



# Tools for Transitioning to Employment

Governor's Council on  
Disabilities and Special  
Education

# Employment First Concept

“Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of level of disability.”

Employment First Definition taken from Association for People Supporting Employment First, [www.apse.org](http://www.apse.org)



# Employment First - Why?

- The employment rate of citizens with disabilities in the workforce is unacceptable
- Access to “real jobs with real wages” helps avoid lives of poverty, dependence and isolation
- It is presumed that all working age adults and youths with disabilities can work in jobs fully integrated within the community
- working side-by-side with co-workers without disabilities earning minimum wage or higher

# Employment First - Why?

- As with all other individuals, employees with disabilities require assistance and support to ensure job success and should have access to those supports necessary to succeed in the workplace
- All citizens, regardless of disability, have the right to:
  - pursue the full range of available employment opportunities
  - earn a living wage in a job of their choosing
  - based on their talents, skills, and interests

# Characteristics of Employment First

- Increase in the number of individuals with disabilities in the workforce:
  - in the community
  - earning minimum wage or higher with benefits
  - Increase opportunities to pursue self-employment
  - Employment is the first and preferred option when exploring goals and a life path for citizens with disabilities

# More Characteristics

- The expectation is that everyone will have the opportunity to work regardless of the severity of disability and assistance required.
- Young people with disabilities have work experiences that are typical of other teenagers and young adults.
- Employers value individuals with disabilities as an integral part of their workforce.
- Individuals with disabilities have increased income, financial assets and economic wealth.

# More Characteristics

- Increase opportunities for employees with disabilities to advance in their careers.
- Funding is sufficient to ensure quality services and supports are available as needed for long-term employment success.
- A decision not to consider employment in the community for an individual is re-evaluated and documented on a regular basis.

# How do we get there?

- One of our Council Members, Rep. Millett is introducing an Employment First Bill for Alaska this session, **House Bill 211**.
- This bill will require The Department of Health & Social Services, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and Department of Education to make the prime objective in their provision of services to people with disabilities, becoming gainfully employed in an integrated setting.
- Each department will also submit an annual progress report to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.



# Employment First

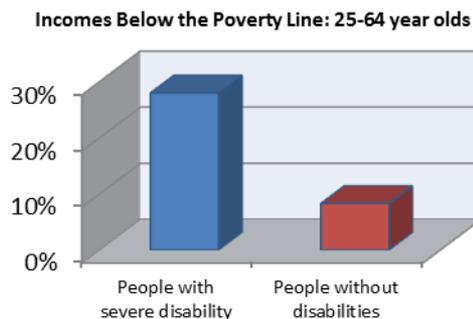
- Employment First is not saying that people with disabilities have to be employed.
- It does; however, presume that all people with disabilities can be employed in a competitive community environment and that such employment is the preferred outcome.
- *People with Disabilities...In Regular Jobs with Regular Wages!*

# Benefits of Employment for People with Disabilities:

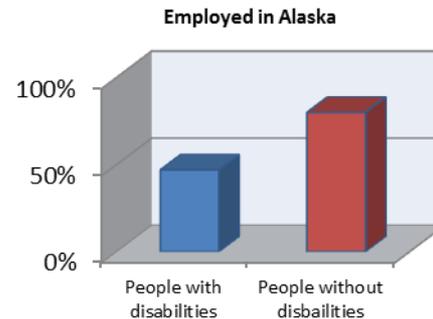
- Economic Self-Sufficiency:
  - “Working age people with disabilities are 2.8 times more likely to live in poverty than those without disabilities.” 2011 data for Alaska shows, only 47% of people with disabilities were employed as compared with 80% of the general population.
    - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service . Healthy People 2010 Progress Review: Disability and Secondary Conditions. Washington, DC: Author; 2006.
  - Community employment gives people with disabilities an opportunity to earn a living wage and increase their self-sufficiency and independence.

