coaching – key components that assist individuals with disabilities in their daily lives and increase opportunities for employment. These programs foster dignity among Tennesseans with disabilities while helping their families see the impact their loved ones have on Tennessee communities.

Strong Communities: We continue to work across all sectors to ensure that Tennesseans with disabilities can secure meaningful work, earn an income, and gain independence, creating a brighter future for all Tennesseans.

While the Employment First initiative has made significant strides in expanding employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities, we're just getting started. We remain committed to opening additional employment opportunities and providing critical support to ensure that every Tennessean can reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Bill Lee
Governor of Tennessee



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Partner Agencies

Department of
Disability & Aging

Department of
**Labor & Workforce
Development**

Department of
Human Services

Department of
Education

Division of
TennCare

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

Department of
Human Resources

Department of
**Economic &
Community Development**

Department of
Health

Council on
Developmental Disabilities



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE **NEXT DECADE** OF EMPLOYMENT FIRST

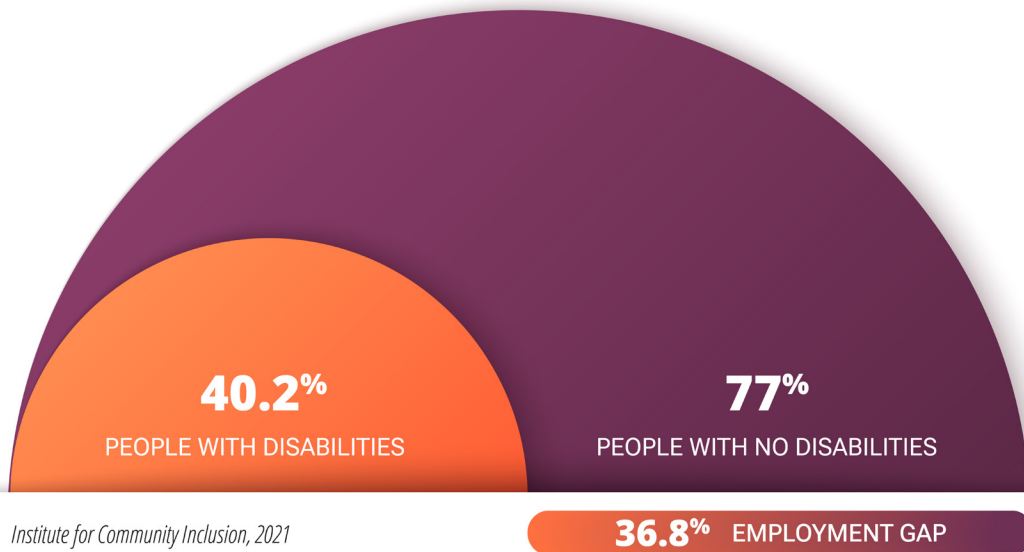
The Expect Employment Report is a comprehensive presentation of the work done by state agencies and community partners that make up the Employment First Task Force. It's been more than a decade since Governor Haslam issued Executive Order No.28, making this report the 11th annual report.

While the ultimate goal to close the disability employment gap remains over the decade later, there have been many changes since the first Expect Employment Report. In 2024, Governor Lee passed the Disability and Aging Act, which led to the creation of a new cabinet level department. On July 1st, 2024, the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability merged with the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to create the Department of Disability and Aging (DDA). DDA is now responsible for serving Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), as well as older Tennesseans and people of all ages with physical disabilities. The challenges people with disabilities face in the workforce are very similar to those faced by the aging community. With the addition of more than 1.5 million people to our services and supports, the Employment First Task Force will be charged with identifying barriers to competitive, integrated employment for older adults who want to work on top of the ongoing work to expand employment outcomes for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and those with behavioral health diagnoses and substance abuse disorders, as well as evaluating policies that hinder progress and calling on state agencies and partners to find creative solutions that make the workforce more accessible.

As the Employment First Task Force enters the next decade, the focus remains closing the disability employment gap. But now, the state and our partners have a renewed responsibility to support and serve older Tennesseans. When people are given the opportunity to find meaningful and competitive employment, they have a chance to support themselves and their communities. A job that you love provides purpose and fulfillment – one of the greatest services that agencies can provide the tools for. This task force is looking forward to the exciting challenges in the next decade of Employment First, and celebrating the successes of individuals who find their place in the workforce.

CLOSING THE TENNESSEE EMPLOYMENT GAP BETWEEN PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES **BY 5% BY 2028**

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT GAP



WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

In 2012, the newly formed TennesseeWorks Partnership brought together people with disabilities, families, community agencies, state government, employers, and community leaders to build programs and develop policies promoting employment for people with disabilities. By Executive Order, the Governor's Employment First Task Force was established in 2013. Working together, members of TennesseeWorks and the Employment First Task Force have moved Tennessee forward in the following areas:

1. Formed statewide partnerships between ***more than 40 organizations***.
2. Developed five task force subgroups focused on ***service alignment, technology and innovation, employers, community awareness, and student transition***.
3. ***Met our initial goal to close the employment gap by 5% between 2018 and 2022.***

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO CLOSE THE EMPLOYMENT GAP BY ANOTHER 5%?

To close the employment gap by an additional 5%, members of TennesseeWorks and the Employment First Task Force continue to work collaboratively to ensure services and supports are based on the needs of the disability community and that supports and services are comprehensive and consider the whole person.

HOW CAN YOU HELP US?

Scan the QR code to visit our website and learn more:
tn.gov/disability-and-aging/l/e1st

scan me 



Strategic Goals

I: Service Alignment

It's one thing to create employment programs and opportunities. But the most important thing our partners can do is sustain programs that are easy for individuals to find and use. The next decade of Employment First in Tennessee requires advocates and partners to continually update and improve services so they are best suited to meet the needs of potential employees.

As both TennCare and the Department of Disability and Aging continue alignment efforts along all IDD waiver programs, aligning provider credentialing requirements is a large component of that work. Across all programs, employment staff training requirements are significantly more aligned, greatly reducing the time and financial burden on providers and their staff. In addition, existing ECF CHOICES Self-Employment services have been significantly enhanced to include a plethora of resources, guidance, and tools for both the provider and individuals interested in or pursuing self-employment. The enhanced self-employment services have also been added to the CHOICES program and 1915(c) Waivers. There are three self-employment services available to individuals enrolled in these programs: Self Employment Exploration, Plan, and Start-Up. Self-Employment Exploration assists interested individuals in determining whether owning a business is right for them. Self-Employment Plan helps individuals with the creation of a business plan, feasibility studies, funding/investment options, licenses, insurance, and anything else needed to start one's own business. TennCare also received approval to offer Employment Services in the CHOICES program, which serves older adults and adults with disabilities. Starting on July 1, 2024, Employment Services became a covered HCBS benefit for those enrolled in CHOICES groups 2 and 3.

Tennessee's Individual Placement and Support (IPS) provides a full range of employment services and supports to assist people with serious mental illnesses to achieve competitive, integrated, and steady employment. The IPS program has also proven to be more successful and cost effective than other employment programs; For every 100 people who enroll in an IPS program, 60 obtain employment, which is more than double the success rate of any other employment program. IPS is currently available in 49 counties and has helped more than 11,000 Tennesseans pursue an education or employment goal since its inception in 2013.

