

Florida Provider Network



University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support
Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

Employment as Public Policy

Washington's "Employment First" Policy Presented at Florida APSE Conference

At Florida APSE's annual statewide conference on the employment of people with disabilities, held last month in Orlando, a team from the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment presented on that state's "The Working Age Adult Policy: Pathways to Employment." The policy consists of two key features:

"Supports to pursue and maintain gainful employment in integrated settings in the community shall be the *primary* service option for working age adults. . ."

"Counties will develop and make available services that offer support for individuals to pursue or maintain gainful employment, including support and technical assistance to achieve integrated employment outcomes."

The policy thus revolves around community employment as the goal for all working age adults with disabilities. It calls for those who have not reached gainful employment to have an individualized career plan.

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Editor: Dale DiLeo

Building New Leadership in Florida for Employment and Transition

Florida Provider Network Participants Meet in Orlando



Brenda Clark, USF liaison to the Florida Provider Network, discusses some of the employment issues faced by the regions in the training project funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council.

The Florida Provider Network held a meeting in Orlando on August 21-22 to problem-solve, receive training, and plan for future technical assistance. Over the two days, the teams discussed issues and brainstormed solutions, received training on advanced systematic instruction from Dale DiLeo, and a state of the state review from J.B. Black. Each team also provided project summaries for the region, as listed below.

BREVARD

- Two individuals completed the Discovery process with Brevard Achievement Center (BAC) and Easter Seals.
- A self-advocate and her Discovery team from BAC is presenting at FLAPSE.
- A relationship building meeting was held at BAC to discuss the implementation and support of employment options and non-traditional strategies. A survey of questions was completed by participants to identify barriers and concerns.
- The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) team member shared information with local co-workers regarding Discovery strategies used during the interview process.
- An information meeting and SWOT analysis was facilitated by Dave Guido and Brenda Clark with local leadership and representatives from the school district, VR, grass root advocates, employment providers, and other stakeholders. Local VR supervisors volunteered to facilitate ongoing networking based on the results of the SWOT. The group took on a name to represent their shared belief and values: Employment First Group.
- Art Brandt and Judy Dunning participated in the 10-day Benefits training sponsored by APD.

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Join the Florida Provider Discussion Board on the Web:
<http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/>



Florida Provider Network Update...

- Lynda Schuchert, VR representative on the team, will now focus on transition concerns.
- Project Search added Mercedes Homes as another business opportunity for participant experience. To date twelve students participated with five students successfully hired. There is an RFP to award seven more sites to initiate Project Search strategies in Florida communities.
- Initiated parent to parent communication to disseminate information.
- Two team members completed the train the trainer seminar.

BROWARD

- Bob Wessels is new team leader due to changes in local staff assignments. He requested nomination of replacement team members with commitment letters to fill vacancies.
- Requested training and technical assistance for local stakeholders about strategies and options to support employment outcomes.

OSCEOLA

- A self-advocate and her team is presenting at a local APD Symposium concerning the principles and value of using a Discovery strategy to support employment outcomes.
- The VR satellite office is now a full service office.
- The local community now has eight placement providers.
- Six self-advocates from Ridge Area ARC will attend the FLAPSE conference with financial stipends.
- Interagency contact with VR and the community college.
- Two successful placements with the support of Discovery (Renaissance and Bealls) by Ridge Area ARC employment staff.

PALM BEACH

- Working closely with school district.
- BLN coordinator has taken a new position.
- Three individuals participated in Discovery (one with PBH and two with school district staff at Pahokee Middle/High school).
- The Professional Placement Network is an ongoing opportunity for employment providers and other local stakeholders supportive of integrated employment outcomes.
- A new position will collaborate between United Way and the school district (Al Flores).
- Bi-annual group of 70 local stakeholders active with transition are planning for the STARS conference (Start Transition And Realize Success) and strategic planning for ongoing transition outcomes.