# Benefits of Employment for People with Disabilities:

- Economic Self-Sufficiency Continued:



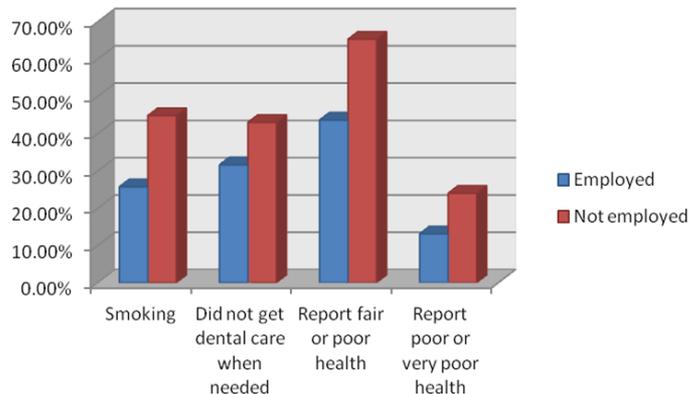
World Institute on Disability, A Perfect Fit: People with Disabilities Building Assets. Accessed: August 1, 2011. <http://wid.org/employment-and-economic-equity/access-to-assets/equity/equity-e-newsletter-october-2005/apperfect-fit-people-with-disabilities-building-assets>



Source: American Community Survey, 2011

# Benefits of Employment for People with Disabilities:

- Better Health: Research finds that people with disabilities “...with any level of paid employment had significantly lower rates of smoking and better quality of life; self-reported health status was significantly higher...”  
“Employment, even at low levels, was associated with better health and health behaviors...”
- Health Related Information of People with Disabilities by Employment Status:



“ Employment as a health determinant for working-age, dually-eligible people with disabilities” Hall, Kurth, and Hunt (Disability and Health Journal) 2013.

# The Facts Regarding Benefits, Services, & Employment:

- **How will my benefits be impacted by employment?**
  - Through Ticket to Work and Medicaid Buy-In programs, people with disabilities can be employed and thus increase their income without losing their Medicaid benefits.
  - It is important to note that Alaska has both of these options for its citizens with disabilities to utilize and become employed while at the same time allowing the reassurance of not losing their benefits.
  - To learn more about these programs, visit <http://jobs.alaska.gov/t2w/m> and contact your local Alaska Job Center Ticket to Work Employment Network.
- **Can I get other services besides employment services?**
  - Yes! Employment First does not mean that you can only receive employment services and it does not change or take away services you have, it merely makes employment a prime focus to be addressed and considered for working age Alaskans with disabilities.

# How can you help your child be employable?

- Partners in Employment has a free online self-study course developed by the MN Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities to assist people with disabilities who want to become employed.
- <http://mn.gov/mnddc/pipm/employment/>
- "Today, over 105,000 individuals with significant disabilities are experiencing more independence and inclusion through competitive, community-based careers."
- This can be **your child!**

"The only disability in life is a bad attitude."  
– Scott Hamilton



# Other national factors

- National Governor's Association Blue Print
- "A Better Bottom Line: Employing Persons with Disabilities"
- Sponsored by Governor Markell of Delaware- As chair of NGA asked all Governor's to join him on this one initiative
- Governor Parnell sent team from Alaska to Seattle workshop
- The report talks about Alaska and our "State as Model Employer" initiative
- Project SEARCH

Alaska's  
Governor, Sean  
Parnell, has given  
an Executive  
Proclamation  
regarding  
Disability  
Employment  
Awareness Month!

STATE OF ALASKA



*Executive Proclamation*  
by  
*Governor Sean Parnell*

WHEREAS, every Alaskan deserves the opportunity to hold gainful and meaningful employment; and

WHEREAS, employment provides opportunities for greater independence, personal responsibility, confidence, and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, it is important that the workplace fosters a culture that accepts, promotes, and values Alaskans who are living with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the Americans with Disabilities Act is a vital piece of legislation which prohibits the discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, housing, and healthcare; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska is committed to being a model employer of people with disabilities. The State's Model Employer Task Force consists of members of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, the State Division of Personnel and Labor Relations, the State Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator's office, and the State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation who work to increase the number of disabled people who apply for State employment and create unique opportunities and training programs that increase workplace success for Alaskans living with disability; and

WHEREAS, we recognize the invaluable contributions people with disabilities make to our workforce and remain dedicated to improving the employment opportunities for those living with a disability.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Sean Parnell, Governor of the State of Alaska, do hereby proclaim October 2013 as:

*Disability Employment Awareness Month*

in Alaska, and encourage all Alaskans to acknowledge the tremendous potential of people with disabilities and to hire qualified Alaskans with disabilities.