Finding Success with IPS

Before David engaged with the IPS team at McNabb Center in Knoxville, he wasn't working. Through McNabb Center, David landed a job with the City of Knoxville's Public Service Department. He likes that it's different every day, and his employer likes that they're getting an employee they can rely on.

"There is never really one set thing that I do every day, so there is something new every day and I like that," David said.

"David has been great from the get-go. His personality is such that he fit right in with the crew and has turned out to be an all-around great employee," said Scott Jenkins with the City of Knoxville. "They also do a good job of letting the candidate know what our expectations might be. When I get a referral from a partner like the IPS program, I know it is a person who wants to get themselves out there, wants to get going and wants to build a career."

For Caroline Sands with the McNabb IPS team, the relationship with the employer is ongoing to ensure success. "We are able to provide support to the individuals on the job. When there are issues, we can help troubleshoot the concern and help the employer prevent having more vacancies," said Sands. David says he's already seeing the benefits of steady employment.

"When you get up and you go to work every day, it's going to make you feel better about yourself, it's going to give you more confidence, it's going to make you feel like you are just as good as everybody else," David said.

David



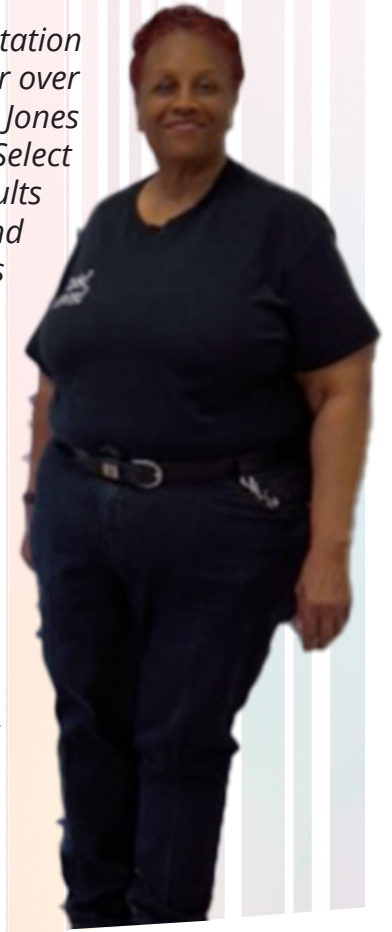
As we learn more about meeting the needs of people in the disability and aging community, Tennessee's departments are making vital changes to deliver the best services. The Disability and Aging Act led to the creation of the **Department of Disability and Aging (DDA)**, allowing for the merger of programming from the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability.

This merger will help amplify the voices of people with IDD and older adults on areas of shared concern, including housing, transportation, and caregiver availability. One area that is helping to support both a person's employment goals and the statewide need for more Direct Support Professionals is the DSP Academy. This program provides training to people with disabilities to help them become employed as direct support professionals. Over the past year, the DSP Academy had continued success, with another two graduating classes. Of the ten graduates, 8 people with I/DD are now working as Direct Support Professionals.

Finding Success at the DSP Academy

Annette Jones came to Select Services of Memphis as a Vocational Rehabilitation referral in December 2023 seeking employment, after being off work for over 5 years due to her health and many surgeries. While speaking with Jones and learning of her employment interest and rereviewing her resume, Select Services saw that she had previous experience working with older adults but none in working with individuals with different levels of disabilities and mental health diagnoses in the home healthcare field. Select Services introduced her to the Direct Support Professional Academy while she was going through physical therapy, and she was delighted to join.

Jones was a great asset to the class. While in class Jones was very intuitive. She shared her experiences working with home health and how it helped her care for herself and her husband. Jones was able to help others in the class understand the ethics and dynamics of Direct Support Professionals from hands on experience. Jones shared how the class opened her eyes to more than the day-to-day duties of an aide but how to become professional with all entities. Jones was hired with Select Services of Memphis directly after completing the class in December of 2024 and remains a devoted DSP. She's timely, efficient and helps out wherever needed.



Annette Jones

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is now available to all who qualify for services. Since 2001, VR has been in an order of selection and only eligible to individuals in categories one and two, experiencing the more complex disabilities. VR worked closely with various state agencies to enhance the alignment of service delivery systems and strengthen coordination at all levels for a seamless customer experience. This can be seen in the increased IPS programs offered across the state, ECF CHOICES, and soon will be partnering with TennCare to provide employment supports for individuals in the CHOICES program as mentioned above.

VR is dedicated to serving individuals of all disabilities by assisting them in achieving their career goals to live fulfilled lives as independently as possible. As of June 30, 2024, 1,753 customers achieved and maintained their desired competitive integrated employment goals with the assistance of their VR support team. Additionally, 361 VR customers have careers in their desired fields and are working towards achieving their 90-days of competitive integrated employment.

VR & Community Services Unit Success

Ashley Bell

Ashley Bell graduated from Dresden High School in 2018 and found Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which changed her life. With VR's help, she started studying at the University of Tennessee at Martin. There, she learned to speak up for herself and other students with disabilities. She also volunteered at the student center.

Ashley grew up on a farm in West Tennessee and loved animals and farming. So, she chose to study Agricultural Science in college. She graduated in 2023 and was excited about her future. Right away, she started looking for a job but faced challenges because she had no work experience. Ashley and her VR Counselor decided that the assistance she needed was to participate with the VR Community Service Unit (CSU) for career readiness services.

"I met with the CSU, and we talked about my goals. They reviewed my resume and taught me how to adjust it for different jobs. We practiced job interviews. They helped me connect with local career fairs and even made business cards for me," Ashley said. The support from the CSU and her counselor made her feel more confident in her job search.

One barrier Ashley faced was her lack of experience. Many local jobs needed both a degree and experience. The CSU suggested an internship at a local Co-Op to help her gain experience. Ashley agreed that this would be a great opportunity. They worked together to find the right internship opportunities. After some discussions, the local Co-Op was excited to partner with VR and offer Ashley an internship.

"The process was so simple and fast," Ashley said. "The internship is with the Weakley County Co-Op in Martin. They have an animal science department where I get to work with the vet, help farmers with their livestock, and answer questions. I'm also gaining experience in the billing department. The internship lets me use my education and gain experience while meeting local farmers and building my network. I've learned so much about agriculture, business, and management. This experience is helping me grow as a professional. Ms. Macenna and Ms. Brenda have been very helpful and continue to support me. They've taught me a lot about resumes, interviews, and writing cover letters. I am very thankful for this experience!"

Ashley Bell



Abby McCage

Abby McCage learned about Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services from a VR counselor presentation at Gibson County High School. She decided to refer herself and got help with her postsecondary needs. Later, Abby wanted to start working to help others and support people with disabilities.

She began her journey by participating with the VR Community Services Unit (CSU). Abby's first challenge was accessibility. As a wheelchair user, she needed a job where she could easily do her tasks independently. She said, "Some barriers I faced while finding employment was a job that was adaptable to my needs as someone who lives with a disability. I wanted a job that was fully accessible without any barriers, and that made me feel like I couldn't do the job correctly. My job goals were to have a fully accessible work environment with the hope of helping people or working with kids."

