

# 2016

**EXPECT**

**EMPLOYMENT**

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR



## A NOTE FROM **GOVERNOR** BILL HASLAM

Effective state government focuses on results, and in its third year, it's clear the Employment First Task Force is executing the vision outlined in Executive Order No. 28 and producing results for Tennesseans with disabilities. The task force has brought stakeholders together, identified barriers to employment, increased cooperation and established partnerships to increase employment. Through this work, Tennessee has been lauded as a national leader for advancing "Employment First" principles across state government.

**Making sure Tennesseans have access to a good job is a top priority for our administration,** and knowing that state agencies, families, advocates and jobseekers are seeing more employers interested in hiring people with disabilities is exciting.

The individual success stories highlighted in this report bring the task force's hard work to life. You will learn about the positive impact Tennesseans with disabilities are having in the places where they work. Improved morale, increased productivity and lower turnover are all benefits employers see when they create inclusive workplaces. But more than that, when you read these stories or speak personally with someone with a disability who works in a competitive environment, you really see the pride in their eyes and you hear the value that work gives to their life. This is proof that we are moving in the right direction and makes me proud that Tennessee is a leader in this field.

Sincerely,

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

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, Governor Haslam signed Executive Order No. 28, which established the Employment First Task Force in the state of Tennessee. The task force was charged with identifying and eliminating barriers to employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, substance abuse disorders and other disabilities. Furthermore, the task force was to seek best practices, partnerships and opportunities for shared services to increase integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.

For the past three years, the Employment First Task Force has met quarterly to work towards those goals set forth in the Executive Order. In Year 1, the task force focused primarily on identifying barriers to employment by engaging families, professionals, employers, people with disabilities and other community members through “Community Conversations” and surveys across the state, as well as examining programs and policies in various state agencies to look for ways to expand employment opportunities.

In Year 2, the task force focused on the creating of a strategic plan based on the findings in the initial report. That plan included five goals, each with objectives to complete.

With barriers identified and goals outlined, the Employment First Task Force focused its efforts in Year 3 on refining and completing the objectives. Many of the accomplishments can be directly tied to collaboration among state agencies and partner groups, including TennesseeWorks, Disability Rights Tennessee and The Arc Tennessee. This includes the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding for Youth Transition from School to Work, the submission of the Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the development of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program. All of these initiatives have benefitted from the cooperation and the public-private partnerships that were initiated through Executive Order No. 28, and collectively stand to have a tremendous impact on improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Individually, many agencies have also made progress in their own programs that are leading to direct results.

Never before has there been such a concerted effort to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities in the state of Tennessee. And never before has such movement been made toward this goal. In fact, Tennessee has been called a national leader in working with stakeholders to advance Employment First principles by the United States Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez. While many barriers to work have been eliminated, others still persist, which are outlined in this report. However, this task force intends to build on the work it has already accomplished and take advantage of building momentum as it starts to develop a new strategic plan to guide its work for the next three years. There are thousands of Tennesseans with disabilities who want to work, and this task force must support them in making their employment dreams a reality.



**THOMAS E. PEREZ,**  
U.S. SECRETARY OF LABOR

*“The U.S. Department of Labor is pleased with the outstanding progress that’s been made in the state of Tennessee over the past five years through its participation in the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program.*

*Tennessee continues to be a national leader in working with stakeholders to advance Employment First principles across the state’s government, and expanding opportunities for competitive integrated employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.*

*The state has made remarkable progress in aligning policies, practices and funding to increase opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities to obtain real work for real pay in their communities.”*

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION OF SERVICE SYSTEMS

Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities

### COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Build shared community commitment to Employment First for individuals with disabilities

### MORE EMPLOYERS HIRING

Increase the number of businesses and employers throughout the state who actively seek and hire individuals with disabilities

### TENNESSEE AS A MODEL PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYER

Make Tennessee a model public sector employer through actions to employ more people with disabilities and through policy and regulatory change

### STUDENT TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT

Prepare students for employment throughout their education and connect them to essential services



# COLLABORATION

IN ACTION

## INCREASED AWARENESS, INCREASED JOB OPPORTUNITIES

While we know that many people with disabilities in Tennessee want to work, there must be job opportunities available for them. To that end, through several initiatives, the task force has made substantial efforts to increase employer awareness about employing people with disabilities. The broadest of these was the Employer Outreach Initiative, which is coordinated by TennesseeWorks. The goal of the initiative is to change the employment landscape for people with disabilities throughout the state. The presentation shares with employers the business case for hiring people with disabilities as well as examples of companies that have benefitted because of it.

There are currently 27 active trainers for this presentation. As of July 2016, trainers had shared the Employer Outreach presentation to groups in 48 different counties. More than 1,444 people have been in attendance. Another key partner in this effort is the Department of Labor and Workforce Development through their Workforce Employer Outreach Committees (WEOC), which were established to create a direct link between the department and Tennessee's employer community. Not only have employers attended these talks, but TennesseeWorks has also reached out to local high school transition teachers to attend as well. This has been a key opportunity to make connections between employers and the local education professionals to pave the way to employment for youth transitioning out of school.

The DOLWFD and DIDD have also collaborated to begin hosting "Commissioners Luncheons" with employers to discuss the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. The first lunch was held in Clarksville in February 2016, and attended by approximately 50 members of the employment community in Montgomery County. Both commissioners spoke about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities as well as clearing up longstanding misconceptions. Several more luncheons are being planned statewide for Fall 2016.

