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GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES & SPECIAL EDUCATION
NEWSLETTER

Employment First Initiative Sweeping the Nation

What is Employment First?

Employment First is defined as employment in the general workforce being the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publically funded services for all working age Alaskans with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability. Employment First focuses on employing people with disabilities in an integrated setting. This means they work alongside other employees who do not have disabilities, having the same opportunities to participate in activities as any other employee. Employment First also focuses on jobs where individuals with disabilities are working for at least minimum wage or being self-employed.

Employment First is a change in the way we think. Being employed is the expectation for individuals without disabilities who are between 18 and 65 years old. People with disabilities should have the opportunity for the same expectation from themselves, from their parents, from their teachers, from employers, and from the public.

Employment First is not a program, it is an outcome. Employment First does not mean "employment only" or "forced employment." It is designed to expand opportunities for employment, resulting in increased personal choice and self-determination. When individuals with disabilities are successfully employed in the community, they are able to become contributing members of the community, decrease their dependence on public benefits and increase their opportunities for inclusion in the community.

Why do we need an Employment First initiative? In 2011, the employment rate of working-age people with disabilities in Alaska was 47.3 percent, compared to the employment rate of working-age people without disabilities in Alaska, which was 79.6 percent (American Community Survey, 2011). Often individuals with disabilities who are employed work at or below minimum wage. These low paying jobs do not often lead to opportunities for promotions or career options

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EMPLOYMENT FIRST...

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based on personal interests. As the Baby Boomer generation begins to retire, there is expected to be a workforce shortage. Individuals with disabilities should be looked at as a new source of workers for employers. An increase in the amount of people with disabilities employed in meaningful, customized, integrated and competitive jobs not only builds a stronger community, but a stronger economy as well.

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority is keenly aware of the importance of employment and, as a result, has recently created a new focus area around Beneficiary Employment for its beneficiaries. For

more information on this exciting new focus area visit: www.mhtrust.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=calendar.catalog_class&classid=131. An exciting disability employment wave is hitting the nation; at its crest is Employment First. Many states have implemented Employment First legislation or policies to increase the number of individuals with disabilities who are employed. Employment First legislation is a top priority for the Council for the 2014 legislation session. Representative Charisse Millett has agreed to sponsor a bill to make Employment First a reality in Alaska.

Employment First principles and definitions listed in

this paper are derived from the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), a national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities. For a comprehensive look at the Employment First concept, existing legislation and data from other projects across the nation, visit their website at: <http://www.apse.org/>.

EARLY INTERVENTION

The Early Intervention Committee is partnering with the Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP) to develop a comprehensive survey for ILP providers and families that focuses specifically on gaining insight into gaps in service and staffing. The purpose of the survey is to identify what services are not available, as well as missing components of current services for a comprehensive statewide early intervention program. The survey will delve into workforce issues in the areas of autism, mental health, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, deaf education, and special education

professionals. It will also determine the specific training needs that professionals need to remain qualified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and training they need to be able to better serve Alaska's infants and toddlers with disabilities.

The Early Intervention Committee (EIC) plans on sending the survey out in early 2014. They are currently collecting input from the public on survey questions that should be included in order to gather comprehensive information from a variety of users.

The EIC is also looking for child care providers and families of young children (0-5) that experience a disability to participate in the survey. Please contact Christie Reinhardt if you are willing to participate in the survey. You can call her at 907-269-8462 or email her at christie.reinhardt@alaska.gov.

RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION

During the 2013 October Council meeting, the Council adopted supporting Restraint and Seclusion legislation drafted by our Legislative liaison, Representative Charisse Millett. The House Bill has been through several draft forms and is now in its final draft form. This proposed legislation would require all schools in Alaska to have a policy on restraint and seclusion. Currently, only about half of Alaskan schools have policies in place. In addition, the bill contains requirements for safe de-escalation training, 24-hour parent notice and annual reporting. The bill also contains a ban on all

chemical, mechanical and prone restraints. Prone restraints or supine restraints, where the student is restrained on their stomach or back, pose a grave danger to children. Both prone and supine restraints are the types that often result in injury and death. The majority of children restrained or secluded in the US are young children, and many of them have a disability that makes communication difficult, such as autism.