Abby met with the CSU regularly to write a resume, work on interviewing skills, practice mock interviews, and narrow down the types of jobs she wanted.

"I worked with VR to help find the perfect job. I worked with the CSU on my interviewing skills and my resume. The BEC (Business Employment Consultant) helped me find and apply to many jobs that I felt were capable of or could be easily modified for my needs," Abby said.

In late November 2023, Abby was offered a job at the YMCA. She said, "I am an early learning YMCA center assistant teacher. I work with students who also have all kinds of different disabilities. My duties include helping the lead teacher and working directly with preschool students to carry out lesson plans." For Abby, the best part is, "Working with kids! I love where I work so much! The workplace is completely accessible and adaptable to my needs, and I get to do what I feel I was meant to – advocate, assist, and teach." She added, "This job was exactly what I was looking for when I originally was looking to begin my career! VR has helped me with school and finding a job that fits my needs perfectly! I'm very thankful for the support they've given and showed me. I wouldn't have been able to find a job I love so much without them."



Abby McCage

What's Next: Service Alignment

You would consider a successful delivery of services to be seamless, well coordinated and executed at the highest level for those supported. The past decade of Employment First efforts have highlighted our strengths, our weaknesses, and what works best for securing integrated and competitive work for those who desire it. But we are far from the finish line.

Stakeholders are looking for more collaboration in service delivery. Interagency agreements are a desirable effort amongst the VR division, bringing together funding to allow for more drawdown from federal partners, and having shared fee structures and qualifications for community rehabilitation providers. Ideally, we would look to Employment First member networks to invite families, employers, and self-advocates to the task force to be included in discussions, planning and improving service alignment – possibly for compensation. Sharing of success stories is vital for those amongst the Transition age community, who are looking to their peers for evidence of employment success.

There is a desire for more streamlined delivery and execution of the Employment First mission. This could include growing funding to more equitably reimburse providers for services provided, especially transportation; Streamline employment provider reimbursement structure to make it easier to understand and bill. Also, it will be important to consider how expanding value-based purchasing (VBP) can be used to incentivize the delivery of high-quality employment services and support people to achieve their employment goals. For those in the transition age community, they desire clear resources about employment services, how they support a person's employment goals, and the role of included state agencies. Navigating the system is something that is confusing for people with disabilities as well as their families and caregivers. State agency employees would also benefit from a better understanding of the role of other state partners and how important an informed sense of collaboration is to the people we serve.

II. Technology & Innovation: Improve access to technology and enable its use to expand employment options.

Our devices have changed the world. Smart phones, tablets and interactive devices, artificial intelligence and medical advancements have revolutionized all of our jobs. It's without a doubt they make an incredible difference for employing individuals with disabilities.

The Enabling Technology program has helped make employment a reality for many within the Department of Disability and Aging.

- As of June 2024, there are **587 people** in the DDA 1915c waiver using Enabling Technology services, which is a **48% increase** from last June 2023 (396 people)
- As of June 2024, there are **195 people** in ECF CHOICES and **477 people** in CHOICES, for a **total of 672 people** using Enabling Technology services, which is a **92% increase** from last June 2023 (350 people)

DDA's Enabling Technology Program, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the AWS Foundation are continuing to partner together to provide **Tennessee Tech Connect**. This is a Technology Database hosted on Tennessee Disability Pathfinder's website that will let users select the technology goals they would like to achieve, and then learn how technology can help them reach those goals. This includes providing specific solutions available to the person, selecting technology based on age and disability, and find technology providers in their area.



visit **Tennessee Tech Connect**

Tennessee Tech Connect

- 1,480 Active Users (Tennessee)
- 2,812 Sessions
- 6,478 Views

Popular Topic Choices

1. Aging Related
2. Technology
3. Communication
4. Housing
5. Addiction

Popular Technology Solutions

1. Calling for Help (PERs)
2. Prompting Independence & Productivity
3. Exploration Discovery
4. Medication Compliance
5. Accessible Learning Solutions
6. Low Vision Assistive Solutions

POWER UP TECHNOLOGY CAMP

DDA held their second **Power Up Tech Camp** in June in West Tennessee. More than 150 people showed up to the two-day extravaganza where they were able to combine experiencing the latest enabling technology and the great outdoors! Many of the campers were in the transition age from education to the workforce. For two campers, in particular, they found valuable tech that will help them reach their education and employment goals!

LaCassie Clay

LaCassie Clay is a high schooler who has dreams of living independently and supporting herself with a fulfilling career.

"I want to help children."

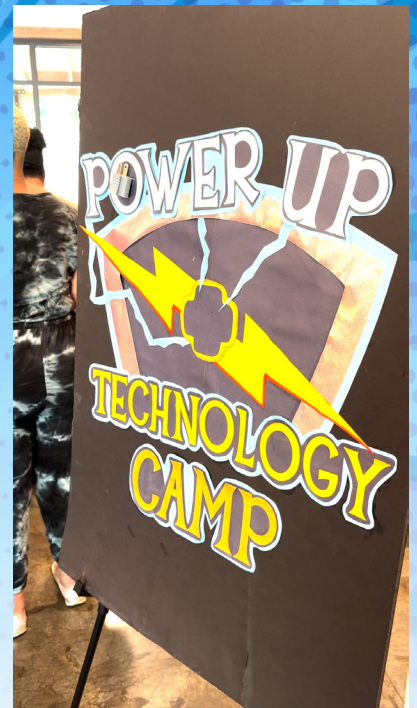
LaCassie loves computers and recognized that a lot of the technology showcased at Power Up Tech Camp can enable her to join the workforce and do something she loves.

Abby Goldberg

Abby Goldberg is a 21-year-old who didn't just love the ziplines and climbing walls, but the enabling technology exhibits as well.

"I've got one more year at Houston High School and then I'm going to leave, and then I'm going to go to TigerLife College. It [Tech] can help with my disability. It can help with things, like, I can say, 'Alexa, set alarm,'" said Abby.





Campers were able to experience everything from wall climbing, roasting s'mores, and flying through the trees on a zipline to robotic therapy animals, voice and motion-activated detectors, and step-by-step guides in the kitchen.

DDA hopes to put on more of these tech camps in different regions across Tennessee.



Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP)

The Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP) aims to support individuals of all ages and disabilities in providing access to and acquisition of assistive technology (AT) to live independent and productive lives where and how they choose. This occurs through direct services to individuals through assistive technology device demonstration, device loans, and device reutilization. TTAP additionally participates in public awareness activities and provides training, technical assistance, and information & assistance to individuals, families, and professionals across the state. As all services through TTAP are provided at no cost, the reutilization program specifically allows TTAP to provide donated assistive technology devices including durable medical equipment to anyone in need free of charge. In the last year, over 1,350 devices were provided to individuals resulting in a cost savings of more than \$400,000 to Tennesseans with disabilities.

