

# EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA 2017-18 ANNUAL REPORT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**Annual Report 2017-18**  
[www.employmentfirstfl.org](http://www.employmentfirstfl.org)



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## INTRODUCTION

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When people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) are included in the workforce, it is better for everyone.



However, it can be hard for people with I/DD to get and keep jobs. In fact, working-age people with I/DD in Florida have much lower rates of employment than people without disabilities.

It's important to change this.

Employment First is a group effort in Florida to make sure that people with I/DD can get and keep good jobs.

In 2016, Florida passed a law called the Employment First Act. The law says loud and clear that jobs are very important for people with I/DD.

This report discusses the work of 9 different Florida organizations that worked together to make Employment First a reality during 2017 and 2018.



## WHY WE NEED EMPLOYMENT FIRST

**People with I/DD can find it hard to get good jobs because employers do not understand what having a disability means.**

**Employers may not understand that people with I/DD can work well. They may not understand that people with disabilities also have strengths.**

**Even though there are many tools to help people with I/DD in the workplace, employers and job seekers do not always use these tools.**

**People with I/DD also worry they might lose some public program benefits if they earn money working.**



## THE EMPLOYMENT FIRST FLORIDA INITIATIVE



An “initiative” is a large effort supported by many people.

The **Employment First Florida** Initiative has many Florida partners working to make sure Employment First becomes reality.

This program provides opportunities for both employers and job seekers.

The Employment First Florida Initiative has improved more than 78 policies, procedures, and practices related to employment this year. These changes:

- **Support integrated (community) employment for people with I/DD.**
- **Improve the ability of students and adults to get and keep good jobs.**
- **Increase access to career opportunities.**

## EMPLOYMENT FIRST EXECUTIVE ORDER

In 2013, an Executive Order was issued by the Governor that supports the hiring of people with disabilities.



**The Executive Order says that jobs for people with disabilities should meet the following.**

### Jobs should:

- ***Be paid at minimum wage or higher.***
- ***Not be isolated or kept away from other workers.***
- ***Help people achieve independence and success.***

## AGENCIES WORKING TOGETHER

**9 agencies agreed to work together for better jobs for people with disabilities:**

- ***The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)***
- ***The FL Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)***
- ***The FL Department of Children and Families (DCF), Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) Office***
- ***The FL Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS)***
- ***The FL Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO)***
- ***The FL Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc. (FDDC)***
- ***The FL Department of Education, Division of Blind Services (DBS)***
- ***CareerSource FL, Inc.***
- ***The FL Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (FARF)***

**Agencies work together with self-advocates who share the voice of people with disabilities.**

***The Employment First Grassroots Group that meets 4 times a year by webinars is a great way for self-advocates to learn more and share the voices of people with disabilities.***

## EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**During 2017-18,  
Employment First  
partners made progress in:**

- 1. Services and new ideas for services**
- 2. Training and technical help**
- 3. Ways to work together**

The partners' group work created great results. They revised, created, or improved 78 employment policies, practices, and procedures. A few highlights are on the next pages.



## EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS CONTINUED

### Employment First Collaborative Training (EFCT) Toolkit

This resource helps job coaches and employment specialists know how to help people with I/DD find and keep jobs.

### “Nine Agencies, One Mission: Florida’s Employment First Collaborative Team” presentation

At the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) Conference in Orlando, the partners described how they have worked towards improving employment opportunities for all Floridians with disabilities. The presentation was very important because:

- It showed people at the national level what work is being done in Florida.
- It showed how important it is that people with I/DD become independent through working at a job.



## **EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS CONTINUED**

### **Project SEARCH**

This is a national high school transition model. This program brings together businesses, schools, state agencies, and provider organizations to provide classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training.

Project SEARCH started in 2007 and is a group effort across several Employment First partners, including the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Florida Department of Education's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Students Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Project SEARCH has done well in Florida, but the program's progress was slowed down by a \$15,000 fee for a license to provide training and support. This problem was resolved when the Council provided funds for technical assistance. At the end of 2018, Florida's total number of Project SEARCH sites had grown to 37 in 26 counties.

