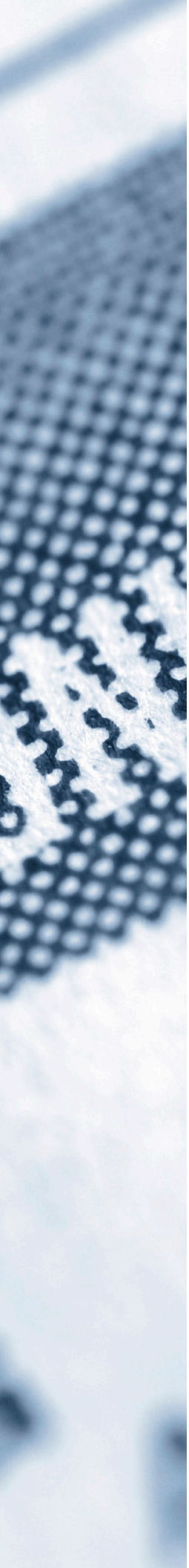
EXPECT EMPLOYMENT **2015**

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE **REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR**



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MAKING SURE **ALL TENNESSEANS** HAVE **ACCESS** TO A **GOOD JOB** IS A TOP PRIORITY...

BILL HASLAM
GOVERNOR
STATE OF TENNESSEE

A NOTE FROM **GOVERNOR** BILL HASLAM

Making sure all Tennesseans have access to a good job is a top priority for our administration. Tennesseans living with disabilities already make significant contributions to our state's workforce, but we can do more.

Two years ago I signed Executive Order No. 28, creating the Tennessee Employment First Task Force to expand employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities. "Employment First" emphasizes employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly-funded systems. Using this approach, state programs are focusing on job training and reaching the employment goals of Tennesseans living with disabilities, increasing not only their economic self-sufficiency, but their participation in all aspects of community life across Tennessee.

This report from the task force outlines the progress that has been made over the past year toward fulfilling Executive Order No. 28 and plans for the next three years. By bringing stakeholders together, we are working to remove barriers to employment and use tax dollars more effectively to improve services.

A successful Employment First initiative takes collaboration. It takes efficient and effective government programs that are customer-focused and deliver meaningful services. It also requires strong public and private partnerships. I am grateful to the state agencies, families, consumer advocates and service providers that have dedicated themselves to serving our state and their fellow Tennesseans.

Sincerely,

Bill Haslam

EXECUTIVE **SUMMARY**

Governor Haslam established Tennessee as an Employment First state in June 2013 with Executive Order No. 28. This Order, in recognition of high levels of unemployment for Tennesseans with disabilities, mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders, establishes the Employment First Task Force to support the commitment of state partnership agencies to increase opportunities for integrated, competitive employment. The Task Force includes representatives from state agencies, consumers and family members, advocates, service providers, employers and other community members.

The Employment First Task Force released its first Expect Employment Report to the Governor in August 2014 to outline findings and provide recommendations for expanding community employment for Tennesseans with disabilities. The Task Force members identified barriers to employment in their first year in order to strategically plan and propose changes in policies and practices to increase employment. The Task Force and our partners at TennesseeWorks were able to move quickly to action. TennesseeWorks is an initiative facilitated by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center since 2012. With a shared vision to increase employment for all Tennesseans with disabilities, Employment First and TennesseeWorks are able to accomplish mutual goals through four work groups who take the lead in these key areas: Policymakers/ Data; Employers and Providers; Education; and Families and Youth. This 2015 Report describes some of the specific results and progress achieved over the past year by these groups as well as the strategies set in motion to sustain and measure progress through a new strategic plan.

The first recommendation in the 2014 report was to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the state partner agencies committed to Employment First. Six state agencies approved and signed the MOU this year, thus removing potential barriers and strengthening the level of coordination among these partners to improve employment outcomes. Another important step towards increasing employment outcomes is the extraordinary collaboration between TennCare and the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) to share employment-focused technical assistance granted to DIDD, which was used to help inform a recently proposed amendement of the state's Medicaid waivers to emphasize employment as the preferred option for individuals with intellectual disabilities who receive long-term services and supports. Community providers are already making progress in increasing employment outcomes for persons supported through the waiver across the state.

A fundamental commitment of Employment First partners is to seek out best practices and proven models when implementing new or continuing programs. One model is Project SEARCH, a nationally recognized and replicated program that places people with disabilities in internships that often lead to jobs. This program has been expanded in Tennessee with support from the Council on Developmental Disabilities in partnership with the Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS). Project SEARCH has increased to 7 sites with 60 interns statewide; 42 individuals have been employed so far following graduation. Another evidence-based model is the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) initiative for individuals with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. IPS was started in 2013 by the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) in partnership with DHS, and has served over 270 individuals to date. A total of 148 participants have been placed in employment receiving a competitive wage.