Throughout the year TTAP conducted over 50 group trainings to various audiences addressing a wide range of assistive technology and accessibility topics. Topics of a few training sessions provided through TTAP include smart phone accessibility, AT for transition, AT for invisible disabilities in the classroom, AT for vision loss, and alternative and augmentative communication. Multiple sessions occurred to specifically to address AT interests of the aging population. TTAP additionally conducted workshops on making switches and adapting toys, which allow children to play independently. Workshops and partnerships in this arena have yielded the donations of more items to the TTAP toy library and reutilization program as well as summer internship opportunities with TTAP partners to continue supporting the toy program.

Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence (MAPS)

The MAPs program (Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence) is entering its second year, and continues to connect transition aged Tennesseans with resources and technology-based support in order for them to achieve their goals at home, at work and within their community. Since launching in 2022, the MAPs program has 348 people enrolled, with a target goal of 500 enrolled participants by December of 2024. MAPs is a program targeted to high schoolers in the final three years before graduation (age 18 or 22), young adults who have recently left the school system, adults who want to become more independent in their home or community life, or people who are waiting for Employment and Community First CHOICES waiver services. Of those who apply, more than 70% of applicants are eligible for the MAPs program. The youngest MAPs user is 15 years old, and the oldest is 68 years old. At this current time, we have more than a dozen active MAPs providers across the state of Tennessee.

MAPs participants utilize a VCRM (virtual community resource map) to create a personalized plan and to guide their goals: whether at home, at work or in the community. Each person's map identifies the people, places, and activities that are important to them. The map also includes their independence goals at home, at work, and in their community, and their plan to reach them. A VCRM can be used on a phone, tablet, or computer. More than 120 VCRMs have been validated and more than 250 incentives completed. MAPs participants are meeting, completing and achieving their goals.

MAPs Success, Regardless of Age:

Technology is helping Scott Britton make a living. At 50 years old, he's turned to MAPs to help him operate his own e-commerce business. He discovered the MAPs program while researching autism services and supports for his newly diagnosed nephew. Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder himself, Scott saw an opportunity to become Emory Valley Center's (EVC) second MAPs candidate.

"MAPs has introduced me to other people and gotten me out into the community. I've been isolated in this home office for about 3 years," said Scott, who has lived in East Tennessee his whole life. "But they've gotten me out with businesses, people and dating too."

Scott's used MAPs to connect with the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce, network with local businesses leaders, and grow his online store. While he had his businesses before joining the MAPs program, Scott utilized marketing and advertising skills he learned in MAPs to make meaningful business connections.

"I'm very proud of him. I've seen leaps and bounds in the way he interacts with people," said Dianna Wooldridge, a DSP from EVC who supports Scott in his MAPs program. "He's grown in his employment and his community relationships. He's made a lot of friends and networking with people."

More than a year into the MAPs program, Scott believes his future is bright. And of course, if the economy can cooperate.

"It's been a night and day difference for me in the last year. The future looks good for me."



Scott Britton



With the growth of MAPs, the state is seeing more technology access in both rural and urban areas of the state. Saint John's Community Services, which supports many areas in rural West Tennessee, has also had the chance to expand their footprint within the state by providing greater outreach to new service areas previously untapped through remote support services.

For MillarRich, which provides supports in Middle Tennessee, technology and innovation are vital to serving individuals. They began participation in the then DIDD Tech Pilot Program in 2020, started its ET Department in 2022 to align with the launch of the MAPs program, chased funding and invested privately in The Lab (a new Tech Home for tech assessments and tours), and became the first provider in the state to become Tech 1st accredited and certified to provide tech-based services.

Finding Employment Success

Blake Garrison came into services with Millar Rich in 2018. He had multiple diagnoses, but Prader-Willi was the one that most impacted community access and employment. When he came into services, he had a hard time controlling his emotions/behaviors, including elopement (many times ending in police involvement and sometimes hospitalization), property destruction (damaging walls, furniture, sink, stove, tv, vehicles), and physical aggression (hitting staff and roommates). Blake preferred to stay home instead of going out in the community, and staff felt many places were “High Risk” in the community and would often not even attempt to take Blake out. As he settled into services at MillarRich, Blake was admitted into a home that had a lot of expertise with serving individuals with Prader-Willi. Blake slowly started integrating into the community: bowling, working out at Planet Fitness, spending more time with friends and family, and started volunteer work at animal-focused businesses.

As community participation increased, Blake’s behavior incidents decreased, and he was able to regulate emotions for longer periods of time. Blake had personal goals of wanting to become more independent but still struggled with emotions/behaviors. The support team initially turned to Enabling Technology for assistance and were able to access the Mozzaz App that works through a smart watch and iPad. Blake was able to now report how they feel every day through self-check ins and biometric data, of which the app would report data back to them and their staff. Blake was able to use this aid to better understand how he’s feeling, establish routines and habits, and have better control over himself.


Due to the success of this ET, Blake’s Behavior Analyst (BA) provider discontinued services on 10/31/2020. A little later, Blake purchased a chicken coop and is now raising chickens and selling eggs. This personal success motivated him to seriously look at employment and deepened his desire to work with animals. Blake was referred to Supported Employment services in 2022, and we started with a Discovery service. There were several concerns from the support team around the Prader Willi diagnosis and Blake’s safety in the community once supports were faded. We did our best to alleviate and address all concerns and focused the service on Blake’s interest in working with animals.

He volunteered at Safe Place for Animals (SPA), The Hairy Moose Pet Retreat, Grand Paws, and Old Friend’s Senior Dog Sanctuary. In May of 2023, Blake was officially offered a job at Old Friend’s Senior Dog Sanctuary (OFSDS) , earning \$15 per hour. His duties included socializing with and walking the dogs, plus laundry. The Job Coach worked closely with Blake, his support team, and the manager/coworkers at OFSDS to help Blake appropriately navigate behaviors, including getting upset and irritated with staff. The SE team worked hard to bring in natural supports and fade job coaching, but due to the behavioral history and Prader-Willi diagnosis, the Circle of Support had determined that line-of-sight supports were necessary when Blake was out in the community.

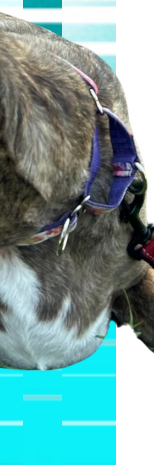


Blake Garrison






However, through a collaboration of positive residential, technology-based, and employment-based supports, Blake began to demonstrate more personal accountability and improved decision-making. After consecutive successful months of employment at OFSDS and the development of some meaningful relationships with natural supports at the job site, the team collaborated with Blake and his conservator to develop a fading plan which allowed Blake to be as independent as he chooses to be while at work. The fading plan was a success, and we have been providing Stabilization & Monitoring supports since November 2023. Blake continues to do awesome at home, community, and work life!



For vocational rehabilitation teams, eliminating financial barriers to technology helped make employment plans a reality for many. This past year, VR removed financial eligibility requirements for the following services: books and training supplies, assistive technology devices and services, and other devices or services of a personal nature such as tools and supplies, wardrobes, and uniforms. VR is now able to provide the recommended assistive technology for eligible customers to successfully complete the training they need to achieve their career goal and the assistive technology they need once they achieve their desired employment.