Plans are to file the bill in December, prior to the 2014 legislative session. Currently, the Council is

looking for partners to help move this important legislation forward. We have pledges of support from the Key Coalition and the UAA Center for Human Development (CHD). The Council is actively looking for parents, caregivers, self-advocates, and school staff that have stories about the effects of restraint and seclusion in schools. If you have a story to tell, please contact Christie Reinhardt at 907-269-8462 or Christie.reinhardt@alaska.gov. While not easy to tell, it is these personal stories that make an issue real to our legislators. You can help us make schools safe for all children in Alaska.

ASPEN

The Alaska Safety Planning Empowerment Network (ASPEN) is a statewide partnership invested in helping Alaska community providers serve the needs of people with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. The statewide ASPEN partnership includes the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education as the lead agency, UAA Center for Human Development, Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Statewide Independent Living Council, Alaska Native Justice Center,

and Advisory Board on Alcohol and Drug Abuse/Alaska Mental Health Board. Together the statewide partnership selects a new Alaskan community each year to implement the ASPEN project.

ASPEN's activities include conducting a needs assessment with community providers and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, reviewing social service agencies' policies and procedures, and developing and implementing a community-wide strategic plan to improve services

for survivors with disabilities. ASPEN has been implemented in Ketchikan and Dillingham with very positive results.

The ASPEN project has started in this year's focus community and we have received commitments from all local agencies that were invited to participate. The next few months will involve interviews, focus groups, and surveys with staff, providers and survivors. We plan to have the results of this year's project available in October 2014.

COMPLEX BEHAVIOR COLLABORATIVE

The Complex Behavior Collaborative (CBC) is the top legislative priority for the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education for the 2014 legislative session. The Council is advocating for \$450,000 General Funds/Mental Health (GF/MH) base funding for the Complex Behavior Collaborative. The goal of the CBC is to increase the capacity and expertise of providers in local communities so that individuals with complex behaviors can remain in their communities and not be placed in institutions.

To reach this goal, the Division of Behavioral Health identified experts knowledgeable in behavior intervention for individuals with developmental disabilities, mental health diagnosis, brain injuries, and seniors with dementia. The CBC experts provide behavior assessments, behavior intervention plan

development and consultation, family and provider training, data collection and evaluation.

The Complex Behavior Collaborative served 42 individuals (17 youth and 25 adults) during the first full year of the program. These individuals experienced one or more of the following disabilities: developmental disabilities, mental health diagnosis or Alzheimer's/dementia. The CBC trained providers from 27 different agencies in ten Alaskan communities (Anchorage, Eagle River, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, Kenai Peninsula, Homer, Valdez, Cordova, Juneau, and two northern communities).

Of the 42 participants, 93% have been able to remain in their communities with the support and training of the CBC experts. This has resulted in a

\$229,552 decrease in services billed to Medicaid for participants in the program. The data from the Complex Behavior Collaborative has shown it to be an efficient and effective program. The Council is hoping the documented success of the CBC will encourage legislators to include CBC GF/MH base funding in the state budget.

OCTOBER COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education recently held its fall meeting on October 2-4, 2013 at the Embassy Suites in Anchorage. The first day began with an overview of the Developmental Disabilities Act and the Council's Five-Year Plan, with the Council staff also going over many important areas impacting individuals with disabilities. Executive Director, Teresa Holt, let members know the exciting news that the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust) will now have a Beneficiary Employment focus area and that the Trust and the Council will be working closely together on this. The Trust will be putting \$1,000,000 per year, for the next five years, towards policy and systems changes, training programs, and public awareness campaigns.