Making connections between employers and people with disabilities has been an important element of outreach efforts. In September 2015, Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT), a statewide legal advocacy group for people with disabilities, held its annual luncheon at the Music City Center. Students

from Lipscomb University's IDEAL program, a post-secondary program for people with disabilities, who had an interest in culinary arts participated with the convention center kitchen to prepare and plate the meals. Several businesses also attended the luncheon. Afterwards, DRT scheduled a follow-up meeting with those employers and the Department of Human Services (DHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to continue the conversation on facilitating a relationship between the two groups. So far, several successful employment outcomes have been achieved as a result of a new partnership with Gaylord Opryland.

In addition, part of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program involves job developing in the community. IPS Employment Specialists build relationships with employers through multiple onsite visits in person that are planned to learn the needs of the employer, convey what the IPS program offers to the employer and describe an IPS job seeker's strengths that are a good match for the employer. In fiscal year 2016, IPS Employment Specialists across the state built meaningful and engaging relationships with 317 unique employers. Seventy of those employers hired a person being served by IPS.

Through these efforts and others, employers in Tennessee have an increased awareness about these issues and are beginning to create additional employment opportunities. This work has just started, but is a foundational goal of the Employment First Task Force. It is clear that the collaboration among state agencies, people with disabilities and their families, advocacy groups, and post-secondary education institutions is starting to break down the barriers that have long existed when it comes to increasing competitive, integrated employment for persons with disabilities.

## EMPLOYER OUTREACH INITIATIVE

**27** ACTIVE TRAINERS

**48** COUNTIES REACHED

**1,444** ATTENDEES

# SUCCESS STORY

## CLANCEY

People with disabilities who work in an integrated setting are often described as working at their “dream job”. For Clancey, her job at the Grand Ole Opry truly is a dream come true, but it’s also the product of a lot of hard work.

Clancey was one of the first participants in Vanderbilt University’s camp for people with Williams Syndrome. Started in 2005, the Lifting Lives camp connects people with Williams Syndrome with researchers who study how music affects the brain. With the sponsorship and connections of the Academy of Country Music, the annual summer camp gives people the experience of a lifetime: they get to meet several country music stars, write a song with one of them, and then perform on the legendary Opry stage during a live broadcast.

Clancey kept her connections with Lifting Lives active over the ensuing decade, and in 2015 she had the opportunity to travel to Dallas for an ACM gala to raise money for the Lifting Lives program. At the gala, Clancey ran into Pete Fisher, the General Manager of the Grand Ole Opry. She knew Fisher well enough and was outgoing enough to ask if he had a job for her at the Opry! She made the connection once she got back to Nashville, and she secured an interview with the tour operations manager. Clancey and her soon-to-be boss hit it off immediately, and she had the job before the interview was over.

It’s on the job where Clancey’s enchanting personality and immense knowledge of country music shine. Clancey takes tour groups through the Opry immersing them in the building’s 40+ years of history. She sprinkles in her own jokes and keeps folks entertained on the entire hour-long tour. The best moment for her is when she’s able to step with her tour group on to the Opry stage. Each member of the group gets to stand on the hallowed circle of wood that dates back to the Opry’s earliest days at the Ryman Auditorium, and Clancey says she still gets chills when she thinks about the legends who have stood in that same circle and sung their hearts out. Members of the tour group get to sing a little too, and if they’re too shy, Clancey steps in and sings a few bars for them! When the tour ends, Clancey’s groups walk away with a smile and memories they’ll never forget, and unless they’re told, they might never notice she has Williams Syndrome.



## COLLABORATION STARTS WITH...

THE FIVE ORIGINAL SIGNING STATE AGENCIES

Department of  
**Intellectual &  
Developmental Disabilities**

Department of  
**Education**

Department of  
**Human Services**

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

Department of  
**Labor & Workforce  
Development**

## AND GROWS...

ADDING

Department of  
**Children’s Services**



## INCREASING COLLABORATION, ENDING SILOS

One of the biggest successes of the Employment First Task Force in 2015 was the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding for Transitioning Youth. The MOU facilitates coordination of transition services from school to post-secondary education or training that is targeted towards competitive integrated employment. The MOU defines the necessary relationships, policies and procedures among state agencies to create common understanding, establish collaborative efforts and promote systemic change that will improve training and competitive integrated outcomes for Tennessee youth with disabilities. The MOU was originally signed by five state agencies: the Departments of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Education, Human Services, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and Labor and Workforce Development. The Department of Children's Services is joining the MOU and the Council on Developmental Disabilities convenes an oversight committee to evaluate and update the MOU.

A particularly effective communication practice is the monthly Employment Roundtable meetings, also convened by the Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Roundtable members include public and private agencies. Meetings provide time for valuable updates by agencies and also give agencies an opportunity to discuss people with disabilities who are experiencing gaps in services. On the spot, agencies find solutions for individuals and families who need support by working across agency programs to link services in a meaningful and helpful way.

In addition, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services—Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) signed a separate Memorandum of Understanding in December 2015 to coordinate the seamless and cost-effective transition of services between the two departments. The two agencies worked to ensure both agencies had common vendors. While the payer of service may change, the provider of the service does not, therefore eliminating any disruption to the person supported.