Vocational Rehabilitation provides assistive technology services to customers through a partnership with the STAR Center. The STAR Center has been a known entity in West Tennessee since 1988. The array of services provided has expanded since their inception; however, the heart of what they do has always been based in assistive technology. In 2021, STAR Center's Assistive Technology Department expanded and became the contracted AT provider for Vocational Rehabilitation. Under this contract, the team of specialists provides assessment services to individuals with varying diagnoses. These assessments may take place at the individual's homes or workplaces, a community setting of the person's choosing, or a STAR Center office space. During the assessment, various types of hardware, software, and adaptations may be demonstrated, considered, and trialed to determine what will provide the best support. Once these options are formally reported to Vocational Rehabilitation and the equipment has been purchased, the STAR Center provides delivery, installation, and training on the proper use of the equipment to support each individual in their goals of education, employment, and, as an extension, activities of daily living.

Vocational Rehabilitation along with the STAR Center works in conjunction with the Tennessee AgrAbility Project to address the needs of farmers with disabilities, whether it be through accident or age-related, to keep them farming. This may include items as small as anti-vibration gloves or adaptive wheelbarrows, or it may be as involved as the purchase of UTVs, truck/tractor lifts, or trac chairs.

What's Next: Technology & Innovation

As the workforce becomes more reliant on technology, our partners and agencies will have both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the efficacy of technology and innovation on employment efforts. We will be asking ourselves some important questions: Does investing in employment services lower costs of services/supports in other areas? Does introducing technology into services increase fading and lower service costs?

The answers to those questions will impact the future investments we make into employment efforts – both financially, physically and emotionally. And technology in the next decade of Employment First could mean more than smart phones. It's tablets, computers, expanding internet access in rural counties of Tennessee, increasing transportation accessibility, and assistive technology, like artificial intelligence.

III. Employers: Increase the numbers of employers who value and hire people with disabilities.

Can you name a business that employs people with disabilities? Are they a large corporation or a small business? Are they within 50 miles of your home?

As advocates and partners of the Expect Employment mission, we strive to positively answer each and every one of those questions. And in the instances where we can't, we are motivated to take the next steps to change those answers.

As part of a workgroup within the Employment First Task Force, the TN Employment First Inclusive Employer Award was born. This award, first implemented in 2023, seeks to recognize businesses that go above and beyond the legal requirements to recruit, hire, advance, and retain people with disabilities. Categories include businesses within the community as well as state agencies. Five businesses and five state agencies were awarded in 2023. The task force is looking to continuously increase the number of applicants and awardees each year. Ultimately, our goal is to increase the number of employers who value and hire people with disabilities. It awarded 4 state agencies, DDA, DOHR, DHS, and Dept of Safety and Homeland Security the 2023 Tennessee Employment First Inclusive Employer Award. The task force also awarded 6 businesses with the award. Freed-Hardeman University, Muse Knoxville, Manchester/Coffee Conference Center, Black Sheep Logistics, Holiday Inn Vanderbilt, and the Precisionist Inc.



Through the State as a Model Employer (SAME) Program, state government aims to be the model for inclusive employment across the state. The state is on its 4th cohort of the SAME Internship Program. This is a partnership between TRC Smyrna and DOHR to offer internships to students in their areas of study. The Department of Safety and Homeland Security, Department of General Services, TN Dept of Environment and Conservation, and TennCare all support this program. DOHR also has a goal of getting 90% of the state

workforce to make their self-identification election in Edison. This year, this number increased from 32% to 48% with over 20,000 state employees making their election. Over 10% of state government employees have disclosed their disability. This is an increase of 4% this year and exceeds the federal government benchmark of 7%. This is a direct result of our efforts to create a culture of inclusion and acceptance of and for people with disabilities within Tennessee State Government.

Karrington Thomas, Intern

Internship opportunities also give students an opportunity to learn about working in state government. During the fall of 2023, the Department of Disability and Aging welcomed an intern from the Lipscomb IDEAL Program. Karrington Thomas, a Nashville native and second-year student in the IDEAL program at Lipscomb University, joined the Communications and External Affairs team during her fall semester. Working alongside the communications team, Karrington was responsible for managing news clips, creating social media graphics, taking photographs and partaking in daily team meetings.



The Council on Developmental Disabilities supports the Department of Human Resources in providing leadership training opportunities for state employees who support programs for Tennesseans with developmental disabilities. This year, 20 state employees representing 9 state agencies participated in this program, called the Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services (LAEDS). Through this program, future state leaders learn more about the services and supports offered through sister state agencies, and also get to know contacts within the agencies to further program alignment. Importantly, LAEDS acts as one mechanism for the Council to support system alignment for disability employment, ensuring state government supports their customers with a shared approach and set of values.

Disability Mentoring Day



Tennessee Department of Human Resources sponsored a resource fair event for Disability Mentoring Day during the month of October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month. A number of participating state agencies shared information and resources about benefits, programs, and career opportunities within their organizations to more than 170 attendees. The DOHR-led event included a business clothing "closet," a private booth for on-the-spot interviews, and a resume-writing workshop hosted by the American Job Center. There was even a runway show spotlighting workplace fashions - featuring not-so-appropriate pieces to show attendees what not to wear!

#HireMyStrengths Campaign

Every October, Department of Disability and Aging celebrates National Disability Employment Awareness Month and promotes the #HireMyStrengths campaign on various social media platforms. Participants shared their personal strengths and why they make an incredible addition to any team.

The 9th Disability Employment Awareness Luncheon (DEAL) at Nashville's Music City Center on October 30th was another powerful moment of connection. While DEAL focuses on employing Tennesseans with disabilities, each year we differentiate the luncheon with themes. In 2023 we welcomed keynote speaker, Cookie Brand, and three unique panels highlighting American Sign Language (ASL) etiquette in the workplace, co-occurring disability and mental health diagnoses, and the use of Assistive Technology (AT) on the job.

The Department of Disability and Aging utilizes the Windmills Training Program, a disability employment training for employers. Employment Innovation & Community Inclusion DDA's Employment Coordinators are trained Windmills facilitators and have been doing great work educating businesses about inclusive employment. In the reporting period, they did 25 separate trainings, reaching 252 people. VR continued to offer Windmills Training to employers. The VR Business Services Team provided Windmills training during lunch and learn sessions and to specific employers, as requested. Additionally, the VR Business Services team in East Tennessee provided disability etiquette and Windmills training to students at UT Knoxville majoring in business.

Individual providers are often on the front lines of business engagement. They are not only identifying employers who are interested in hiring people with disabilities, but matching the people support to jobs that fit their skills and interest. For example, MillarRich Supported Employment works daily to identify and engage with new employers in Davidson County and all the surrounding counties to introduce the population it supports and the services it offers, based upon the individualized interests, skills, and goals of each individual they work with. MillarRich has developed and are growing a database (spreadsheet) of employers that can be searched via location and field for all employers it has previously worked with. MillarRich is in the process of developing follow-up procedures for ensuring that they continue checking in with previous connections and updating contact info for future networking.