**Florida leads the nation in  
the number of active Project  
SEARCH sites for a state!**



## **EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS CONTINUED**

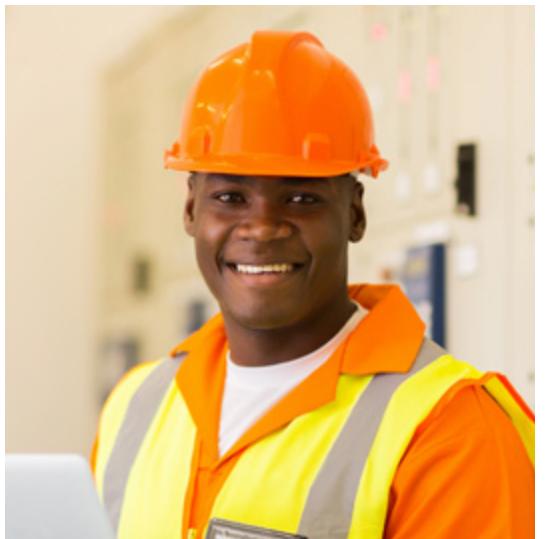
In 2018, Florida's Employment First partners showed leadership and worked together in all areas.

Florida's Employment First efforts are paving the way to better job opportunities for Floridians with disabilities.

These programs serve as a model for other states wishing to improve employment opportunities for their residents with I/DD.



## INDIVIDUAL PARTNER ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**Some accomplishments were the result of working as a team.**

**Others were the result of efforts by individual agencies or organizations.**

**The next pages show the major accomplishments of each Employment First partner.**



**2,957 IN COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT**

### **1. Wait List Money.**

*Florida gave \$900,000 to APD for the Employment Enhancement Program in 2017-18. This helped students and adults on APD's waiting list find jobs and internships:*

- 70 on the waiting list got jobs**
- 10 found internships**
- 255 kept their jobs**

### **2. APD Staff Training.**

*APD staff are trained that employment is the first and best option for the daily activities of people with disabilities. APD continues to improve how it keeps track of how many people get jobs and how well they are doing in their work.*

### **3. Partnership with Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).**

*APD works with VR to support career counseling for people in sheltered workshops earning below minimum wage. The goal is to help people with I/DD find paid jobs in their communities.*

### **4. Disability Employment Awareness Celebration.**

*Every year, APD honors employers. 2017 winners were:*

- Boca Raton Resort and Club**
- Cunningham Pest Control of Palm Beach County**
- Dosatron of Clearwater**
- Embassy Suites of Ft. Lauderdale**
- Martin Health System of Stuart**
- Piggly Wiggly of Quincy**
- Planet Fitness of Panama City**
- Publix**
- Sodexo (Tallahassee, St. Petersburg, and Daytona Beach)**
- The Women's Center of Central Florida.**



## THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES (BEESS)

**59%**  
EMPLOYED

1. Improved graduation rates for students with disabilities by 11%
2. Closed the gap between students with disabilities and all students
3. 82 student scholarships awarded to students with I/DD through the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida



## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

**41,402** PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SERVED

1. Launched in 2016, CareerSource's Hospitality Training Program of the Palm Beaches gives people with I/DD the opportunity to earn a nationally recognized certificate from the American Hotel and Lodging Association. More than half of the program's graduates have found jobs in the hospitality industry.
2. The CareerSource Florida network includes 24 local workforce development boards. There are over 100 career centers in Florida. 17 of the 24 centers are employment networks with the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program.
3. The Abilities Work Portal ([abilitieswork.employflorida.com](http://abilitieswork.employflorida.com)) provides job listing tools for both employers and people looking for jobs.
4. The Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program recognizes employers who are committed to providing good job opportunities to people with I/DD.

## THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)



**46,323**

**CUSTOMERS SERVED!**

1. VR's Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS) offer help to students in high school. Services include career exploration, self-advocacy training, community work experiences, and more.
2. VR's Work-Based Learning Experience Contracts helped 31 students who would not have otherwise received any work experience.
3. Through its Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Programs, VR worked with 17 colleges in Florida to offer students with disabilities leaving high school the chance to attend college.
4. VR has partnered with 33 staff known as Community Work Incentive Coordinators. They offer benefits planning to VR customers eligible for the national Social Security "Ticket to Work" program.
5. VR helps people go to work using "Supported Employment."
6. VR's "Project SEARCH" program helps students with disabilities in their last year of high school develop job skills. Almost 70% of people in this program get jobs.
7. VR Supported Self-Employment Services help VR customers to own their own business.

