

# Florida Provider Network



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

## Supported Employment Training Grant

### New Training Project Focuses on Pensacola and Palm Beach Areas

*A Florida Developmental Disabilities Council-funded project will lay the groundwork for building a sustainable training and technical assistance system in supported employment for community rehabilitation providers, families and individuals with disabilities, and other stakeholders in Florida. The first year of the training project will focus on two pilot sites, Pensacola and Palm Beach.*

*Training be provided using a unique collaboration of state and nationally recognized experts in the field of supported*

## New Web-Based Tool Available for Vocational Professionals in Florida

### Florida Discussion Board in Supported Employment Launched



A new web-based Discussion Board dedicated to supported employment in Florida has been launched. The purpose of the forum is to support the exchange of information on the web with other FL professionals as well as experts in the field.

Over 170 employment professionals have registered to participate in the Forum thus far. There is no cost to participate. Users need only be from Florida and simply register online. Once registered, you can logon and post questions, join discussions, and participate in the community. The discussion topics range from career

planning, transition, job development, and job site training, to state and national employment news. There is also a family forum for non-professionals. Users may also start new topics as well.

The Board includes a Forum dedicated to Florida employment professionals seeking new jobs, and agencies seeking staff. Users can post their resumes, while agencies can post their job openings, all at no charge.

To go to the site: <http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/>.



Cary Griffin,  
Project Training  
Team Member,  
conducts a  
training.

Continued on page 2

**Florida's minimum wage is \$6.40 per hour effective  
January 1, 2006 for all hours worked in Florida.**

## New Employment Training Project...

*employment and will focus on topics selected after each region has had a needs assessment. This Project Team will consist of:*

- Jennifer Briggs, Briggs & Associates
- Dale DiLeo, TRN, Inc.
- Tamara Geary, Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC
- Cary Griffin, Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC
- David Guido, University of South Florida
- David Hammis, Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC
- Beth Keeton, University of South Florida
- Lewis Persons, Region 5 Career Center

*There will be five, three-day training sessions for each pilot site. The first training sessions have been completed and addressed an introduction to best practices in supported employment training. This session provided the ground work for a needs assessment. The assessment focused on the current practices within the pilot site area for each one of the content areas included in the training curriculum. The results was used by the training team to develop a Training and Technical Assistance plan. The remaining sessions have scheduled and can be found at:*

<http://www.tolomato.net/webcalendar/month.php>.

*The project will initiate a Florida supported employment provider network that will allow supported employment practitioners to maintain ongoing contact, share job leads, and communicate with each other. This will be done through a combination of web interaction, and, where appropriate, district-wide meetings. Technical assistance will be provided to facilitate the meetings. It is expected that the project will sponsor at least one network meeting in each of the two pilot sites in the first year of the project. The project will use both a newsletter format and a Web-based Discussion Forum to enhance communication and information sharing.*

## Florida Developmental Disabilities Council Employment Priorities

Historically, many individuals with developmental disabilities have spent their days in workshops or day programs with other individuals with developmental disabilities and not in their community, earning a salary as do most other adults.

This has been due, at least in part, to the perception that individuals with developmental disabilities are not capable of becoming productive employees and to outdated policies and practices that perpetuate this assumption. Individuals with developmental disabilities can work when provided necessary services and supports. And more individuals want to work, as evidenced by the 2,500+ individuals with developmental disabilities currently receiving services through the Agency for Persons with Disabilities who have indicated they want a job in the community.

To empower these individuals to obtain productive employment, Florida needs to shift its service delivery systems to emphasize and support employment opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities. Such a shift would provide a more cost effective use of funds since the state spends \$6956.00 a year for an individual with developmental disabilities in a day program, while the average annual cost of supported employment, is \$3238.00.

Fundamental to supporting the efforts of individuals with developmental disabilities to find and maintain employment in the community is the improvement of services that prepare individuals for work, assist them in acquiring a job, and support them to sustain their employment. The effectiveness of these services is directly dependant on the knowledge and expertise of the individuals providing such services. Florida has invested in the development of a nationally-recognized training curriculum and has offered the training, but only on a limited basis.

The time has come for a line item budget to be established to provide training to ensure on-going development of knowledgeable personnel to provide supported employment services to individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and employers. Additionally, the state needs to develop certification and/or standards to ensure personnel are trained and qualified to provide such services.

Continued on next page...

# Career Planning: Building Solid Employment

By Cary Griffin and Dave Hammis

When you decided on a college major, did you check the latest market surveys for the top jobs? Probably not. Most Americans, not all but most, chose majors that fit their personalities, their dreams, and the subjects they got the best grades in high school. However, traditional job development for people with disabilities has been based on the market demand principle. That approach is fading because, after over 50 years of trying to fit people with disabilities into jobs that an interest inventory or vocational assessment pinpointed, or that a labor demand survey emphasized, job retention remains extremely low.

People have dreams, talents, and personal interests that are revealed daily if job developers and employment specialists care to observe. These bits of personal genius are what drive us to success in our chosen careers.

It may seem presumptuous to speak of careers for many individuals without a work history, but by prospecting to reveal a life-work theme, the opportunity for job retention and satisfaction increases. In the long run, this means satisfying the customers (the job seeker, funders, and the employer) and reducing costs by doing things right the first time and by garnering a reputation for quality employment services. Now certainly career planning is not indicated

for the individual walking into the office who needs a paycheck tomorrow and does not really care about where they work due to more pressing matters like making a rent payment or feeding their children. But for many people with significant disabilities who will get only one or two chances to retain employment before the system suggests they are unemployable, career planning can mean the difference between freedom and life-long clienthood.