#HireMyStrengths



WINDMILLS DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT
TRAINING FOR EMPLOYERS

The Windmills Disability Employment Training equips business leaders with the knowledge, skills and tools to create an inclusive workplace where all employees have the opportunity to thrive. The interactive training modules address real-world situations faced by businesses every day. Trainings are provided free of charge. Schedule a training today!

For more information, please email:

DIDD.Employment1st@tn.gov



With 12 training modules to choose from, you can select which work best for your business or organization. Trainings may be customized to fit your specific needs.

Module 1 <i>"The Story"</i> - Ice breaker to establish the group's level of exposure to people with disabilities.	Module 2 <i>"Perceptions"</i> - Introduction to self-awareness concerning attitudes about people with disabilities and how our perceptions impact hiring and supervisory decisions.	Module 3 <i>"Profiles"</i> - Teach people to evaluate job matches for people with disabilities on a case-by-case basis & demystifies myths regarding people with disabilities in the workplace.
Module 4 <i>"Reasonable Accommodation"</i> - Acquaint participants with the interactive process to develop reasonable accommodations.	Module 5 <i>"Disabilities: Fact or Fiction"</i> - Make participants aware of respectful etiquette & language for creating a comfortable workplace for all employees.	Module 6 <i>"Taking the Emotion Out of Emotional Disabilities"</i> - Explore ways to consider accommodations for persons with emotional disabilities.
Module 7 <i>"Calendar Game"</i> - Give participants a chance to formulate better ways to utilize employees with disabilities.	Module 8 <i>"Traumatic Brain Injuries"</i> - Review strategies participants can implement to improve how they work with people with traumatic brain injuries.	Module 9 <i>"Encounter"</i> - Allow participants to become exposed to people with disabilities in a safe, information-sharing environment.
Module 10 <i>"Whose Fault?"</i> - Improve awareness of the different players and roles in a successful business employing persons with disabilities.	Module 11 <i>"Rumor"</i> - Explore fears, stereotypes and concerns that supervisors and employees may have about ill or injured employees returning to work.	Module 12 <i>"Ask it Basket"</i> - Participants will learn simple and easy ways to get answers to questions they may have about disabilities.

Trainings can be modified to fit the needs of specific audiences and or business needs

What's Next: Employers

While great strides have been made through the Employment First Task Force, even greater employment opportunities could be available to individuals with disabilities through expanding the provision of customized employment and self-employment services. Employment is an essential key to belonging for all Tennesseans, including those with disabilities. It would benefit our efforts to extend Employment First Task Force membership to individuals with disabilities who are employed and supported by state systems. Working alongside DOHR and partners, we should continue to find opportunities for the state to be a model employer for individuals with disabilities. Our partner agencies should also continue to identify areas of opportunity to increase expectations of individuals with disabilities; expect that employment can be an outcome for all individuals regardless of ability and can be practiced at even an early age.

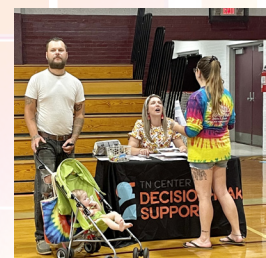
Post-pandemic, certain companies and organizations have had measurable success working in a remote or hybrid model. People with disabilities have just as much right to apply to these jobs as their neurotypical counterparts. Businesses should not be formed solely for the purpose of disability employment. Moving forward, it's important for us to partner with companies that will allow all employees to feel empowered from their workspace, whether in person or online.

IV. Community Awareness: Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.

Employment First does not exist in a vacuum. It is more than task force meetings, and subgroups, and 30 page reports. In order for this to be a success across the Volunteer State, partners and organizations must be educated and committed to the Expect Employment mission. Participation is key.

For partners outside of state government like MillarRich, making connections with committees focused on employment and similar goals is essential to their employment efforts. The same is important for Disability Rights of Tennessee, which utilizes outreach to focus on underserved communities across the state. DRT participates in a variety of outreach activities including transition fairs, presentations at college campuses, job fairs, and more to build awareness about inclusive employment and Employment First for all Tennesseans.

VR conducted outreach, training, and is planning to launch the 18th Project SEARCH program in the state with Niswonger's Children's Hospital and Ballad Health, Johnson City Schools, and Goodwill Industries in the 2024-25 school year. This is the first Project SEARCH program in the Tri-Cities region but is promising for more to follow. Regarding Project SEARCH outcomes, the 2022-23 intern cohort saw 86% of interns who completed the Project SEARCH program have a job record, and 73% are employed at the Project SEARCH criteria of 16+ hours a week in competitive, integrated employment. Tennessee continues to exceed the national Project SEARCH outcome data for intern graduates. Additionally, the 2022-23 intern cohort had the highest average wage and hours worked in the history of Tennessee Project SEARCH graduates.



During this past year, VR enhanced its efforts to build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans. VR began holding Job Clubs out in the community, at American Job Centers (AJCs), schools, and various State office buildings. This has helped create a centralized and set time for customers to come receive assistance with completing job applications, prepping for interviews, creating and revising resumes, and preparing for the next steps in their career obtainment journey. VR partnered with several community rehabilitation providers (CRPs), AJCs, and school systems to host these job clubs and make them successful opportunities for our shared customers.

Transition Tennessee shared transition resources at the Tennessee Bridge to Success Conference hosted by The Arc Tennessee. It also developed resources based on the needs of families and disseminated them to transition professionals across the state so that they can equip families with the support they need. Transition Tennessee attended several Transition Fairs hosted by various districts and partners to share Tip Sheets directly with students and their families.

In August 2023, the Employment First Task Force celebrated 10 years of Employment First in Tennessee. Employers, state agencies and employment advocates convened to recognize the great progress made towards employment efforts in Tennessee. Leaders and self-advocates shared not just the purpose of the Employment First Executive order, but the purpose that a Tennessean has when they are able to live, work and participate wholly in their community.



10-Year Celebration

In December of 2023, employment partners, advocates, task force members and Governor Lee celebrated the publication of the Expect Employment Report in Clarksville, Tennessee. This year, Common Grounds Cafe hosted the report presentation. Common Grounds Cafe, located in Veterans Plaza in Clarksville, is a partnership among the City of Clarksville, Montgomery County Government, and Progressive Directions, Inc., a non-profit organization working to support individuals with I/DD and their families. Participating in a paid internship, cafe employees are able to learn job skills that will help them attain competitive employment in their communities. Interns were excited to share their experience with Governor Lee, and were quick to remind him that while he didn't know how to make a latte – they did!

Report Presentation



NEXT DECADE: Community Awareness

When we promote inclusive hiring in our communities, we improve them. In the next decade of Employment First in Tennessee, our partners want us to continue to champion the various types of employment and also recognize that a person's first job is just the beginning, not the destination. The task force has a hand in ensuring that community events continue to be hosted, accessible and helpful to those looking for work.

V. Student Transition – Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.

Life after high school is daunting. For individuals with disabilities looking for work, this can be two and three-fold. If students and their families are prepared before graduation, they can take the steps that best equal success for their loved one. Whether it's job coaching, vocational school or a post-secondary program at a Tennessee community college or university – there is a place for their skills.