Also, DIDD and DHS are implementing a pilot project this year to train providers on Customized Employment practices. This approach has been proven to strengthen employment outcomes by personalizing the relationship between employee and employer in a way that meets the needs of both. Another new development is the availability of the Occupational Diploma, an option developed by a Department of Education (DOE) Task Force to increase the knowledge, skills and experience of students with disabilities leading to integrated competitive employment following graduation. A total of 11 students in 4 pilot districts received the diploma in 2015 and that number is expected to grow significantly with the next school year. The Employment First Task Force has been an essential vehicle for collaboration in achieving these results and other accomplishments described further in this report.

In an effort to expand upon and sustain the recommendations in the 2014 Expect Employment report, the Task Force engaged its members and other stakeholders to develop a strategic plan. The three-year goals, metrics and strategies of this plan serve as the framework to drive the collaborative effort for 2015-17. The Task Force is already measuring its progress against specific objectives for the current year set out in each of these five goal areas aimed at increasing employment:

- Alignment and Coordination of Service Systems
- Strong Community Commitment
- More Employers Hiring
- Tennessee as Model Public Sector Employer

2013
ESTABLISHED
AS EMPLOYMENT FIRST STATE

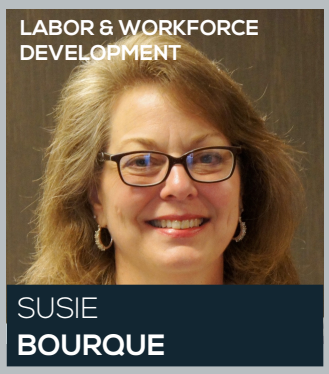
28%
OF TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES **ARE EMPLOYED**

Data taken from the 2012 American Community Survey. http://goo.gl/61rfWS

• Student Transition to Employment

A key objective within the strategic plan is to establish a dashboard for partners to share data. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is taking the lead in gathering and posting national and state data relevant to employment of people with disabilities. The dashboard will also track and display progress in moving the needle on important indicators for Employment First Tennessee. Task Force partners recognize the importance of defining common metrics and this year will identify a targeted employment rate for people with disabilities that will guide the efforts of all Employment First partners.

The Employment First Task Force members, on behalf of all individuals with disabilities as well as family members, communities and future employers appreciate Governor Haslam's leadership in making this collaborative effort possible. We look forward to providing continued progress reports as the public and private partners committed to Employment First in Tennessee make our vision for Tennessee a reality in which "people with disabilities have the same opportunities for employment as anyone."



Two Employment First Task Force Members were selected by Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor (ODEP) as State Ambassadors to serve as virtual coaches and mentors to other local and state officials participating in ODEP's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP) activities and National Employment 1st Community of Practice.

Project SEARCH has increased to **7** sites with **60** interns statewide; **42** individuals have been employed so far following graduation.

7 Sites
60 Interns
42 Employed

"The U.S. Department of Labor enjoys a remarkable partnership with the state of Tennessee through the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program -- a collaborative commitment to aligning policy, funding and practice to increase opportunities for both youth and adults with disabilities to pursue competitive, integrated employment. Tennessee truly embraces the spirit of Employment First across the state's government, and it has achieved numerous milestones that are resulting in real jobs at real wages in typical community settings for Tennesseans with disabilities."

Secretary of Labor,
Thomas E. Perez

COLLABORATION IN **ACTION**

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE UPDATE

EMPLOYMENT FIRST **MEANS CHANGE**

It has been just over two years since Governor Bill Haslam signed Executive Order No. 28 to charge an Employment First Task Force with developing strategies to expand community employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities including those with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. With the Governor's Order, Tennessee joined the national movement known as Employment First and became fully committed to increasing community-based, integrated employment opportunities for all citizens with disabilities.

19.8%

The percentage of people with disabilities participating in the labor force.

Nationally, we know that only 19.8% of people with disabilities participate in the labor force compared to 68.8% of other employment age citizens (U.S. Dept. of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, May 2015). The goal of Employment First is for employment in the general workforce to be the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities, or stated simply, it means "real jobs, real wages." For states that have committed to the Employment First philosophy, trends are starting to show that a shift in public and private attitudes leads to improvements in the employment rate for people with disabilities. And as is true for most aspiring students and adults, the pathway to employment is often a large piece of the puzzle in creating a fulfilling and independent life.