Dated: September 30, 2013



*Sean Parnell*

*Sean Parnell, Governor  
who has also authorized the  
seal of the State of Alaska to  
be affixed to this proclamation.*

# State as a Model Employer (S.A.M.E.)

- Work group partners with the Council include:
  - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
  - Personnel & Labor Relations
  - the State ADA Coordinator's office
- 2011 survey of state employees:
  - Voluntary self identification
  - 16% of respondents said they experienced a disability
  - What is working well
  - Barriers
  - Improvements needed



# S.A.M.E.

- Provisional Hire
  - Hiring managers can hire DVR clients without going through the long hiring process
  - DVR can place qualified candidate in position for 4 months
  - If candidate works out well, they change from “provisional” to permanent

# Project SEARCH

- **Students with intellectual or developmental disabilities:**
  - age 18-21
  - in their last year of high school
  - on-the-job work experience for 9 months
- **Collaboration between:**
  - the Council
  - Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
  - local school districts
  - Dept. of Education and Early Development (DEED)
  - local businesses



Project SEARCH

# Project SEARCH

- **Current Alaska sites:**

- Providence Hospital in Anchorage
  - Regional Hospital in Mat-Su
  - Hospital in Fairbanks
  - Hospital in Soldotna
- 
- Next target area is in Juneau.
- 
- There is an 87% employment rate after leaving the program, with jobs that primarily pay far better than minimum wage

# Trust Beneficiaries Employment

- In September 2013, Trustees voted to create a Beneficiary Employment focus area
- **FY14 funding**
  - \$188,000 in Trust funding (MHTAAR)
  - \$150,000 to the Council to facilitate focus area and support the Disability Employment Initiative
- **FY15 funding** (ongoing for up to 5 years)
  - \$1 million in Trust funding
  - \$200,000 to the Council

# Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative

## Goals are to:

- Increase the number of youth and young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) who are employed or self-employed in the community
- Increase the percent of youth and young adults with I/DD served by DVR from 20% to 25%
- Increase the hours worked by DVR participants with I/DD from 13 to 20 hours per week.
- Double the number of youth and young adults with I/DD served by SDS who are employed or self-employed from 139 to 278

# What is Customized Employment?

- U.S. Department of Labor: “ a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both”
- <http://www.dol.gov/dol/media/webcast/20110610-odep-ce/20110610-odep-ce-3.htm>

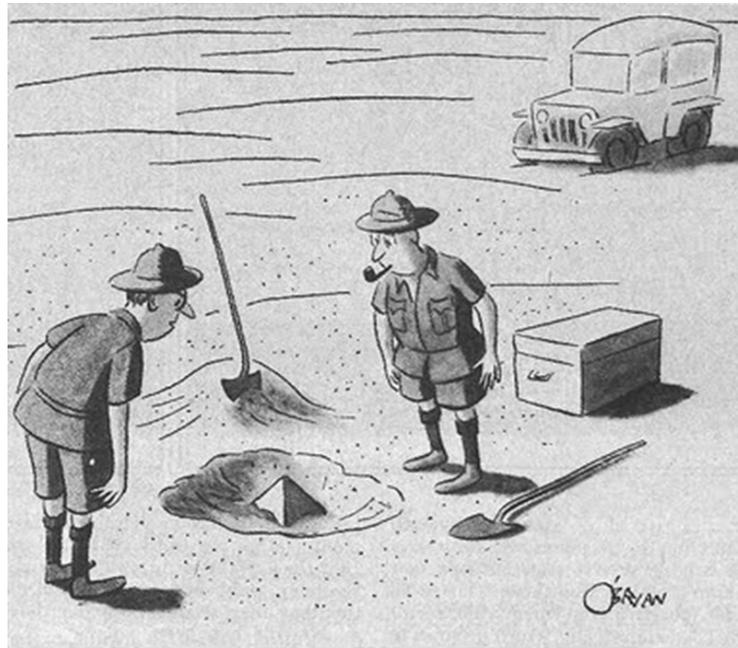
# Who Benefits?

