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DIDD Launches State Employment Mentorship Program
Tennessee Employment First Leadership Initiative Aims to Increase Employment Rate for
People with Disabilities

NASHVILLE—The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) launched a new mentorship program today, designed to leverage in-state employment expertise to increase competitive, integrated employment opportunities in Tennessee for years to come.

The focus of the Tennessee Employment First Leadership Initiative (TEFLI) is to provide consultation and mentoring to intellectual and developmental disability providers around the state as they transition people with disabilities from sheltered workshops to competitive integrated employment opportunities in the community. Persons who work at sheltered workshops typically make subminimum wage, as opposed to earning minimum wage or higher in community employment.

“Tennessee is fortunate to have within its borders providers who have a wide-range of knowledge in promoting and expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities,” DIDD Commissioner Debra K. Payne said. “By leveraging in-state expertise, we can create a sustainable model for Employment First.”

The Tennessee Employment First Leadership Initiative has identified three provider subject matter experts—SRVS and St. John’s Community Services in West Tennessee and Core Services of Northeast Tennessee—whose designated staff will receive training from federal Employment First experts from the United States Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). The local subject matter experts will be paired with an agency in the same grand division to offer support and resources as that agency continues its work on its transformation from a facility-based employment setting to a community-based setting.

“DIDD has an ambitious goal of doubling the percentage of people in its services who have a job in the community,” DIDD’s State Director of Employment and Day Services Jeremy Norden-Paul said. “We can achieve that, in part, by investing in our local agencies who are already leading the way and creating mentorship opportunities with other agencies.”

The initial TEFLI engagement will span five years and reach approximately 1,200 people supported in DIDD programs.

Video clips of Jeremy Norden-Paul, State Director of Employment and Day Services, discussing the goals of TEFLI can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef5CyyUx2Uc&feature=youtu.be>

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About the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is the state agency responsible for administration and oversight of community-based services for approximately 8,000 people with intellectual disabilities as well as 4,000 people through the Family Support Program. Every day, the department strives to support people to live rewarding and fulfilling lives. It does so by ensuring people are free to exercise rights, engage with their broader communities and experience optimal health. DIDD is the first state service delivery system in the nation to receive Person-Centered Excellence Accreditation from the Council on Quality and Leadership. It has also been recognized as a national leader in its efforts to increase competitive, community-based employment outcomes for people with disabilities.