# 852 EMPLOYED

1. DBS worked to educate employers about *Blind Services*, accommodations, and training.
2. DBS also provided employers with basic information about blindness and visual impairments.
3. The DBS Bureau of Business Enterprise (BBE) supported 10 new food and vending companies. People who run these companies have average incomes of over \$69,000 per year.
4. DBS' Pre-Employment Program (PEP) in Daytona held 6 classes in 2017-2018, and 21 people completed classes. The program helped 8 people identify a career pathway, 3 people pursue work experience, 2 people pursue post secondary education, and 6 people look for employment.
5. In 2017-2018, DBS developed 1,452 new business and government agency partnerships. Several have employed DBS job seekers, including the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Transportation, Department of Education, and the Department of Internal Revenue.

# 2,081 PERSONS SERVED IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

1. The Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) provides employment services through Supported Employment and Mental Health Clubhouse Services.
2. The Office of SAMH revised several of its contracts to make it easier for people to access a range of employment services.
3. The Department has asked the Florida legislature to repeat its funding and to increase the amount awarded by \$800,000 for a total of \$1,500,000 for 2019-2020.
4. In Broward County, the local mental health agency and VR worked together to offer supported employment. The project used the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, and people are served by 2 providers there.

# 110 INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED

- 1.** *Project ACHIEVE. Florida State College at Jacksonville and the Duval County School District continued a career and technical education program for students with I/DD. Between 2011 and 2017, 59 students earned industry certification.*
- 2.** *Project TOPS. Robert Morgan Education Center and Technical College of the Miami-Dade County School District provided a technical college program that increased enrollment from 25 to 35 students this year.*
- 3.** *Project SEARCH. The Project SEARCH high school transition program added 14 new sites this year, bringing the total number in Florida to 37 in 26 counties. It is likely that over 315 students will be served.*
- 4.** *The Employment First Collaborative Training Toolkit. This effort provided training to 60 people at 7 partner agency sites.*
- 5.** *The Employment First Website. This website provides important information to support community jobs: [employmentfirstfl.org](http://employmentfirstfl.org).*
- 6.** *Employment First Collaborative sites. Local efforts are helping train staff to help people with I/DD learn about and gain employment.*
- 7.** *Employment Options Informed Choice. This effort built a program for job shadowing. A total of 27 shadowing experiences were completed with 17 employers, and 6 people got jobs as a result.*

# 1,246 INDIVIDUALS EMPLOYED

- 1.** *Florida ARF's RESPECT of Florida program offers services and items produced by individuals with disabilities to government agencies. In 2015, 842 employees earned at least minimum wage, working through Employment Centers. RESPECT wages increased by 4% (35 cents per hour) over the last year.*
- 2.** *About 89% of the work through RESPECT in 2017-2018 paid minimum wage or higher, up from 70% last year. About 76% of people working through RESPECT worked at integrated work sites.*
- 3.** *Florida ARF worked with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities to move people out of day programs.*
- 4.** *Florida ARF worked to make transportation accessible to people with I/DD.*
- 5.** *RESPECT awarded a grant to a person with an intellectual disability who is running a business making bracelets made from parachute cords.*
- 6.** *Florida ARF provides Employment Outcomes Professional (EOP) training to help people with disabilities compete for better jobs.*
- 7.** *In 2017-2018, employees working through RESPECT Employment Centers and earning minimum wage or above totaled 1,065 individuals (89%). RESPECT wages increased from \$9.25 to \$9.49 per hour, compared to Florida's minimum wage of \$8.25 per hour.*
- 8.** *Florida ARF continues to serve on the Employment First Interagency Collaborative Team.*
- 9.** *Florida ARF works with VR to develop transition opportunities for youth with disabilities.*

## CONCLUSION



***Individuals with disabilities want to participate in the workforce.***

***Employment First is helping them to do so.***

***It is also helping employers understand how hiring workers with disabilities benefits them and their businesses.***

***Employment First has worked to:***

- Help employers understand the power of workers with disabilities***
- Provide employers what they need to hire and help workers with disabilities***
- Help state and local government with new employment practices***

***Employment First Florida is meeting the challenge of making employment the best way to independence for people with disabilities.***