- New supported employment provider for the area.
- Sharon Brown, transition specialist, facilitated ongoing Discovery support to two students. As a result one student is enrolled for culinary arts at PBBC and the other student is a lead dog walker for the dog Kennel Club.

PANAMA CITY

- Through SCIETT, Dave Hammis provided a training entitled "Interagency Collaboration and Collaboration with the Business Community." Myrtle Kent, core team member, went back to her community and spearheaded the formation of an Employer Council. Myrtle drew on her many personal connections to get the mayor and other civic leaders, as well as business leaders in her community to commit to participating. On July 31, the Washington-Holmes Active Employer Council had its first meeting at which they elected a board of directors, met two job seekers, heard from representatives from VR, APD and the public schools, agreed on a mission and set a date for their next meeting.
- Also as a result of the May training by Dave Hammis, supported employment professionals in Bay County have formed the Bay Supported Employment Network. This is a peer group organization composed of employment specialists from the schools, provider agencies, and representatives from VR and APD. They hope to include employment specialists from the community mental health provider, as well as Certified Business and Technical Assistance and Consultation vendors as they become certified. The first meeting was May 21, 2007 and they will continue to meet regularly to network, share leads, brainstorm ways to build social capital, etc.
- Three consumers are benefiting as Brenda Clark has led them and their support teams through the Discovery process.

PENSACOLA

- APD Symposium on September 7 with speaker Mike Callahan. The project team leader coordinated with the school board to ensure 200 students are bused to the Symposium.
- APD will be invited to all IEPs, with each student to be referred for paid employment and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Participants in ADT will be referred for DMD and VR. The local area is interested in submitted request for Project Search.
- Transportation connection issues being addressed by Center for Independent Living.
- Video profiles are being utilized with several job seekers successfully.

Washington's Employment First Policy Initiative

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Individualized goals can include community contribution, volunteerism, discovery, community based assessments, job search and paid employment.

According to the presenters, this public policy has led to a single employment-based message to Washington's schools, families, communities and employers. As a result, there is a more collaborative attitude, and the service system is no longer sorting people into service categories. The presenters also noted that there was an increase in number of people earning wages. In addition, as employment is not the expectation, schools are re-defining their role regarding the preparation and transition of youth with disabilities.

For more information: Washington Initiative for Supported Employment, <http://www.theinitiative.ws>

Helping Job Seekers Prepare for the Hiring Interview

The interview is generally considered the most important step in the hiring process. One of the roles an employment consultant or job developer can play is to prepare the job seeker on how to interview.

A job interview usually lasts only between 20 to 60 minutes. In this short time, the person must convince the interviewer not only that he or she is qualified, but will be a great addition to the business. For people with noticeable disabilities, this requires not only self-presentation, but being able to overcome any misperceptions or stereotypes that might exist in reaction to their disability.

There are a number of skill domains to consider. Let's review a few key ones: preparation, appearance, presentation, answering questions and asking questions.

Preparation

Provide enough information about the organization and job description to the person without being overwhelming. The job seeker should know the name of the company, the job title and the job description. Explain the type of business and what products or services are sold.

Review with the person the job listing (if available), and his or her resume, application and cover letter. Write a simple sentence or two about why the person wants to work for the company and in this job. Then ask the job seeker to list in advance his or her abilities that match the job requirements and any accommodations needed to perform the essential functions of the job.

Finally, ask the person to practice saying the things he or she has decided to say. You might rehearse an interview by role-playing.

Be sure to know where the interview is and allow enough time to get there. It is often a good idea to go to the location the day before. This prevents getting lost and being late, and also provides some confidence so you know what the outside of the setting looks like. You can then check to see if any accommodations or assistance will be needed.

Appearance

Encourage the person to choose modest and comfortable clothes. An interviewer will notice what people are wearing as an indication of their interest in the job as well as their personality. Wearing more creative fashion might show one's originality, but can work against a person in an interview



setting where an employer is looking for someone to fit in. Clothes should be clean, pressed and free of stains.