This past year, UnitedHealthCare and TennCare hosted a post-secondary resource fair to share information on post-secondary programs and internship opportunities throughout Tennessee. It also included local disability resource agencies sharing information about services and supports for job seekers. This event allowed individuals, parents, teachers and others to connect with available resources.

As of June 30, 2024, VR has **assisted 1,753** customers in achieving competitive integrated employment and successfully maintaining their desired employment for at least 90 days. In addition, VR has **361 customers currently employed in their desired career** continuing towards achieving their 90 days of competitive integrated employment. The work done this past year is a

strong predictor that even more people with disabilities will receive employment services and obtain meaningful careers moving forward. This is based on **over 11,000 VR referrals** having been **completed in 2023-24**, and over 3,000 of those coming from students in high school who have received Pre-Employment Transition Services

Last spring, the Department of Disability and Aging awarded grant funding to five higher education institutions to create and expand opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. In its second year, the Tennessee Believes Grant Program received an additional \$500,000 from the Governor and the General Assembly to expand reach.



TN Believes Grant Presentation

- Chattanooga State Community College: \$411,917 over three years to create the Tiger Access Program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The two-year program will focus on life skills, career exploration and job readiness for up to 9 students in its first year.
- Lipscomb University: \$300,000 over three years to provide an Advanced Certificate Program for students in its IDEAL program. This would provide an additional third or fourth year of education while preparing students for independent living and employment.
- East Tennessee State University: \$400,000 for three years to support the transition of students in its ACCESS ETSU program into competitive integrated employment and independent living. ETSU will partner with a community provider, Core Services of Northeast Tennessee, to provide transitional support, including community navigators and job coaches, to ensure long-term success post-graduation.
- University of Memphis: \$375,000 for three years to create a three-year study, called PROOF, focused on expanding current inclusive higher education programs at the University. This includes offering credentials and training for individuals exiting the school system and the TigerLIFE program, piloting a study for expanding into Independent Living, and assessing the feasibility of adding new inclusive programs at other West Tennessee higher education institutions.
- The Union University EDGE Program: \$10,000 for two years to provide groceries and supplies to its Cooking Lab program. The program helps teach EDGE students about cooking and nutrition, so students can gain independence and self-sufficiency while learning important social skills, such as teamwork and communication.

One Step Closer to Success: Dyersburg State Community College

Finding your dream job is no easy feat. The Eagle Access Program at Dyersburg State Community College is helping students get one step closer to making those dreams a reality. The program, the first offered to students with IDD at a Tennessee Community College, allows students to take two college classes alongside career development courses.

For Bryson Pearson, learning independent living skills, employment training, organization management is helping him on the job at the Ripley Walmart. Bryson enjoys his work stocking shelves and keeping aisles in top shape for customers. His next big goal: getting his drivers' license.



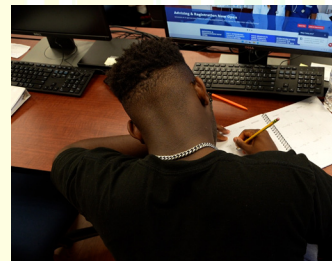
"They asked me do I want to go to Dyersburg State Community College, I said yes," said Bryson, who is a West Tennessee native. "That way I can have my business and learn to help me get my drivers' license and help me pass it. I've been studying for the longest."

The Eagle Access Program began accepting students in 2022, following more than \$300,000 in grant funding from the Department of Disability and Aging. In the Spring of 2024, 8 students were enrolled in the program. At least 10 are expected to enroll in the Fall 2024 semester.



"Whether or not they know what kind of job they want to do, they're capable of coming to a college campus and getting around on their own," said Eagle Access Director Nikki Erickson. "It gives them a sense of independence, being able to find your college class when there's eight buildings."

In addition to academic coursework, the program has opportunities for internships and work-based learning experiences for students. Throughout their coursework, they learn job application tips, interview skills and the garner the tools they need to succeed in whatever field they choose.



The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) is focused on increasing awareness of the importance of Indicator 14 (I-14). I-14 is a Part B indicator focused on postschool outcomes, requiring states to report data to the Office of Special Education Programs. Beginning in 2024, every Local Education Agency (LEA) in Tennessee must collect I-14 data. The annual I-14 data collection process allows LEAs to evaluate how well students are transitioning from school to adulthood.

In partnership with Transition Tennessee, the TDOE is redesigning the statewide I-14 postschool outcomes survey to better align with I-14 metrics. As well, Transition Tennessee is working to redesign the communication materials to enhance how educators, families, students, and community members can engage with and understand their data.

Sidebar:

Indicator 14

What is Indicator 14 (I-14)?

I-14 is a measure used to track the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities. It assesses the success of these students in transitioning from high school to adulthood, specifically in terms of their engagement in higher education, employment, or other postsecondary activities.

What Does Indicator 14 (I-14) Measure?

I-14 measures the following outcomes for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) who have left high school:

1. Enrollment in higher education within one year of leaving high school.
2. Enrollment in higher education or competitive employment within one year of leaving high school.
3. Enrollment in higher education or other postsecondary education program, or competitively employed or in some other employment setting within one year of leaving high school.

Why is Indicator 14 (I-14) Important?

I-14 data are crucial because they provide valuable insights into how well schools are preparing students with disabilities for life after high school. The data help to identify areas where improvements are needed and support efforts to ensure that students with disabilities have opportunities to succeed in their postsecondary endeavors.


What Does Indicator 14 (I-14) Mean for Students and Families?

For students and families, I-14 highlights the importance of transition planning and the effectiveness of the support provided during high school. It emphasizes the need for schools to:

- Develop comprehensive transition plans within the IEP.
- Provide appropriate resources and support to help students achieve their postsecondary goals.
- Engage in ongoing communication with families to ensure a smooth transition from high school to higher education, employment, or other training programs.

Key Details:

- Data Collection: Schools collect data on student postschool outcomes typically through surveys or interviews conducted one year after students have exited high school. Previously, data were collected every four years. However, starting in 2024, the TDOE requires LEAs to collect this data every year.
- Reporting: The collected data are reported to TDOE and are then used to monitor and improve transition services.
- Goals: The ultimate goal of I-14 is to improve the quality of life for students with disabilities by ensuring they are productive and engaged adults.



The TDOE wants to improve education for students with disabilities who stay in school until they are 22. The goal is to support these students to engage more with job training services thereby increasing their chances of competitive, integrated employment post-graduation. To help students succeed as they transition from school to work, early planning is essential. Transition Tennessee aims to use existing resources to raise awareness of transition/employment for younger students, their families, and educators. Transition Tennessee has joined the Tennessee Technical Assistance Network (TN-TAN) and continues to provide training and support to school districts so that they may improve and enhance their transition programming.

Transition Tennessee continues to work to enhance the in-school experiences of youth with disabilities to improve postschool outcomes. They have continued to meet with their Transition Leadership Team, made up of experts from various agencies across the state that meets every three months. This Team works together to enhance transition practices in Tennessee. Transition Tennessee also provides training across the state to encourage collaboration among those who offer transition services, such as special educators and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) providers. Finally, Transition Tennessee is working with Career and Technical Education (CTE) to better prepare teachers to support students during the transition period. Teachers and Pre-ETS providers are receiving more training to help guide students effectively as they prepare for the future.