The execution of both MOUs has led to a better alignment of services and resources, eliminating duplication of resources and maximizing funding. The MOUs have also assisted in further compliance with federal regulations. The Youth MOU gave Tennessee an advantage when working on the Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, because the collaboration amongst state agencies required by the federal law was already happening through the MOU.

Furthermore, the roundtable method has been so effective on a statewide level in assisting with the school-to-work transition that its application is now an important element of the work being done on a local level as a part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Pre-Employment Transition Services.

## SUCCESS STORY

### ANTHONY

Anthony is an integral part of the team at Orchard Knob Elementary in Chattanooga. He's worked there for about 5 years, and everyone he meets knows to expect a friendly smile and a big hello. Anthony works in the cafeteria, and he enjoys the busy rush of kids coming through. It starts around eleven a.m. and doesn't let up until two p.m. Anthony's coworkers rely on him to keep the cafeteria running smoothly by making sure there's always enough clean trays for the students to eat their lunches on. He rarely calls in sick and always has a good attitude about work. Anthony loves interacting with the students, teachers, and other workers in the cafeteria. This is Anthony's second job at a school. He had to leave his previous job because of problems with consistent transportation. Anthony spends the \$12 per hour he makes on his hobbies and helping his family with expenses. He's a passionate artist who enjoys coloring intricate pictures and giving them to co-workers or teachers. His pictures decorate the offices around the cafeteria. In the spare minutes when he's not working, Anthony tries to impart wisdom to the students encouraging them to respect their parents and be helpful.

## WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

On April 1, 2016, as a requirement for the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Tennessee submitted the Combined State Plan. The plan communicates how Tennessee will implement WIOA and lays out the strategic and operational plans geared towards improving alignment of federally funded services related to job training and education. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development-Division of Workforce Services is the state agency authorized to receive WIOA funds, but collaborated with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development – Division of Employment Security and Division of Adult Education; the Tennessee Department of Human Services – Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Division of Family Assistance and Child Support; the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development; the Tennessee Department of Education; and the Tennessee Board of Regents to develop the Combined State Plan.

The Combined State Plan is significant in regards to expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities for several reasons. By recognizing that people with disabilities are essential members of the Tennessee workforce, it represents a large step towards the greater success and access of workforce development support and funding. For example, through Vocational Rehabilitation partners and the Employment First Task Force collaboration, strategies were outlined in the Combined State Plan that will provide for staff training at all Tennessee American Job Centers to better understand how to provide quality employment services to people with disabilities. One larger impact the WIOA will have on people with disabilities is through Tennessee's plan for Pre-Employment Transition Services.



## PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES

Pre-Employment Transition Services are a key element of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act with respect to improving employment outcomes for students with disabilities by aligning the services of the Department of Human Services Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Education to support and strengthen transition programs. As part of the Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services -- Vocational Rehabilitation this involves Vocational Rehabilitation engagement in a student's life, starting as early as age 14. Through this service delivery model, Vocational Rehabilitation is engaged in the pre-employment transition planning process throughout the student's high school career. Vocational Rehabilitation coordinates service delivery in a manner that supports the student's transition plan, academic instruction, and age/grade appropriateness with the input of the student, parent, educator and vocational rehabilitation staff. Vocational Rehabilitation is uniquely positioned to contribute to a student's path to employment through connections and community partners that create meaningful experiences and opportunities for students that align with evidence-based predictors of successful employment outcomes in adulthood. To further inform those decisions, there are five services for which Vocational Rehabilitation may assist in Pre-Employment Transition Services. (see below)

The services are coordinated in partnership with the students, parents or guardians, the local Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, a student's teacher and/or other school professionals who may already be involved in support or service provision. It's important to note that students may participate in one or several of these services, depending on their interests and future goals.

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES



**JOB EXPLORATION & COUNSELING**

**WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

**COUNSELING IN POST-SECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES**

**WORKPLACE READINESS TRAINING**

**TRAINING ON SELF-ADVOCACY**

## EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY FIRST CHOICES

Employment and Community First CHOICES is a new program for people with intellectual and other types of developmental disabilities. Approved by the governor and the General Assembly, the program launched on July 1, 2016 with funding to serve an estimated 1,700 people with intellectual or developmental disabilities during the first year of the program. This Home and Community Based Services program, operated by TennCare, is the nation's first managed long term services and supports program that is specifically geared toward promoting and supporting integrated, competitive employment and independent community living as the first and preferred option for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. This program was designed after extensive stakeholder input, and it incorporates the philosophy stated in Executive Order No. 28 and the work of the Employment First Task Force overall. Some examples of how TennCare collaborated with task force agencies to design and implement the program include the following:

- Partnering with DIDD and stakeholders to design and implement the program
- Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with VR to outline how the two agencies will work together to provide employment services to people with intellectual or developmental disabilities
- Convening an Interagency Technical Advisory Group focused on employment during the planning of the program, including the departments of Education, Labor, Human Services, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and the Council on Developmental Disabilities
- Partnering with the Council on the Developmental Disabilities and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to conduct state-wide focus group meetings for individuals with disabilities and their families to give input to managed care organizations about the new services

Not only does the design of this program incentivize successful employment outcomes from contracted providers, TennCare is targeting students transitioning out of high school and adults who need supports to maintain employment, as well as those who are pursuing employment for priority enrollment in Employment and Community First CHOICES.

## Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program and Adult Learning Programs are unique, business-led programs that take place entirely at a workplace. Total workplace immersion for one year ensures a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration and relevant job skills training through strategically-designed internships for youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Project SEARCH is a nationally-acclaimed model and driven by a collaboration of the following community partners:

- 8 to 12 interns committed to preparing for competitive, integrated employment
- A host business, large enough to accommodate 8-12 students or adults with a variety of internships
- A Local Educational Agency (LEA) (For the High School Program only)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- A Community Rehabilitation Partner (CRP)
- A Long-Term Support Agency
- People and families seeking competitive, integrated employment for their son/daughter

In FY2015-2016, Project SEARCH expanded from 7 to 9 programs in Tennessee, with the number of interns increasing from 53 to 71. Not only has the Project SEARCH employment rate grown to 71% for previous interns, but two sites had 100% of its graduates placed in competitive, integrated employment. A third to half of the interns are employed at the host business where the job training occurs.



# SUCCESS STORY

## BRANDON

Brandon attended Project SEARCH at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in 2014-2015.

As an intern, he rotated through multiple departments including Nutrition Services, Patient Transport and the Athletic Dining Hall. While interning at Nutrition Services, he earned the admiration of the staff for his work ethic and positive outlook.

He was hired in July 2015 by Nutrition Services and is still a full-time employee there.

# TRANSITION TN

## BLUEPRINT

## FRAMEWORK

## TRAINING

## COURSES

*available later this year*

- CORE VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES •
- AGE-APPROPRIATE TRANSITION ASSESSMENT •
- HIGH-QUALITY TRANSITION PLANNING •
- PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT •
- SUPPORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS •

## TRANSITION FRAMEWORK

TennesseeWorks and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center are collaborating with the state Department of Education to develop the **Transition TN: Blueprint for Student Success**. This will provide recommendations and guidelines for educators assisting students with disabilities as they transition from high school to postsecondary education and employment.

This project includes the development of the transition framework, a written manual that outlines best and evidence-based practices for transition planning, services and supports for individuals with disabilities. In addition to the manual, online training modules detailing these recommended practices will serve as professional development for educators.

Courses will include presentation-based lessons, videos, downloadable resources, tip sheets and special features including a transition assessment database and transition assessment rubric.

Five courses will be available this year:

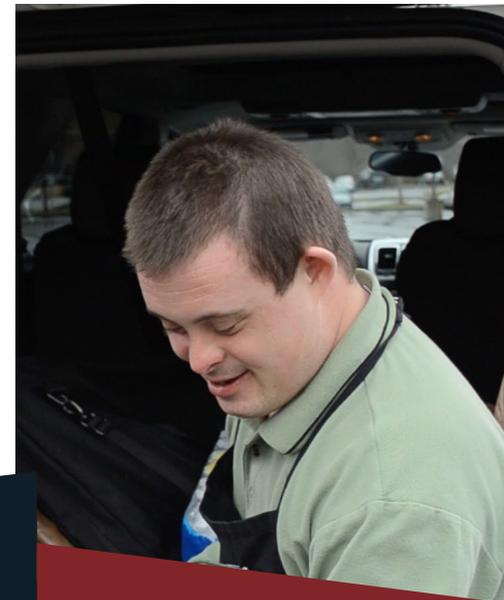
- Core Values and Guiding Principles
- Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment
- High-Quality Transition Planning
- Pathways to Employment
- Supports and Partnerships

## ONE MISSION, ONE MESSAGE

While many agencies started unprecedented collaboration as a result of Executive Order No. 28, communications about Employment First were still compartmentalized in individual departments. Task force leadership understood that aligning messaging about Employment First was an important element to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. Therefore, an Employment First Communications Subgroup was founded to share resources, unify messaging and maximize the collective social media audiences to promote competitive, integrated employment as the first option for all people with disabilities.

The group initially started with communications representatives from DIDD, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Council on Developmental Disabilities but has expanded to include representatives from The Arc Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee, Tennessee Disability Coalition, University of Tennessee Boling Center, DHS and Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

Contributors work to replicate the intense exchange of information, stories, and ideas that happened as a part of the “Hire My Strengths” campaign during National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2015, and the group now gives regular updates at the task force’s quarterly meetings. The groups also coordinate so that consistent, accessible information about employment is available on their websites and links connecting the organizations are also included.



## SPREADING

THE MESSAGE



# SUCCESSSES

## STATE AGENCIES & STAKEHOLDERS

### INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Program is a model of supported employment that has been the most successful in helping persons with behavioral health disorders obtain competitive, integrated employment. This initiative is spearheaded through a partnership between the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and Department of Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation. This past year, the IPS program was expanded to two additional community mental health agencies in West Tennessee, bringing the total number of participating agencies to nine. Additionally, federal grants allowed for the inclusion of transition-age youth and young adults at two community mental health agencies and expansion to homeless veterans and individuals who are chronically homeless who also have mental illness, substance abuse disorders or co-occurring disorders at five agencies. To date, 474 individuals have been served through the IPS program, and 229 have been placed in employment receiving a competitive wage.

Through the recommendation of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Employment First Task Force created a mental health subgroup. The purpose of the group is to focus on Tennesseans with mental health and substance abuse challenges and strategies to increase the number of individuals that are competitively employed in the community.