If the individual uses a wheelchair, mobility aid or some other device, help him or her be sure it is clean and in good repair. Remind the person to be sure to remove any push gloves prior to shaking hands. Hygiene is of course important, too. The person should not wear strong aftershave or perfume. Hair should be combed and out of the face. If a person wears jewelry it should not be flashy, distracting or excessive.

Presentation

A skilled interviewer is listening not only to what the person says, but what and how the person communicates non-verbally. People with confidence often are given more serious consideration. Confidence is shown by making eye contact, having a warm, friendly smile and sitting comfortably, yet alertly. Using a little humor is fine, as long as the person does not overdue it.

Help the person practice good posture by answering practice questions sitting up straight without fidgeting. Remind the individual that politeness and good manners count, and to thank the interviewer at the very end of the session.

Answering Questions

The heart of the interview is what the person says to answer specific questions. While it is not a good idea to be completely rehearsed, it is useful to anticipate typical questions and be ready to have something to say to them. For example:

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September 23-26, 2007

**The US Business Leadership Network's 10th Annual Conference and
2nd Annual National Career Fair: <http://www.newworkforceconference.org/>**

Preparing for Interviews

1. Tell me about yourself.

This is a very common opening question. It can mislead someone who takes it literally. It is not really a question designed to get the person to talk about any hobbies or interests. It is really about giving an opportunity for the person to talk about their personal experiences in a way that relates to the job that he or she wants.

2. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Help the person practice discussing two or three key strengths. Especially focus on those things that match up to the job. Don't avoid mentioning a weakness, but state one or two in a way that shows an ability to accommodate to get things done. For example, "One weakness might be is that when I focus on a job, I might lose track of other things around me that are going on. But I have learned to be more flexible with how things can change on a job, so I can change what I'm working on as you need me to."

3. Why do you want to work here?

Help the person discuss things about the employer, the work or the people there. Remind him or her not to answer by saying more personal goals, like "I want this job because I am saving for a car."

Disclosure Issues

Even when a person with a visible disability arrives at an interview, the decision to disclose the nature of his or her disability is a personal one. If the person elects not to disclose, then the employer has no obligation to provide any accommodations during the interview itself. Either way, the employer may question the person only about his or her ability to perform specific job functions. (See the May, 2007 issue of this newsletter for a discussion of disclosure of disability.)

This is due to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was passed because of the discrimination job seekers with disabilities have faced when applying for jobs. Unfortunately, some employers still stereotype and retain misinformation related to people's disability labels that might prevent a job offer from being made.

Most professionals advise that, if disclosing, the person should disclose in a casual yet confident manner close to the end of the interview or at the time of the job offer. If asked an illegal question, it is best not to alienate the interviewer by getting angry. Instead try to briefly answer only those questions you

are comfortable with and return to your ability to perform the work. Remember, if the applicant needs to request an accommodation of the employer during the application or interview process, then it is necessary to disclose one's disability.

Asking Questions

During the interview, most questions are asked by the recruiter. However, having some questions of the employer shows that the person has a strong interest in the position. For example, the person might be ready to ask:

- What are you looking for in a worker?
- How do you train and support your employees?
- Is this a new job or am I replacing someone?

Common Mistakes Made During Interviews

1. poor personal appearance
2. overaggressive behaviors
3. inability to express information clearly
4. lack of interest and enthusiasm
5. lack of planning for career; no purpose or goal
6. nervousness; lack of confidence and poise
7. overemphasizing money
8. unwilling to start at the bottom
9. excuses
10. lack of tact and courtesy
11. lack of maturity
12. condemning supervisors/superiors
13. no genuine interest in company or job
14. failing to look employer in the eye
15. sloppy paperwork or forms
16. little sense of humor
17. failing to express appreciation for employer's time
18. arriving late to evaluation meeting or interview
19. fail to ask questions about the position
20. vague responses to questions