- Employers
- Individuals with disabilities
- Service providers
- Educational institutions
- Government agencies
- Families
- Society as a whole

# The Basics of Customized Employment

- Discovery
- Job Search Planning
- Job Development & Negotiation
- Post-Employment Support

# The Mythical "Discovery"



*"This could be the discovery of the century. Depending, of course, on how far down it goes."*

# The Mythical “Discovery” Process

- “Discovering Personal Genius”™
  - Home & Neighborhood Observation
  - Interviewing Others
  - Skills & Ecological fit
  - Review
  - Vocational Themes
  - Descriptive Narrative
  - Career Development
- 
- TM – Griffin Hammis & Associates, LLC



# Starting at Home: A Discovery of Life at Home

- Daily routines
- Chores
- Activities
- History of the family  
and individual
- Get names of others  
to interview



# Tour the Neighborhood

- Neighborhood
- Surroundings
- Safety concerns
- Businesses
- Culture
- Transportation
- Services



# Interviewing Others (conversations)

- Parents
- Siblings
- Teachers
- Neighbors
- Providers



- (We're looking for themes here...)

# Skills & “Ecological” Fit

- Interest levels
- Performance
- Demonstrated Skills
- “Connections”
- Relationships
- Supports



# Other Things to Review

- Files
- Memorabilia
- Records
- “Discovering Personal Genius” TM notes



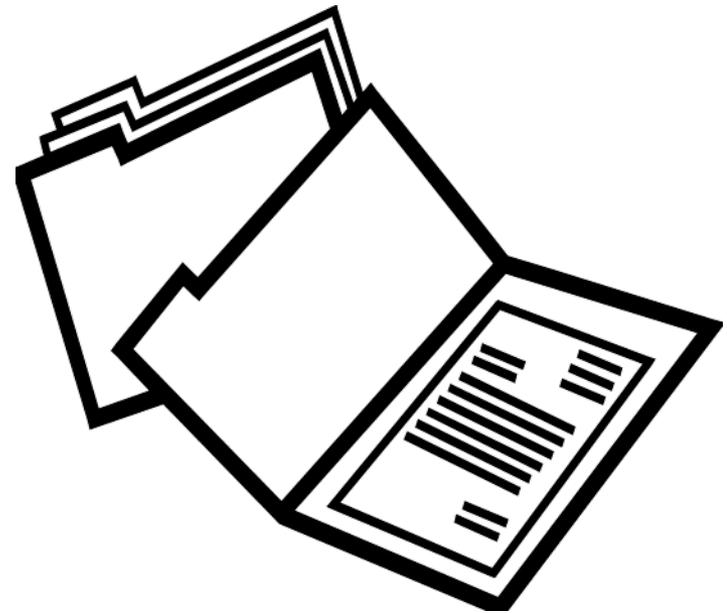
# Vocational Themes

- Shoot for a minimum of 3
- Broad in scope



# Descriptive Narrative: The Vocational Profile

- “Ideal” conditions of employment
- Skills
- Interests
- Culture
- Environment
- Work schedule
- Supports
- Equipment
- Adaptations
- 3 “themes” & “60 jobs”



# Job / Career Development

- Approach specific employers
- They're always hiring!
- Information interviews (I mean conversations) with employers
- Ask them about their business
- Tour the business
- Thank them



# Job Search / Planning

- Align skills / interests with employer needs
- Allow them to represent themselves!
- Create a list of skills the job seeker can exhibit for the employer
- Always expect employment!
- Living wage
- Production hours
- Social hour
- Integrated settings



# Customized Self-Employment

- Nick's Copy Service



- <mms://stream.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/broadband/cary/nick.wmv>