Council members were updated on the various grants and projects the Governor's Council is working on right now, including:

- the Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative, which is a five-year grant that is focused on doubling the number of youth and young adults served by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services who are employed or self-employed from 139 to 278
- the Disability Employment Initiative which has received a three-year continuation grant of \$500,000 per year to ensure that Alaska Job Centers are accessible and that their staff are knowledgeable in effectively serving customers with disabilities
- Project SEARCH, with its four current sites in hospitals across the state (Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Kenai/Soldotna), serving as transition programs for students with intellectual/developmental disabilities by providing on-the-job training and education during their last year of high school
- the Microenterprise Program, which provides grants and technical assistance to Trust beneficiaries to assist them in starting or expanding their own business
- the Health and Emergency Preparedness three-year grant, which is working towards better access to health services for people with disabilities, as well as supporting people with disabilities to become more prepared for emergencies
- the Alaska Safety Planning and Empowerment Network (ASPEN), which is working to help providers address the needs of individuals with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

An update was given on the new Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver regulations by Michael Bailey, from the Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities. Mr. Bailey stated that some of the main changes in the new HCBS waiver regulations impacted supported living and day habilitation

services. The day ended with public testimony on issues related to employment for people with disabilities.

The second day included planning for the Complex Behavior Collaborative, which provides behavior experts who work with Trust beneficiaries and their families, providers and communities to decrease challenging behaviors and keep people in their communities. The Employment First Initiative was introduced to the Council, which emphasizes employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred outcome for all working age people with disabilities, regardless of level of disability. Council members were also provided with training on the customized employment process, emphasizing that this process focuses on personalized planning that best meets the needs of both the employee and the employer. Benefits counseling and assets building was another important part of the employment discussion, as there is often a fear of losing benefits, which sometimes causes people to not go down the path of employment. By discussing great programs, like Ticket to Work and Project SEARCH, members learned how people with disabilities can eliminate this fear of losing their benefits and thus feel comfortable becoming employed.

The third day was filled with reports from Council committees: the DD Committee, Medicaid Reform Ad Hoc Committee, Autism Ad Hoc Committee, Early Intervention Committee, Education Committee, Employment and Transportation Ad Hoc Committee, Health and Disability Committee, and Legislative Committee. Each committee presented their work plan for the upcoming year based on the priorities selected by the Council at the May meeting. The Council also received an update from the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services and the Peer Power self-advocacy group. The next Governor's Council meeting will be held on January 21-23, 2014 in Juneau, Alaska.



Join the Alaska Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program on the web:

www.earlyintervention.alaska.gov

on Facebook:

facebook.com/alaskailp

Twitter: twitter.com/AlaskaILP/

HOPE-HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

In 2012, Hope Community Resources approached the State of Alaska Division of Public Health and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) about improving the health of their clients. This project was started when Hope Community Resources (Hope) reviewed their clients' health records and found high rates of obesity, low rates of physical activity and overall poor health. Hope made the decision to develop and implement a new health program within their agency called "Discovery Health." Within the Discovery Health program, clients participate in cooking classes, physical activity and nutrition education. Upon implementation, the Wasilla Hope office saw amazing results in the lives of their clients-weight loss, increased physical activity, etc. Based on this success, the Hope Anchorage office requested additional support from the Division of Public Health (DPH) and the GCDSE for the Discovery Health program.

Based on six interviews with Hope staff, the Alaska Health and Disability Program Committee developed a list of goals and recommendations for successful implementation. The recommendations included the following:

1. Leadership support. This project must be included as a part of Hope's existing wellness plan and approved by the Hope Wellness Committee.
2. Increased awareness of Hope's Discovery Center's training and classes as a resource for clients, parents, caregivers, and Home Alliance Coordinators (live-in staff).

3. Continued use of the Plan of Care document as a goal-based record.
4. Recognition of clients and support staff through words of praise, weekly check-ins, praise in the monthly newsletter and the Hope Facebook page.
5. Inclusion of training for care coordinators and nurses, with support from the Division of Public Health.

Year 1 Goals: Increase support for the Discovery Health program by offering the following

1. Four trainings for Home Alliance Coordinators and others on relevant health topics.
2. Development and distribution of a Healthy Lifestyles toolkit for Home Alliance Coordinators to demonstrate correct portion sizes, diabetes monitoring, etc.
3. Development of an internal web-based "Plan of Care" training.
4. Grants to support community-based physical activity opportunities when possible.

