

Florida Provider Network



University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support
Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council

MicroEnterprise Opportunities.

1.2 Million Grant to Empower Florida Adults and Youth with Disabilities

Agency for Workforce Innovation to Coordinate Self-Employment Grant

Governor Jeb Bush has announced the U.S. Department of Labor awarded \$1.2 million to the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation to increase opportunities for persons with disabilities to become entrepreneurs. "Persons with disabilities make a valuable contribution to the character of our state, the quality of life in our communities and the strength of our economy," said Governor Bush. "This funding will play a vital role in ensuring individuals with disabilities have the necessary tools to optimize their talents and achieve their goals."

The Self-Employment for Adults and Youth with Disabilities Research and Technical Assistance Grant will fund pilot projects and research to develop systems models

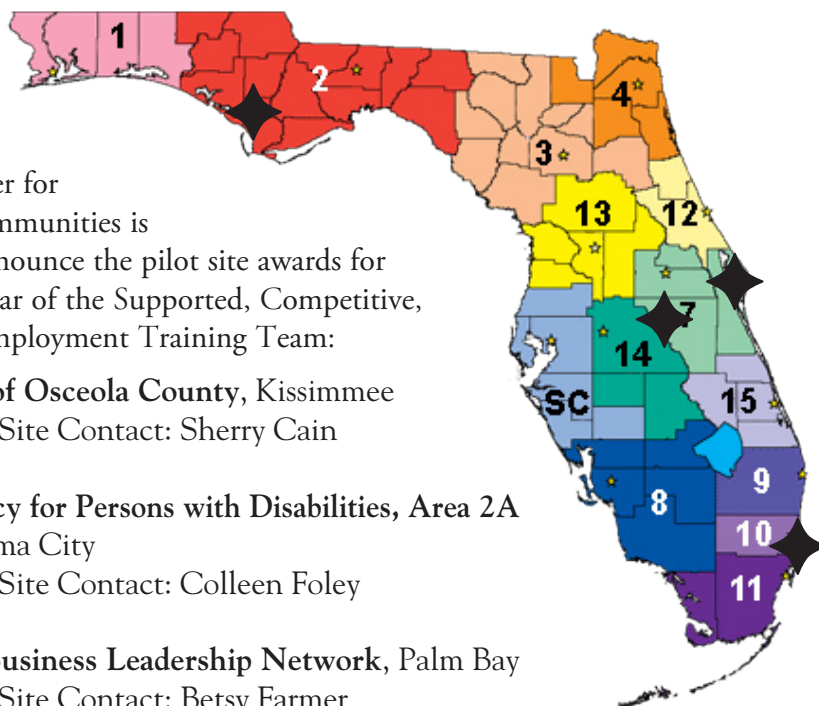
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Training and Technical Assistance to be Offered for '06 and '07

Second Year of Supported Employment Effective Practices Project: Four New Florida Sites

The University of South Florida's Florida Center for Inclusive Communities is pleased to announce the pilot site awards for the second year of the Supported, Competitive, Integrated Employment Training Team:

- The Arc of Osceola County, Kissimmee**
Pilot Site Contact: Sherry Cain
- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Area 2A**
Panama City
Pilot Site Contact: Colleen Foley
- Brevard Business Leadership Network, Palm Bay**
Pilot Site Contact: Betsy Farmer
- The Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Area 10**
Ft. Lauderdale
Pilot Site Contact: Ryan Murphy



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Join the Florida Provider Discussion Board on the Web:
<http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/>

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Florida Self-Employment Grant Awarded

designed to increase self-employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

“The Agency for Workforce Innovation actively pursues funding that creates services available to all Floridians who wish to work,” said Agency for Workforce Innovation Director Linda H. South. “This project will allow Florida to bring new services to those with disabilities interested in self-employment.”

The project has been developed in coordination with Workforce Florida, Inc., Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Florida Department of Education, Division for Vocational Rehabilitation, the University of South Florida’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Griffin-Hammis & Associates, LLC, and the National Disability Institute. All of these partners, with their individual focuses and expertise, work together to address a special need and create a positive impact for both workers with disabilities and their communities.