Studies indicate that the average person served in a Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) receives less than two hours of career planning annually. Career planning is a loosely defined approach to job acquisition and growth that is highly interactive, self-determined, person-centered, community-referenced, outcome-focused, and unique for each job seeker.

Career planning is a flexible and action-oriented process that leads to multiple jobs across a lifetime for individuals with significant disabilities. The disability is unimportant in that it is the series of employment contacts, supports, and actions taken that determine the ultimate success of the individual. Disability is too often used as an excuse for why a person cannot work. All people can work to some degree when provided the necessary supports. People are not unemployed because they have disabilities; people are unemployed because they do not have jobs.

*Continued on next page...*

---

## FL DDC: Focus on Training, Certification, MicroEnterprise, Medicaid

*Continued from page 2.*

All staff needs to understand the various supported employment options, including educators, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Support Coordinators. These options include services provided through natural supports, the Medicaid waivers, vocational rehabilitation, and other grants and training opportunities.

A critical barrier to employment for individuals with developmental disabilities is the loss of Medicaid health benefits when the income from earnings is considered prior to the individual obtaining true self-sufficiency. The Medicaid Buy-In program and other programs like the Florida Freedom Initiative, offer individuals with disabilities the opportunity to buy into Medicaid coverage, which, in turn, allows them to earn a higher wage, retain more of their earnings, and keep their Medicaid coverage. Twenty six states have adopted a Medicaid Buy-In program. Florida adopted the concept into law in 2000, but has not appropriated funds to actually implement the Medicaid Buy-In option.

Employers need to be shown the benefits of tapping into this large labor market of qualified and well-educated individuals with developmental disabilities who are able and eager to work. Individuals with developmental disabilities can be successfully self-employed as well and programs encouraging self-employment and micro-businesses are supported by this council.

# Career Planning

The career planning process is based upon various components of Person-Centered Planning. The individual job seeker is the center of attention and direction. This job seeker requests the presence of those close to him or her in an initial meeting to review past accomplishments and future aspirations. Having a facilitator who understands best employment practice also serves to move the team forward in its work. The next step involves developing a plan of action for starting or re-directing travels down the career path.

The job seeker may take the role of team leader to better self-direct the process. Many individuals have been excluded from society and may need assistance in getting connected to the job market. A rehabilitation professional such as a job developer, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or case manager may be engaged as co-team leader. Family members also often serve effectively in this role and offer typical supports that most of us utilized in creating our careers and a vision for the future. An employer (or brief “consultant”) who knows the individual or family, and who can utilize their peer network and business influence, may be recruited to connect the job seeker with other employers. Whoever takes on the leadership role is responsible for pulling together a preliminary career support team to help devise career opportunities.

The planning team meets initially to review employment history to date, discover the vocational preferences of the individual, and to offer personal and professional relationships to enhance job search or advancement. An analysis of each members’ community connections and employment history creates potential contacts and insights that will help clarify the employment action steps.

Too often, traditional rehabilitation processes create barriers to career development by relegating people to menial jobs or ineffective training and evaluation. The career planning approach views jobs as stepping stones to a career that, like most workers, is created through experiential refinement of what we enjoy vocationally. Remembering that all of us have great latitude in how we select and/or change our careers is important when supporting someone else. In career planning we look beyond typical modes of support because these have proven largely unsuccessful or unsatisfactory to people with disabilities. We facilitate community and job site relationships that advance careers, utilize technology that increases competence, and access resources such as Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS) that can be directed by the consumer.

Various person-centered planning tactics are merged to create a process that exhibits and utilizes the talents of the job seeker and the planning team. Typically, a Background Map helps discover the family, life, and work history used by the team to build a resume and to reveal connections to employers (e.g., the job seeker’s brother works for Intel and can advocate internally). A Relationships Map allows us to identify key connections to the job market, references for the Resume or Portfolio, and possible employers (family friends who run businesses, for example). A Preferences Map is also completed that narrows the type of work desired. A Dreams Map is also initiated to set the desired direction. Throughout the process the individual’s needs and desires are given center-stage. Job creation or carving are often the methods required to address the specific support needs and aspirations of the individual.

One mantra to remember as life patterns and career dreams reveal themselves in the process is to keep asking: “Where does the dream make sense?” Asking this question leads the job seeker and the job developer (or family member, employment specialist, or friend who is helping with the job search) to identify environments where others do work similar to the dream. For instance, ace behaviorist for the State of Colorado, and Community Circle, Joe Schiappacasse, recalls an individual with the career dream of becoming a NASCAR driver. The problem was that “Mike” lived in rural area with no race track where he might start his career. And, oh yes, Mike was legally blind.

Joe arranged a meeting for Mike with some folks who worked “where the dream made sense.” The guys at the local Auto Parts store were taken by surprise when they saw Mike was blind, but they all, to some degree, secretly or openly shared his dream of being in the racing business. The dream made sense to them, so, despite the initial shock of Mike’s disability, the group did not disregard his passion. The short meeting led to a connection at the local fairgrounds where a Demolition Derby was held monthly, with cash prizes (pay!) for the winners. Mike got a cheap car and began his “career” as a race car driver! Will he pursue the dream to NASCAR? Who knows. The point is that he is around others who share his dream and may help him naturally find work locally that meets his needs. Having connections to the world of work is the way most of us advance our careers.

Cary Griffin and Dave Hammis are Senior Partners at Griffin-Hammis Associates LLC ([www.griffinhammis.com](http://www.griffinhammis.com)), a full-service consulting and training firm specializing in community rehabilitation improvement, leadership development, supported employment and self employment. They can be reached at [cgriffin@griffinhammis.com](mailto:cgriffin@griffinhammis.com) or [dhammis@griffinhammis.com](mailto:dhammis@griffinhammis.com)

