

Employment First Taskforce

January 21, 2015

- ▽ Cherrell Campbell-Street, VR, announced the temporary closure of all priority categories (1-4) beginning on January 16, 2015. The reason for this closure is to accomplish a restructuring of processes related to the implementation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It is anticipated to be closed for 8 months or less, but they are looking at the status daily. VR Counselors will be able to provide area specific referrals during the interim. They are trying to be strategic and intentional in how they move forward. New “rules” were to be published in January of 2015, but have been postponed until “spring” 2015. Active cases will not be interrupted. This closure should not affect the Project Search sites.

They will continue to take applications and determine eligibility and, in some cases develop a work plan. However, at that point everyone will be placed on a waiting list. Once the categories open again most of the preliminary work will already be completed and services can begin more quickly. The group wanted to know how this information would be disseminated to the community.

- ▽ Andy Imparato talked to the group about the federal employment landscape. He mentioned that the country is at a tipping point on disability employment. There are two (2) important movements toward disability employment, the ABLE Act and WIOA. As we approach the 25th anniversary of the ADA we have seen decades of work with little to show for it. The federal government has collected employment data since 2008. The highest percentages of disability employment to date occurred in September of 2008 at 5.7 million in the workforce. That number is now between 4.7 and 5 million. The goal is 6 million people with disabilities employed by the end of 2015. Additional information available at sixbyfifteen.org

The country is beginning to make up ground lost by the economy. The country is paying attention to disability employment issues. With the prospect of SSDI funding running out by 2016 it is time for modernization of the entire system. This country can't deal with solvency issues without addressing employment.

WIOA is designed to allow states to propose innovative solutions to employment. There is an increased emphasis on transition from school to work. Tennessee seems to be ahead of the curve on all disability employment activities.

Tennessee is moving to managed care to include employment services that are cost effective and produce long term positive outcomes. However, if the primary goal is saving money it could be a problem with disability rights issues.

Some of the workforce were concerned that there is now an increased emphasis on school transition that will take away from adults who have wanted to find a job for years. VR representatives pointed out that WIOA only requires that there is a 15% set-aside for transition, leaving 85% of the VR budget remaining for adult job seekers.

The federal government (CMS), through the HCBS settings rule, has closed the front door to segregated employment. The 2016 elections provide an excellent opportunity for change. Mr. Imparato opened the floor for questions.

Workgroup Reports:

▽ **Policy:**

- See *Tennessee Works* Workgroup update – attached
- The Youth MOU is almost finalized. We are hoping to receive all signatures by late spring or early summer.

▽ **Employers and Providers:**

- Data on National Core Indicators for 400 people
- 61 of the 400 above have paid employment
- More want to be employed
- People working in the community earn more in half the time than they might earn in a facility
- Project Search continues throughout the state and new sites being added
- Upcoming work with Tennessee Works and the Department of Labor through collaboration

▽ **Individuals and Families:**

- Parent Coalitions being transitioned to the ARC on March 2015, to ensure sustainability beyond grant funding
- Members will be informed in February.
- “Educate to Advocate”
- Disability Days on the Hill – Legislative reception in February
- Group meetings with specific Legislators being arranged
- If you need help to attend there is assistance available through Vanderbilt and the ARC

▽ **Data:**

- Can offer technical assistance on data collections projects as needed
- Looking at data already collected and how we can act on what we have found
- Longitudinal data dashboard is ready
- Data not available at a county level yet

- ▽ Community Conversations planted a seed to start a post-secondary program at Union University. This next year the program will begin. In addition it will be the first such program in the state with a residential component! Hurray for seed planters!

▽ **Strategic Plan:** see attachment

- Work was not totally completed during this meeting, but goal areas were identified and one (1) goal was outlined along with strategies
- A comment was made that the goals for adults look like all people with disabilities can talk, walk, read/write and communicate with others. They could easily work if jobs were available. This is not a practical way to look at employment for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Employment strategies should not be just for kids transitioning from school to work
- Some Project Search programs (East Tennessee) are geared to adults
- Recognize that a wide variety of people with differing levels of abilities need employment services

Next meetings: April 30, 2015, 1-3:30 PM and July 8, 2015, 9-11:30 AM at Disability Rights Tennessee