### BRIAN

Brian began receiving employment services through an IPS program at a community mental health agency in East Tennessee more than a year ago. When Brian began working with his employment specialist, he had a history of substance abuse, anger issues, and inability to maintain employment. Brian and his employment specialist worked together to find a job for Brian in a factory.

Over a year later, Brian is still employed at the factory, is a successful Vocational Rehabilitation closure, and his supervisor says he is a valued and popular member of the team. Brian states he has never had a job with the permanency he is now experiencing. Because of Brian's hard work and dedication to making changes in his life, he was awarded the 2016 IPS Working Member of the Year.



### DIDD PROVIDER TRANSFORMATION

Tennessee was the first state in that country to have its Statewide Transition Plan approved, detailing how it will come into compliance with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Home and Community Based Services Settings Rule, which has a direct impact on future Medicaid funding for any segregated day services. This rule requires that all Medicaid-funded residential and day service settings be integrated and support full access to the greater community. This has a direct impact on many facility-based day services around the state, including sheltered workshops. To achieve full compliance with the HCBS settings rule, DIDD continues to work with its contracted providers on transformation of their facility-based services into integrated, competitive employment services and supports.

Much work has been done over the past year, with perhaps the most notable successes being the 2015 closure of the SRVS sheltered workshop in Memphis and the July 2016 closure of the St. John's Community Services workshop in Martin. Through the technical assistance provided to St. John's and Middle Tennessee provider Pacesetters, an increased number of people transitioned from working in sheltered workshops to jobs in their communities for competitive wages. DIDD also used grants to assist its providers in sending front-line workshop staff to the Association for People Supporting Employment First (APSE) conference to become advocates for transition. Those employees were interviewed by DIDD for a video that was widely shared to spread the lessons learned from the APSE conference to all provider agencies and staff. Tennessee's efforts and successes on systems change and capacity building were singled out at the June 2016 APSE conference.



## OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA

The occupational diploma is one of three Tennessee diploma options available for students with disabilities, with a focus on preparing the student for employment. Students who want to receive an occupational diploma must successfully complete a Skills, Knowledge, Experience and Mastery Assessment (SKEMA), which includes two years of work experience. During the 2014-2015 school year, eight districts piloted the SKEMA, and the first recipients of the diploma graduated in May 2015. In the 2015-2016 academic year, more students took advantage of the occupational diploma option, and the Department of Education saw school districts take more ownership and pride in their occupational diploma graduates.

The department provides technical support and training on the occupational diploma to educators, counselors and administrators around the state, as this year, the department expects all local education authorities to fully support students who want to receive an occupational diploma. In addition, training developed by Disability Rights Tennessee and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center educates attorneys and human resource professionals about the benefits of hiring a person with an occupational diploma.

## WORK-BASED LEARNING LEADERSHIP COUNCILS

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a proactive approach to bridging the gap between high school and high-demand, high-skills careers in Tennessee through experiences like internships, apprenticeships or paid work experiences. WBL coordinators are educators who are trained and certified by the department to coordinate these experiences for students. In addition to the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Council for WBL, the Department of Education, Division of Special Populations worked to establish a WBL council for Special Education.

Together, these councils provide supports through initial WBL training, ongoing professional learning communities and collaboration while maintaining a key belief that "all means all". The Leadership Council for Special Education has received numerous reports about its effectiveness, as teachers have reported they are increasing their business partnerships and setting more rigorous and higher expectations for their students to prepare them for the workforce.

## TRANSITION SCHOOL TO WORK

The Transition School to Work (TSW) Program is a contracted arrangement between the DHS VR program and local education agencies (LEAs). The cost-sharing arrangement with VR allows LEAs to support their transition efforts to prepare students with disabilities for work or post-secondary attendance. In conjunction with their local VR office, students can receive a variety of transition services provided by school system personnel, and they can be referred to VR when they reach working age. The goal is a smooth, seamless transition from high school to the local workforce or to more advanced education or training.

Starting in 2015, VR implemented a pilot program in the Jackson-Madison County School System (JMCSS). One major aspect of the pilot program was the development of a local collaboration, which includes representatives from the departments of Human Services, Education, Labor and Workforce Development, Mental Health and Substance Abuses Services, Health, Children's Services, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Economic Development, the Housing Development Authority, Transportation and JMCSS. The group meets monthly to discuss local program coordination and case solutions. Through these collaborative conversations, people have not only deepened their understanding of the services and supports offered by various agencies, but also have been able to meet face-to-face to coordinate and clear the path to employment for transitioning youth. Furthermore, through a partnership with local staff at the Department of Economic and Community Development, VR counselors have also been able to participate in meetings with local employers and create a single point of contact to coordinate meaningful workplace opportunities for students. This has proven to be a very successful model for on-the-ground implementation in local communities.

In the 2015-16 academic year, 25 contracts were executed in 29 LEAs. 3443 students received services in 84 high schools. In 2016-17, the number of TSW contracts will increase to 33, serving 118 high schools across the state.



**2015/2016**  
PERFORMANCE

**5 Contracts in 29 LEAs**  
**3443 Students in 84 High Schools**





# SUCCESS STORY

## MATT

Matt attended Next Steps at Vanderbilt University from 2011-2013. During his time at Next Steps, he had internships with HealthPlus, the Office of Leadership, Policy and Organization, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and VU Football.