What's Next: Student Transition

With every class of students, we have an opportunity to improve transition services for those who need them most. In the next decade, employment partners across the spectrum can strengthen support services by: expanding access to support services such as vocational rehabilitation, job coaching, assistive technology, and transportation assistance. We should also be setting targets for increasing the availability and utilization of these services among individuals with disabilities. Open resource fairs that attract not just parents and teachers, but the students themselves. Have the opportunity to connect individuals with the best skills and jobs for them. The Employment First Task Force could continue to create success by increasing the number of self-advocates and families directly involved in the task force. There are many partners who are looking for more resources that bridge the gap between families of individuals with disabilities and the agencies and organizations outside of the disability realm so they can better connect and collaborate on improved strategies for employment.

VI. The Role of State Agencies & Leaders

As stated in the original Executive Order from Governor Haslam more than a decade ago, the Employment First Task Force must be made up of state agencies providing service and supports, vocational rehabilitation, community employers, educators and advocates. Participating directly in the Employment First Task Force connects state agencies to the people they directly support, giving a face and real-life story to our efforts. It also holds them accountable when programs are nonexistent or require changes in order to be successful.

One of the largest requests from outside partners is, not surprisingly, identifying more funding opportunities to support employment programs and efforts. More collaboration with employers and investment in universal training, technology and procedures could mean money and time spent on finding job coaches. This is an idea shared by many partner organizations and agencies: a larger investment in technology in order to reduce administrative burdens on providers. By doing so, our workforce has the opportunity to grow in an efficient and cost-effective manner. We're still looking to improve the knowledge and understanding of disability hiring within our Tennessee businesses. Until there are more businesses willing to hire people with disabilities, the employment gap will still exist.

A prominent request of state leadership is to have Executive Order No.28 reissued by Governor Lee, with updated mandates and language that includes not just Tennesseans with disabilities and substance abuse disorders, but the now more than one million people in the aging population. With the creation of the Department of Disability and Aging, a merger of DIDD and the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, there are now more people we are responsible for connecting with employment opportunities should they choose to be. Having the executive order reissued would allow for a greater understanding of the population we strive to support through the task force and provide more opportunities for collaboration.

Appendices



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 STRATEGIC PLAN

MISSION:

Create and expand employment opportunities for all Tennesseans with disabilities.

VISION:

People with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities.

EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 28

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

GOALS:

1. SERVICE ALIGNMENT:

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

2. TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION:

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

3. EMPLOYERS:

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

4. COMMUNITY AWARENESS:

Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.

5. STUDENT TRANSITION:

Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.

GOAL 1: SERVICE ALIGNMENT

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

STRATEGIES:

- Continue to set employment target 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.
- 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.

METRICS:

- 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

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

STRATEGIC PLAN (CONTINUED)

OBJECTIVES:

1. Annually update of the Task Force's shared "close the gap" data goal.
2. Maintain an up-to-date interagency MOU outlining employment services for transition age youth.
3. Identify at least one cross-agency initiative to address collaboratively.
4. Provide Policy Updates at each Task Force meeting.

GOAL 2: TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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

STRATEGIES:

- 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.

METRICS:

- # 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

OBJECTIVES:

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.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

STRATEGIC PLAN (CONTINUED)

GOAL 3: EMPLOYERS

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

STRATEGIES:

- 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.

METRICS:

- # 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

OBJECTIVES:

1. Through July 31st, 2023, Receive applications for the pilot of the Inclusive Employers Awards Program.
2. By September 1st, 2023, Review applications and finalize scoring procedures.
3. By September 30th, 2023, Notify businesses and State Agencies of determination.
4. By December 2023, Recognized award recipients.
5. By December 2023, explore ways to increase use of TEFIE – Comms work group (Tool Kit)
6. By April 15, 2024, Refine Inclusive Employers Award Program.
7. April 15, 2024, Launch second annual Inclusive Employer Award for 2024.
8. By June 30th, 2024, launch the survey to determine how to support businesses in recruiting, hiring and retaining people with disabilities.
9. By June 30, 2024, explore MOU for training AJC staff - disability training
10. By June 30, 2024, explore MOU to ensure disability training is provided to all agencies that do disability related work.
11. By June 30, 2024, work with DIDD to create an RDA for TEFIE Award

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

STRATEGIC PLAN (CONTINUED)

GOAL 4: COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Build awareness and shared commitment to Employment First for all Tennesseans.

STRATEGIES:

- 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.

METRICS:

- # 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

OBJECTIVES:

1. Increase communication output, reach, and engagement of unified employment messaging. Continue to collect and track output and reach.
2. Establish targets in four areas of outreach: Language translation, plain language, accessibility, targeted partnerships with organizations reaching unserved/underserved populations.
3. Increase outreach to employers. Add employer representation as regular participants in the Employment First Task Force Community Awareness Subgroup.
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, Breaking Ground magazine, agency newsletters).

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

STRATEGIC PLAN (CONTINUED)

GOAL 5: STUDENT TRANSITION

Prepare students for employment and post-secondary success.

STRATEGIES:

- 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.

METRICS:

- # 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

OBJECTIVES:

1. Increase enrollment/training in Work-Based Learning (WBL) experiences and courses and the connection to CTE courses.
2. Increase the number of transition stakeholders (i.e., special educators, Pre-ETS providers, school and district leaders, VR counselors, VR leadership) who are trained on preparing students for postsecondary employment expectations.
3. Create an interactive graphic of how each organization serves students as they transition into adult including how they are connected, what they do, and who they serve.

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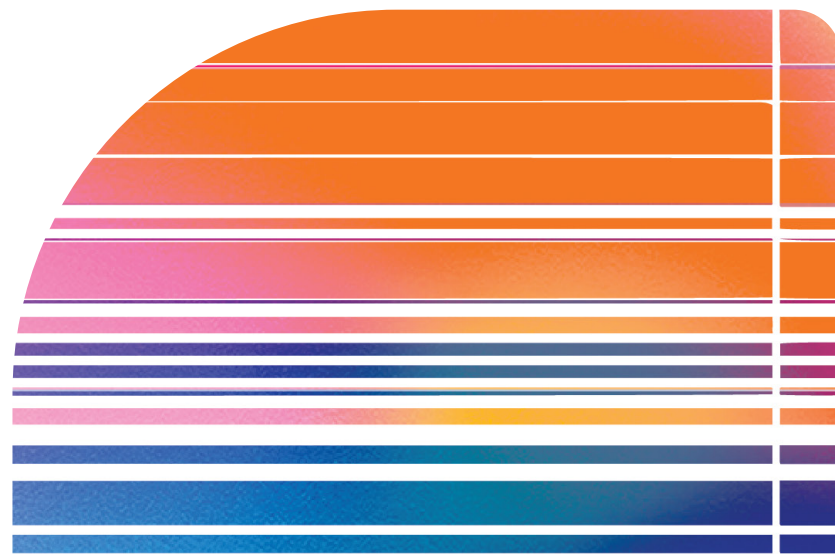
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EXPECT

employment



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