The partners will evaluate three demonstration models currently being used in Florida for self-employment and entrepreneurial activities, expand technical assistance and training opportunities for interagency staff that serve persons with disabilities, and identify barriers and challenges to implementation of these models. In addition, best practices and strategies to overcome these barriers will be identified. Three sites in **Jacksonville, Lakeland** and **Ft. Lauderdale/Miami** have been selected for intensive training and technical assistance and will serve as incubators for further expansion of the models. The grant is effective through September 2009.

“This grant aims to diversify employment opportunities for Floridians with disabilities by providing for flexible employment options,” said Director for the Agency for Persons with Disabilities Shelly Brantley. “By empowering individuals with the tools to launch their own business, they are far more likely to succeed in their dreams and endeavors.”

The Agency for Workforce Innovation is the lead state workforce agency and directly administers the state’s Labor Market Statistics program, Unemployment Compensation, Early Learning and various workforce development programs.

More information can be found at:
<http://www.floridajobs.org>

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SCIETT Training Project Update...

The four pilot sites will receive four training sessions between December 2006 and May 2007. The training sessions will begin with the Orientation to Supported Employment & Natural Supports. Following the first session the pilot site teams will go through an assessment process, which will determine the remaining three sessions.

Along with the training sessions, the pilot sites will also receive hands-on technical assistance as they begin to implement research based effective practices in Supported Employment. All training sessions will occur in Panama City and Orlando, FL. Technical assistance will be provided in the individual communities.

In addition to the training and technical assistance for the year two pilot sites, the year one pilot sites will continue to receive support from the project. The Pensacola and West Palm Beach teams, who participated in the intensive training and technical assistance in the first year, will receive additional training sessions and technical assistance based on their individual community needs. These topics will include, but are not limited to, self-employment, financing supported employment and discovering personal genius.

Plans are also in place for the expansion of the Florida Provider Network (FPN). All six pilot sites will meet three times between December 2006 and July 2007 and are encouraged to logon to the FPN website at <http://www.flse.net/flprovidernetwork/fpn.asp> and discussion board which can be found at: <http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/>.

The network meetings will address specific training needs, brainstorming barriers, challenges and potential resolutions for the implementation of research based effective practices in supported employment and updates on initiatives and progress within the pilot site communities.

The Supported, Competitive, Integrated Employment Training project continues to collaborate with Griffin-Hammis & Associates and Training Resource Network. The project is funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. and the Florida Department of Education/Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services.

Assistance Not Assessment: Getting at the Heart of Small Business Feasibility

By Cary Griffin & Dave Hammis

The big question in everyone's mind when someone points to self-employment as a vocational option is, "will the business be successful?" While there is almost universal agreement that this is a critical question, the literature on business feasibility testing is sparse. Fortune 500 companies have huge research and development budgets to test new ideas, but such resources are not available to most prospective business owners, especially prospective business owners with disabilities.

Public funds from developmental disability services, mental health agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation, Workforce Development, and/or Social Security are almost always used to fund business start-ups for a person with a disability. Consequently, these funding agencies are anxious about risk and frequently call for a test or evaluation to predict success. Vocational testing can't always predict business success because it measures an individual's deficits, not the individual's dreams, desires, and determination.

Still, the need for assessing business risk persists. Vocational counselors can predict success more accurately by analyzing the feasibility of a business concept, rather than relying on traditional vocational testing. Evaluate the business idea, not the person with disabilities.

Self-Employment vs Entrepreneurship

Business feasibility for any potential business owner begins with self-analysis. Many experts ask questions of the prospective business owner, such as:

- Are you self-motivated?
- Do you get along with people?
- Do you have a positive outlook?
- Do you enjoy making decisions?
- Are you competitive by nature?
- Do you practice self-control?

- Do you plan ahead?
- Do you get tasks done on time?
- Do you have high amounts of physical stamina and emotional energy?
- Can you work many hours every week?

All of these questions have some legitimacy for someone starting a business, but they can easily be used to screen out potential business owners with significant disabilities. These questions come from the folklore about entrepreneurs. Allegedly, an entrepreneur can do it all—single-handedly fighting off customers with one hand while designing spreadsheets on the computer with the other. She makes quick decisions, is in control, and never sleeps.