When Matt was asked what meant the most to him during his time at Next Steps, he replied, "the friendships I made." After graduating in 2013, Matt took a job with Best Buy in Brentwood and has been working there ever since.



## INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Tennessee currently has five Inclusive Higher Education programs, which offer postsecondary educational opportunities for students on two and four-year college campuses. Those programs span the state: Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, University of Tennessee FUTURE Program, TigerLIFE at the University of Memphis, IDEAL at Lipscomb University and The EDGE Program at Union University. While specific programs of study vary by university, all of the programs aim to broaden career options and opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, and assist in finding meaningful employment.

Employment rates among graduates of the programs are very high, ranging from 75% to 100%. These programs are continuing to expand their enrollment numbers. In fact, three of the programs, Next Steps at Vanderbilt, IDEAL at Lipscomb and TigerLIFE at the University of Memphis were awarded five-year federal grants from the U.S. Department of Education for program expansion. Further assisting students, Governor Haslam recently signed into law an expansion of the TN STEP UP scholarship, which will allow qualified students four years of financial assistance for an Inclusive Higher Education post-secondary program.

## GOAL #1

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

- ✓ Shared DIDD's technical assistance from the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) with TennCare to help inform the design (in particular employment supports and reimbursement) of Employment and Community First CHOICES, a new program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, which officially launched July 1, 2016
- ✓ Executed the Youth Memorandum of Understanding, and added the Department of Children's Services as a partner agency
- ✓ Included the Tennessee Employment First partnership in the Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- ✓ Conducted training in all three regions on Customized Employment and Discovery, using DIDD's technical assistance from ODEP. 78 employees from DIDD-contracted providers, 45 VR staff and 8 external stakeholders attended
- ✓ Formed Interagency Technical Advisory Group for Employment and Community First CHOICES

## GOAL #2

Build Shared Community Commitment to "Employment First" for Individuals with Disabilities

- ✓ Hosted Community Conversations throughout Tennessee
- ✓ Formed the Employment First Task Force Communications Sub-Group to develop effective communication approaches
- ✓ Collaborated on "Hire My Strengths" Campaign during National Disability Employment Awareness Month
- ✓ Expanded communications for individuals with disabilities and their families through hosting monthly Family Coalition meetings, creating a new resource web page based on areas of need reported in the 2014 TennesseeWorks family survey, launching a weekly blog for family members and starting a video series featuring self-advocates talking about employment.

### October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Join the conversation!  
Use the hashtag #NDEAM and don't forget to follow @DIDD\_TN on Twitter.



TN Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

## GOAL #4

Make Tennessee a Model Public Sector Employer Through Actions to Employ More People with Disabilities and Through Policy and Regulatory Change

- ✓ Met with Department of Human Resources to discuss hiring employees with disabilities in state government.

## GOAL #3

Increase the Number of Businesses and Employers Throughout the State Who Actively Seek and Hire Individuals with Disabilities

- ✓ Presented 48 Employer Outreach Initiative presentations to state and local employer groups
- ✓ Expanded Project SEARCH transition programs to two new sites
- ✓ Created an employer information section of the TennesseeWorks website
- ✓ Developed training to educate corporate counsel and human resource professionals about employment of people with disabilities

## GOAL #5

Prepare Students in Tennessee Schools for Employment Throughout Their Education and Connect Them to Essential Services

- ✓ Embedded a strong transition strand in the Partners in Education (PIE) Conference with more than 20 transition-related presentations
- ✓ Trained 325 educators on the high-quality transition planning process. Another 250 are signed up to receive more information in June 2016. The Occupational Diploma was a component of that training
- ✓ Advertised the Occupational Diploma at the Tennessee Disability MegaConference, BlueCare Support Coordinators training, Think Employment Summit and other avenues
- ✓ Updated the TennesseeWorks website continually to refine resources for educators
- ✓ Held the Think Employment! Summit in September 2015 with 275 people in attendance

## **BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS**

There is no doubt the collaboration spearheaded through Executive Order No. 28 and the Employment First Task Force has led to improved outcomes for people with disabilities. While many barriers to employment have been identified and removed, there are still some key areas where barriers still exist. Those include:

- Collection and sharing of data
- Employer reluctance to hire a person with disabilities
- Setting the bar or expectations too low for people with disabilities
- Some conservators blocking employment
- Alignment of services on a local level
- Inadequate number of internship and summer work opportunities for students with disabilities
- Building capacity and expertise of provider workforce
- Transportation

Strategies have been identified to help address some of the barriers above. For example, DIDD's accreditation plan has laid out steps to ensure people with disabilities are aware of and able to exercise their rights. Furthermore, as employer and family outreach continues, it is the hope that long-standing misconceptions may change and more opportunities will arise for people with disabilities to demonstrate the capabilities and commitment they can bring to the general workforce.

The Employment First Task Force and Workgroups continue to keep these barriers in mind and look for ways to address them as it concludes work on its first three-year plan and begins to develop a strategic plan for the next few years.

# **APPENDICES**

**A ~ EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 28**

**B ~ EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNER AGENCIES**

**C ~ EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE MEMBERS**

**D ~ TASK FORCE WORKGROUP PARTICIPANTS**

**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

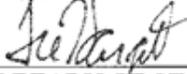
WHEREAS, my Administration is committed to supporting the Employment First Initiative establishing competitive and integrated employment, where work is performed in a typical work setting for a competitive wage.