In 2013/14, Tennessee's Employment First Task Force identified significant barriers to employment for students and adults with disabilities. Some of these barriers can be impacted more readily than others, but nearly all require a multi-faceted approach and sustained effort. Over the past year, the Task Force has "learned by doing" that collaboration is the key to make change happen and achieve real results. In fact, these partners embrace and define collaboration as a guiding principle for their work "in which we share a vision for change, a common understanding of the barriers to employment for people with disabilities and a joint approach to address those barriers through agreed upon action." In short, Task Force members and their partners recognize that real change and results require collaboration in action.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

The state agencies with significant resources and expertise dedicated to employment of individuals with disabilities are key partners on the Employment First Task Force (See Appendix B for descriptions). Representatives from each of these state organizations and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center have formed a Strategy Team to guide and ensure sustainability of the Employment First initiative. Each partner is fully committed to strengthen coordination of resources, maximize funding, and streamline services so the individuals they serve are able achieve their employment goals. Through collaboration with the consumers and family members, advocates, service providers, employers and other community members who serve on the Employment First/TennesseeWorks Work Groups, much has been achieved over the past year.

Interagency Coordination of Resources and Services

- Received federal approval for service definition changes in the existing 1915c Medicaid Waiver programs, which provide long-term services and supports to Tennesseans with intellectual disabilities (ID), so that employment is stated as the preferred option for individuals enrolled in the waivers. Additionally, an employment incentive will be available for employment service providers who successfully support a person with ID in finding and maintaining employment. Providers are already making significant progress in increasing employment outcomes. TennCare, as the state's Medicaid agency, and the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) collaborate in this effort, which was also influenced and supported by the entire Employment First Task Force and the involvement of stakeholders across the state including consumers and family members.

- Executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May 2015 among agencies serving youth with disabilities to improve coordination and delivery of services.

- The Task Force planned to create a new MOU for agencies serving adults with disabilities but avoided duplication of effort by participating within the interagency state plan of the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is aimed at strengthening and modernizing America's workforce, including for people with disabilities, so the WIOA state plan provides new opportunities for collaboration.

- Improved coordination of services between DIDD and Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS), by sharing service plans for individuals with disabilities.

- Developed a three-year strategic plan that includes metrics and measureable objectives for creating and expanding employment opportunities for students and adults with disabilities.

Education and Training that Leads to Employment

- Continued to expand Project SEARCH to include 60 interns participating at 7 program sites statewide. A total of 42 individuals have been employed through Project SEARCH.

Celebrating a Tennessee Trailblazer
Thomas Webster, recipient of the first Occupational Diploma

- Secured federal grants and reallocated resources to expand the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) initiative to include transition-age youth and homeless veterans, and locations in West Tennessee. IPS, an initiative started in 2013 by Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) in partnership with DHS, supports individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring mental and substance use disorders to obtain competitive and integrated employment. To date, over 270 individuals have been served by IPS and 148 have been placed in employment receiving a competitive wage.

- Coordinated efforts between DHS and DIDD to train vendors who will participate in a pilot project to implement Customized Employment in Tennessee this year.

- DHS is providing support for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who attend one of Tennessee's five post-secondary programs for individuals with disabilities. DHS will support eligible students at these universities: Vanderbilt, University of Memphis, Lipscomb, University of Tennessee and Union.

- Department of Education celebrated the first graduates in May 2015 who received the new Occupational Diploma. A total of 11 students in 4 pilot districts received the diploma and that number is expected to grow significantly for 2015/16.

Professional Development Opportunities for Service Providers

- As of June 2015, 13 Community Rehabilitation providers from across the state are certified as Employment First participants by DIDD as they commit to shift their services away from the sheltered workshop model to services that promote and support employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities.

- The 2015 Tennessee Disability MegaConference, an event sponsored by many of the Employment First Task Force members, featured an employment theme throughout the two-day event and was attended by more than 650 individuals with disabilities, families, and professionals.

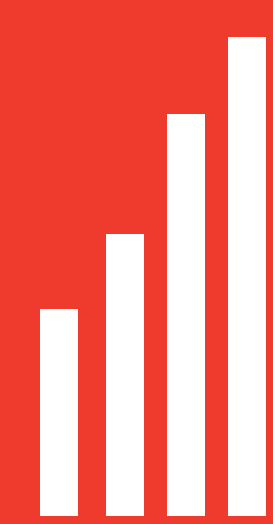
- Vanderbilt Kennedy Center delivered a series of practical workshops entitled "Roadmap to Employment" on evidence-based practices for general and special educators.

To date, 148 people have gained employment through the Individual Placement and Support model.

- DIDD hosted a series of webinars conducted by experts from the ODEP on topics ranging from integrated employment to raising expectations for persons with disabilities.

- Department of Education partnered with TennesseeWorks to conduct a five-part webinar series during 2014/15 called "Launching Students with Disabilities toward Adulthood".