In reality, most people who own businesses are self-employed, but they are not entrepreneurs as characterized by the description above. Self-employed people often do work hard, take risks, and make decisions.

However, most self-employed people rely on other people to compensate for skills or talents they lack. People with significant disabilities are just as well equipped to run a small business as the next person, as long as they can rely on available and affordable support.

Any feasibility study of a business design must include all forms of support. As the business idea evolves, paid supports such as accounting, sales, and marketing, must be figured into the price of the company's goods and services. A vocational counselor will save public resources by determining and creating appropriate supports for someone, instead of relying on personality testing, interest inventories, and other traditional vocational evaluations. The issue is support, not personality or readiness.

If a person has a disability that does not even allow him/her to go into work everyday, he/she can still own a business—if it generates income enough to hire someone who can go in everyday.

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**Effective January 1, 2007, Florida's minimum wage is \$6.67 per hour.
Unless using a special worker certificate, employers must pay employees
at least a wage of \$6.67 per hour for all hours worked in Florida.**

Small Business Feasibility

Risk

The fact remains that most transition-aged youth and adults with significant disabilities face a life of poverty, isolation, and underemployment. Generally, their only employment option is “Plan A,” day programs or high-turnover, entry level wage jobs. “Plan A” has resulted in an unemployment rate of approximately 80% for people with significant disabilities. Let’s assume that a person with a disability draws down \$10,000 a year for special education services, followed by a sheltered workshop placement. Multiply that by 40 years for a total of \$400,000 spent for “Plan A” employment outcomes for one individual.

“Plan B” is self-employment. Imagine spending \$10,000 to purchase a franchise, say a popcorn business. Add another \$10,000 in job coaching services. A \$20,000 investment can lead to a conservative savings of \$380,000 over a lifetime. In an actual case, a young man with Down Syndrome, and a family member who shares the income, purchased just such a franchise (which cost only \$5,000), operated it only two days a week, and generated \$48,000 last year. The average financial investment for small business start-ups for people with disabilities is currently under \$5,000, not counting on-going support. Diverting only one-year’s worth of day program funding to experiment with a business idea (“Plan B”) is worth the risk.

Evaluating a Business Idea

Rather than the questions asked earlier in this article, more relevant and cost effective questions to ask when refining a business idea might include:

- Does this business address a recognized need in the marketplace?
- Can this product or service be produced at a profit?
- Can this business compete with other similar businesses?
- Does this business match your dreams and goals?
- Are you really interested in owning this business?
- How much time can you invest in operating this business?
- How much money can you invest in this business?
- Do you have, or can you afford, the necessary business and personal supports required to run this enterprise?
- Do you have, or can you acquire, the skills necessary to perform the parts of the business you wish to do?
- How will this business affect your family?

One commonsense and low-cost technique for testing business ideas comes from Rosalie Sheehy-Cates, Executive Director of the Montana Community Development Corporation. Rosalie recommends simply: “Sell a few.” Sell a few of your products and then assess the business idea.

- What did buyers think of the product?
- Did they want more?
- Would they pay more for it?
- Should it be a different color or size?
- Can you deliver it?
- Is wholesale pricing available?
- Is it as good as other similar products or services?

Selling a few items or services and having a short discussion with the customer provides crucial information. If no one buys, it might suggest there is no market for the product/service, it is overpriced, it is considered low quality, or it simply does not address a need. Some serious thought goes into the analysis, but the concept of selling an item before starting a company is logical and ecologically valid.

The Internet provides one of the best, cheapest, and easiest ways of comparing business ideas, seeing what others with similar ideas and businesses are doing, and linking up with business owners across the globe. Not only are other existing businesses easy to find through a search engine (e.g. <http://www.yahoo.com>), but their pricing, product line, terms of purchase and shipping, seasons of operation, advertising strategies, and other key business components are offered.

Another on-line resource is <http://www.zoomerang.com>. This on-line survey service is free when used with small survey samples and has already helped several individuals poll their local communities to establish market demand. And local, state, and federal economic development assistance is available over the Internet.

Local Small Business Development Centers are always listed, as are state Small Business Administration resources. A great site for finding government assistance for small business ideas and financing is www.firstgov.com and is often the beginning point for determining available resources, regulations, and expertise.

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