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 **19<sup>th</sup>** day of **June, 2013**.

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SECRETARY OF STATE



  
\_\_\_\_\_  
GOVERNOR

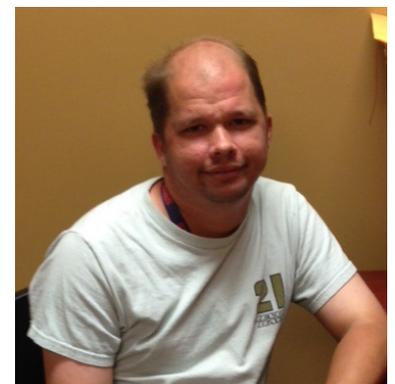
## **DEPARTMENT OF INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) is the lead agency for the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program. Since the inception of Executive Order No. 28 in 2013, the Department has convened and co-chaired the Employment First Task Force. Through becoming an Employment First state, DIDD and the Employment First partners have benefitted from training and technical assistance in key areas important to the initiative including: the development of waiver definitions for the new Employment and Community First CHOICES program including renewal and redesign; rate restructuring; analysis of current provider qualifications; development of employment provider qualifications for the Employment and Community First program; Customized Employment and Discovery; developing family coalitions which are now sustained by The Arc Tennessee; provider transformation; and policy analysis, amendment and development. DIDD staff leads key Task Force meetings and engages other members through work on policy developments, the three-year strategic plan and specific activities to eliminate barriers to integrated employment in several service delivery systems. Among recent accomplishments related to its role in Employment First, DIDD has worked with additional Community Rehabilitation Providers: Pacesetters and St. John's Community Services. The partnership with St. John's has resulted in the closure of St. John's Community Services day center in August of 2015 and their sheltered workshop in July 2016. Pacesetters has implemented job clubs in two of the five counties they serve and has worked on staff decentralization and identification of persons supported that are job ready, including placing four individuals in competitive integrated employment. In addition, DIDD continues to promote Employment First through its "Way2Work" video series, which has garnered tens of thousands of views on the department's Facebook and YouTube pages.



## **DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development has a number of different divisions and programs that provide a vast array of services to support jobs and workforce development in Tennessee. The department has five functional divisions: Adult Education, Employment Security, Workforce Services, Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Workers' Compensation, and Workplace Regulations and Compliance. The Workforce Services Division is responsible for delivering the department's employment and educational services to employers and job seekers with single points of contact and customized packages of services. In addition, the Division administers the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through the American Job Centers (AJC) across the state. The Act is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Job seekers and employers have access to multiple partner services in the AJCs - Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, WIOA and Wagner-Peyser in addition to other partners. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development is a partner with the Employment First Task Force team and the Tennessee Works Collaborative with more than 45 entities that have joined together to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.





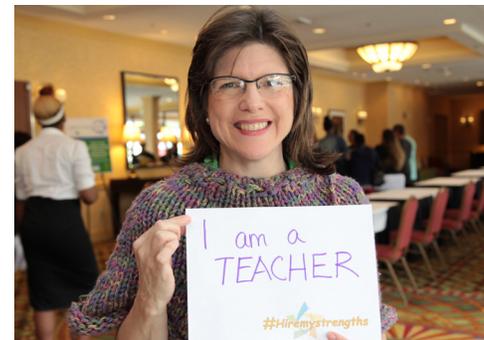
## DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services, administers the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) in Tennessee. The goal of the VR Program is to assist individuals with disabilities to go to work. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed in July 2014. The signing of WIOA introduced some significant changes to the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Two of those significant changes are the Unified/Combined State Plan and Pre-Employment Transition Services. The significance of the Combined State Plan (In Tennessee the plan is Combined not Unified), is that now there is one Workforce System plan for the state instead of persons with disabilities having a separate plan. The significance of the Pre-Employment Transition Services is that the transition from school activities to work activities will begin much earlier in a student's life. This fosters more collaboration between VR and local education agencies. This will assist in students transitioning from school to work rather than from school to home.



## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) strives to provide all students with access and opportunity to ensure their success after graduation. Through research and collaboration with stakeholders, the department has developed frameworks and best practices to support districts and schools as they prepare students for postsecondary and workforce opportunities. The implementation of Response to Instruction and Intervention has provided a structure for educators to reach students at all levels of performance, creating a system to immediately identify and address gaps in basic math and reading skills. The department has also worked closely with partners across the state to develop tools to support students with disabilities, such as the Special Education Framework and an Occupational Diploma. In the spirit of continuous improvement and our unending commitment to Tennessee children, the department is finalizing the Tennessee Transition Blueprint and online professional development portal that is rooted in evidence-based practices that improve outcomes for Tennessee students, and align assessment measures, goals, intervention suggestions, and requirements in order to best prepare our students for success after graduation. The future of our state and our children depends on the work we will do in the upcoming years to provide all students access to great schools and, once graduated, make certain they are ready for postsecondary life and the workforce.