# What's Happening Now with Customized Employment (CE)?

- Training (on a smaller scale) has taken place via seminars over the past 10 years
- DVR has a certification process for providers that want to bill for Discovery and CE services
- The Disability Employment Initiative and the Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative are providing a two day "foundations" seminar in CE
  - July, 2013 – Anchorage & Fairbanks
  - November, 2013 – Juneau
  - February, 2013 – Kenai/Soldotna
  - May, 2013 – Rural site to be determined

# What's Happening now with Customized Employment?

- AIEI staff are collaborating with other state and non-profit agencies on a comprehensive employment services system that addresses:
  - Social Security Work Incentives
  - The Ticket to Work program
  - Discovery and Customized Employment
  - Customized Self-Employment (microenterprise)
  - Long term employment supports
  - Assistive technologies needed for employment

# Customize

- Merriam Webster: to change (something) in order to fit the needs or requirements of a person, business, etc.
- Customized Employment does both... at the same time!



# Biggest questions and concerns

- Will I lose my benefits?
- Cash payments?
- Health care?
  
- How do I get the skills and experience I need?
  
- What if I have to stop working?



# Ticket to Work

- Employment Counselors
  - Answers your questions about returning to work
- Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs)
  - Answers your questions about how work will impact your Social Security disability benefits

# Social Security Disability Benefit Programs

- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Both SSDI and SSI – “concurrent” benefits
- *\*These programs should not be confused with non-disability benefits, which are called Social Security Retirement Benefits*



# What are Social Security Work Incentives?

- Think of them as lifejackets. They help keep an individual “afloat” as you make your way towards self-sufficiency.



# SSDI Work Incentives

- SSA counts less than half of your earned income
- \$85 exclusions
- After the first \$85 are excluded, SSA counts half of your earnings against your SSI rate
- You're SSI will be reduced to zero if your earnings are high enough to reach the break-even point

# SSI Work Incentives

- Example:
  - \$885 in wages
  - - 85 exclusions
  - \$800
  
  - Half of \$800 is \$400
  - \$400 counts against SSI
  
  - \$710 your SSI rate
  - - 400
  - \$310 adjusted SSI

Total Financial  
Outcome:

**\$ 885 wages**  
**+ 310 SSI check**  
**\$1,195**

*You actually have more  
income when you go to  
work!*

# Concurrent Benefits Work Incentives

- If you get both SSDI and SSI
- All of the work incentives plus more that are not mentioned here apply to you



# What is Asset Building???

- Financial Literacy
- Banking the “unbanked”
- Acquiring Assets
- Individual Development Accounts
- Education
- Homeownership
- Economic Development (Small Businesses)
- Equipment needed for Education and Small Businesses
- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Other?

# Anchorage Financial Partnerships Network

- Primary Strategies:
  - Free tax preparation
  - Financial “fitness”
  - Individual Development Accounts



# Peer Power



- Peer Power is a self-advocacy group supported by the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, the Center for Human Development, and the Disability Law Center of Alaska.
- The goal and purpose of the organization is to help self-advocates become empowered.
- We work on such issues as:
  - employment for people with a disability,
  - self-advocate mentoring opportunities,
  - funding resources for the group,
  - and raising disability awareness throughout the community.
- The group is comprised of elected board members, all of whom have an intellectual or developmental disability and area regional representatives throughout the State of Alaska.

# Peer Power

- Mission:
- Peer Power educates, promotes, and advances the empowerment of disability self-advocates.
- Working together, we can make a difference.
- **Empower and be empowered!**



# Join Peer Power



- We are currently recruiting for new members.
- Meetings are held monthly at the Governor's Council office via tele-conference statewide.
- Contact Peer Power Advisor,  
● Tracy Golly, to get involved.
- Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education
- Phone: 907-269-6972
- Fax: 907-269-8995
- Email: [tracy.golly@alaska.gov](mailto:tracy.golly@alaska.gov)
- [peerpower907@gmail.com](mailto:peerpower907@gmail.com)
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- Anchorage, AK 99503
- Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/peerpoweralaska/>
- Like Us on Facebook! <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Peer-Power-of-Alaska/1404232596476441>



Questions?