The Alaska Health and Disability Program Committee is currently working with various State and outside agencies to fulfill these goals. For more information, please contact Amanda Cooper at amanda.cooper@alaska.gov or (907) 269-8992.

PEER POWER

Peer Power is a group that started with the idea that people with disabilities could benefit from the input of their peers. Ideally the group would help people with developmental disabilities learn to advocate for themselves, obtain gainful employment, start job clubs, participate in job fairs, and help with Disability Mentoring Day. This group would act as an outreach for all self-advocacy groups of Alaska.

In 2012, a group of individuals from across Alaska met in Fairbanks to discuss the steps necessary to start a statewide self-advocacy group. Thus Peer Power was born!

Since its inception Peer Power has: Encouraged members to start up or continue existing job clubs in their area, discussed skills necessary to speak up for themselves, advocated for those who cannot, discussed possible goals related to integrated employment, and pursued further involvement in local job fairs.

With support, Peer Power will continue to grow as an organization that helps people with disabilities find meaningful employment.

To learn more about Peer Power contact Tracy at 907-269-6972 or email peerpower907@gmail.com

Check out our website at <https://sites.google.com/site/peerpoweralaska/home>

Like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Peer-Power-of-Alaska/1404232596476441>



MEET THE NEW FACES OF GCDSE

AMANDA COOPER



Amanda Cooper serves as the Health Program Manager for the Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. Amanda began her public health career with the Arc of Anchorage in 2006 and has been employed with various local agencies including the American Lung Association and Alaska Children's Services. As staff to the Alaska Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Amanda's focus areas include health promotion, emergency preparedness and justice for people with disabilities. Amanda serves as the Project Director for the Alaska Safety Planning Empowerment Network (ASPEN) and Project Coordinator for the Center for Disease Control Health and Disability grant. Amanda received her Master of Public Health degree from the University of Alaska Anchorage and her Bachelor of Arts degree in biology from Northwest Nazarene University.

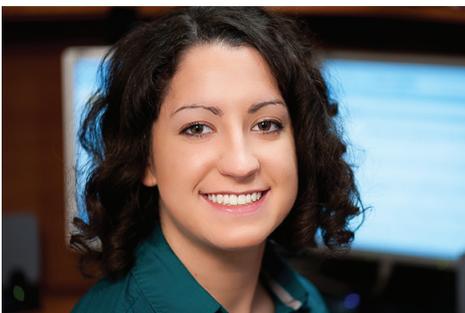
DAVID FLEURANT



David Fleurant is a newly appointed Council member, fulfilling a seat for Alaska's Protection and Advocacy organization. He has been practicing law in Alaska for over 30 years, currently serving as the Executive Director of the Disability Law Center of Alaska, the statewide Protection and Advocacy agency that provides legal assistance to Alaskans with disabilities. Mr. Fleurant has been with the Disability Law Center since 1995, serving as a staff attorney, then legal director, before assuming his current role in 2000. Arriving in Alaska in 1980 as a VISTA volunteer, Dave spent his first year working as the Legal Coordinator for Standing Together Against Rape. Over the next nine years, he served as staff attorney and then statewide litigation attorney with Alaska Legal Services. Dave has an adult son who experienced an acquired brain injury at age 8.

When not working, Dave serves as the videographer for the Chugiak High School girls' varsity soccer team and he previously coached girls competitive soccer with the Chugiak Soccer Club. Dave has worked collaboratively with the Council over the last 18 years and is looking forward to enhancing that relationship through his Council membership.

HANNAH FOREMAN



Hannah Foreman is the Council's 2013-2014 legislative student intern. She is a junior at the University of Alaska Anchorage, majoring in Economics. For part of her childhood, she lived with a child experiencing disabilities. Hannah's desire to make communities more inclusive of people with disabilities stemmed from her childhood experience and she was fortunate to have found an outlet at the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. Hannah is not sure what her future plans will hold, but her top options include working in Alaska, going to law school or living in Rome.