## BUREAU OF TENNCARE

The Bureau of TennCare, the state's Medicaid agency, is the administrative authority over the state's long term services and supports (LTSS) programs for people with disabilities. These programs include: the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, a new home and community based, employment-focused program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities that launched in the summer of 2016; the CHOICES program, which offers home and community based services to people with physical disabilities and people who are over 65; and the state's three 1915c waivers, which support people with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee. The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) operates the 1915c waivers. Together, TennCare and DIDD, as the administrative authority and operating agency respectively, work in partnership to set policies and author service definitions related to employment services for people enrolled in a 1915c waiver. Thus, TennCare's role in the Employment First Task Force is to ensure that all of Tennessee's LTSS programs include an employment-first philosophy and incorporate learnings from the efforts and partnerships of the Employment First Task Force.



## DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) is the single state authority for mental health and substance abuse services. DMHSAS plans for and promotes the availability of a comprehensive array of prevention, early intervention, treatment, habilitation and rehabilitation services and supports based on the needs and choices of individuals and families served. DMHSAS has partnered with the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services VR Program to implement the evidence-based practice of Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS is the model of supported employment that has the most research and evidence for helping individuals with behavioral health disorders gain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. To date in FY16, 474 individuals have been served by IPS and 229 have been placed in employment receiving a competitive wage for an employment rate of 48%. In 2015, IPS was expanded to two Community Mental Health Agencies in West Tennessee and DMHSAS secured two federal grants to include IPS services for transition-age youth and young adults (ages 16-25) and individuals with severe mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or co-occurring disorders who are also chronically homeless, a homeless veteran, or a chronically homeless veteran. DMHSAS's role in the Employment First Task Force is to advocate for and represent individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders. In the future DMHSAS and DRS plan to continue to expand IPS across the state so all individuals receiving services in Community Mental Health Centers have access to evidence-based supported employment services.



## COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities (Council), an independent office in state government that works to improve disability policies and practices in Tennessee, provides the state with a central point of expertise on disability data, service system trends and most promising practices. The Council convenes a monthly Employment Roundtable that includes representatives from 10 state agencies and community programs that support individuals with developmental disabilities to share program updates and develop strategies to facilitate customer services for individuals who have fallen between the cracks in the service system. The group also develops ideas to improve system-wide program efficiency and effectiveness. The Council serves as the oversight agency for the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding delineating the roles and responsibilities of state agencies in transitioning students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and employment. The Council continues to partner with the state departments of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities to expand the Project SEARCH model in Tennessee for youth transitioning from school to employment, and sponsored the state's first Project SEARCH conference this year. In 2016, the Council partnered with the TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development to sponsor their March edition of a new monthly program through News Channel 5+ targeted to employers called "Inside Workforce Development". The program focused on employment for people with disabilities, in honor of March being Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The Council has also convened two meetings of Tennessee's Developmental Disabilities Network and Independent Living Network to discuss how all parties can collaborate together on a joint initiative related to youth transitioning from school to work.



## VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. The VKC is currently working to increase employment of Tennesseans with disabilities through Training, Service and Technical Assistance, Research and Information and Dissemination. The VKC, in collaboration with numerous state and community agency partners, is the administrative lead for the TennesseeWorks Partnership, and has worked to support systems change to increase employment in Tennessee. Several VKC faculty and staff are members of the Employment First Task Force. The VKC also organizes and supports the workgroups of the Employment First Task Force. Accomplishments to date include the TennesseeWorks website, building of Tennessee's Longitudinal Data System to include information on Tennesseans with disabilities, training across the state to build the capacity of Tennessee's service systems to support people with disabilities seeking employment and policy analysis. The VKC, along with TennesseeWorks Partners, is now planning the fourth annual Think Employment Summit.





**DISABILITY RIGHTS TENNESSEE**

Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) is a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free services to protect the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities. DRT is the designated Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities in Tennessee. We concentrate our work in three areas: freedom from harm, freedom from discrimination, and freedom to participate in the community. DRT administers the Client Assistance Program (CAP), which provides individual advocacy and legal representation, information and referral services, outreach and education. CAP may be able to help individuals who need information about vocational rehabilitation services, have been turned down for vocational rehabilitation, or have concerns about services and decisions made by a vocational rehabilitation counselor. In addition, CAP provides information about Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and assists people who are having difficulty with or need information about Centers for Independent Living. Through the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program, DRT also assists people with disabilities who receive Social Security Disability Income or Supplemental Security Income and experience barriers obtaining, regaining or maintaining employment. The agency also helps with selected instances of disability-related employment discrimination. At a systemic level, DRT educates policymakers and collaborates with Employment First agencies and others across Tennessee and nationally to promote equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities.



**THE ARC TENNESSEE**

The Arc Tennessee is a statewide non-profit advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The Arc Tennessee actively seeks to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by collaborating with other community partners through the TennesseeWorks project, the Employment First Task Force, and the Tennessee Employment Consortium, among others. The organization crisscrosses the state to educate employers, families and self-advocates about programs and services that improve employment outcomes including the Occupational Diploma, post-secondary programs for young adults with I/DD, vocational rehabilitation services, Ticket to Work, and supported employment through the home and community based waivers. Finally, The Arc Tennessee is in the process of becoming an approved provider of employment services through DIDD and has plans to expand the number of people with disabilities employed by the organization as it begins implementing the new Employment and Community First CHOICES program.

# EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities  
(DIDD) Authorization No. 344087, 200 copies printed. This public document  
was promulgated at a cost of \$4.29 per copy. September 2016.