MEET THE NEW FACES OF GCDSE

ANGELINA FRAIZE



Angelina Fraize is a newly appointed parent member of the Council and lives in Chugiak. She and her husband have two daughters, the youngest has Down syndrome. Angelina is an officer with the Anchorage Police Department and previously worked as a mental health probation officer with the Department of Corrections. She is a member of the Alaska Crisis Intervention Team. Angelina has been a soccer coach for Chugiak Youth Sports Association and the Boys and Girls Club. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Washington and is currently enrolled in the Masters of Early Childhood Special Education program at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

JOHN (ALEX) GIMARC



Alex Gimarc is a newly appointed parent member of the Council and lives in Anchorage. Alex and his wife live in an accessible home with their youngest son, Grant. As a Council member, Alex hopes to address how individuals with disabilities and their families make choices around life skills and livelihood as well as how to create a system that makes care easier for families. He also would like to ensure that resources are focused on the people who need them.

Alex is a systems programmer for the Municipality of Anchorage and a small business owner. He formerly served on the Chugach Electric Association Board of Directors and the Anchorage School District Budget Advisory Committee. Alex is a senior member of the American Institute of Astronautics and Aeronautics, holds a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from Texas A&M University, and a master's degree in space technology from Florida Institute of Technology. He is a retired Lieutenant Colonel with the U.S. Air Force.

Alex has worked with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game on issues related to fishing for individuals with disabilities in Southcentral Alaska. His son, Grant, is his fishing buddy every summer. Alex has many hobbies including fishing, cross country skiing, cooking, walking, and gardening. Grant helps with the garden during the summer and cooking year round.

ALEXIS HENNING



Alexis Henning is a newly appointed self-advocate member on the Council. She recently moved to Anchorage from Fairbanks. Alexis has firsthand experience working with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the special education system and transition programs activities. She is a graduate of Project SEARCH and previously worked as an archeology technician at the Museum of the North in Fairbanks. Alexis has represented the Key Coalition before the Legislature. She was recognized by Spirit of Youth for her advocacy role on behalf of youth with disabilities, independent living centers, and services for youth who experience disabilities.

MEET THE NEW FACES OF GCDSE

IAN MINER



Ian Miner is the Council's new Office Assistant II. He was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska and is currently finishing a two year commitment with the Tapestry Program at UAA. Ian is a graduate of Service High School.

Prior to joining the Council, Ian worked at the Center for Human Development as a front desk receptionist. He has an eye for detail and enjoys meeting new people.

Ian enjoys biking, downhill skiing, reading sci-fi novels, and going to his family cabin in the winter. Also, Ian is a fraternal twin with his sister, Robin. He has an older sister, Emily, who is a legal assistant, living in Washington. His father teaches fifth grade and his mother is a retired civil engineer with the National Park Service.

KRISTIN VANDAGRIFF



Kristin Vandagriff joined the staff of the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education this October as a Program Coordinator. Previously she worked for the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services in the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Unit for over two years. Before coming to work for the State of Alaska, Kristin was employed for over six years with Hope Community Resources, working directly with people who experience disabilities.

Kristin graduated from the University of Alaska Anchorage with a Bachelor of Arts in political science as a University Honors Scholar. Her emphasis was on American Government, especially related to access and social justice issues for people with disabilities.

Kristin has been involved with advocacy in the realm of people with disabilities for over 19 years and is very personally invested in this work, as her brother has an intellectual and developmental disability. She is very proud of his achievements and greatly looks forward to continuing to grow opportunities for people with disabilities in Alaska. In addition, Kristin has volunteered extensively with Special Olympics in a myriad of different venues and was thankful to have been a part of the 2001 Special Olympics World Winter Games.

Kristin was born and raised in Alaska and enjoys traveling, scrapbooking, figure skating, botany, walks with her new puppy, and most of all, spending lots of time with her husband and two children (3 & 7 years) who keep her on her toes.