- The third annual TennesseeWorks Employment Summit scheduled for September 2015 will bring together employers, service providers, government partners, and people with disabilities to learn about best practices and to build community partnerships. TennesseeWorks is increasingly gaining national recognition as a clearinghouse on employment.



Since 2013, Individual Placement & Support has served over 270 individuals.

+270

650

individuals with disabilities, families and professionals attended the two day MegaConference.

83%

83% of families consider some type of **employment in the community** to be important.

75%

75% of families consider some type of **postsecondary education** to be important.

71%

71% of families consider some type of **community living** option to be important.

COLLABORATION IN **ACTION**

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE UPDATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9:

THE JOURNEY HAS JUST BEGUN

While there is much to celebrate in this second year since Governor Haslam established Tennessee as an Employment First state, the Task Force recognizes we are still building a solid foundation to sustain the Governor's vision for expanded employment opportunities for all citizens with disabilities. We are encouraged by the results achieved through our collaboration and we sense the real shift in culture that is happening as state and community partners embrace the Employment First philosophy. In fact, Tennessee is often recognized at national conferences for the quality and results of our Employment First collaboration. We also applaud and align our efforts with the Governor's Drive to 55 Alliance to better prepare all Tennesseans for the future through college education, adult education and training. It is an exciting time to be a Tennessean and the Task Force is pleased to present our strategic plan as a roadmap to achieve meaningful results throughout the state over the next three years.

Nick Villarreal, a student in **Next Steps at Vanderbilt**, one of Tennessee's five inclusive higher education programs, at last year's Think Employment Summit

EMPLOYMENT FIRST **ROADMAP**
FOR 2015/2017

BUILDING ON **2014 FINDINGS**

In the first year of its work, the Employment First Task Force brought together public and private stakeholders to learn more about issues impacting individuals with disabilities and to develop statewide recommendations aimed at eliminating barriers to employment. The Task Force also established a collaborative structure in partnership with TennesseeWorks to develop and implement a three-year strategic plan based on the findings presented in the 2014 Expect Employment report. The three-year goals, metrics and strategies of this plan serve as the framework to drive the collaborative effort for 2015-17. The Task Force is already measuring its progress against specific objectives for the current year set out in each of five goal areas. *The complete strategic plan is included in Appendix E.*

EMPLOYMENT FIRST **STRATEGIC GOALS**

I. **Alignment and Coordination of Service Systems:** Align service delivery systems and strengthen coordination to increase employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities.

II. **Community Commitment:** Build shared community commitment to "employment first" for individuals with disabilities.

III. **More Employers Hiring:** Increase the number of businesses and employers throughout the state who actively seek and hire individuals with disabilities.

IV. **Tennessee as Model Public Sector Employer:** Make Tennessee a model public sector employer through actions to employ more people with disabilities and through policy and regulatory change.

V. **Student Transition to Employment:** Prepare students for employment throughout their education and connect them to essential services.

WHAT GETS MEASURED **GETS DONE**

A key objective within the strategic plan is to establish a dashboard to share available data within the Employment First Partnership beginning this calendar year. Employment First partner Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities is taking the lead in gathering and posting national and state data relevant to employment of people with disabilities. The dashboard will also track and display progress in moving the needle on important indicators for Employment First Tennessee. Early on in the planning discussions, Employment First partners recognized that identification of common metrics is critical to achieving collective impact. One such metric that will be defined this year is to set a targeted rate for employment of people with disabilities in Tennessee. This rate will be used to guide the efforts and measure progress of Employment First partners. Some other "top line" metrics to be included in the dashboard are:

- Number of districts supporting students to pursue Occupational Diplomas
- Number of youth no longer in secondary school who are enrolled in higher education, competitively employed and/or in other postsecondary education or training within one year of leaving high school
- Number of businesses that employ persons with disabilities in Tennessee
- Number of people with a disability and student interns employed by the Tennessee state government

The 2014 Expect Employment report included a recommendation to strengthen the quality and scope of data collected by state agencies related to employment of people with disabilities. Employment First partners Department of Labor and DOE are part of the Measure Tennessee Longitudinal Data System (MeasureTN) project and DIDD and DHS are also going to participate. Through this system, it will be possible to see the longitudinal impact of state programs and to gain understanding of what factors lead to higher employment rates.

TYPE OF **JOBS** INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE IN OUR STATE

Job Type	%
Assembly, Manufacturing or Packaging	5
Building or Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance	47
Food Preparation & Food Service	15
General Office & Administrative Supports	5
Materials Handling / Mail Distribution	3
Retail (Clerk or Stock Person)	13
Self-Employed	2
Other	10

from National Core Indicator Data - http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/nci/

STATE OF TENNESSEE

EXECUTIVE ORDER

BY THE GOVERNOR

No. 28

AN ORDER ESTABLISHING THE TENNESSEE EMPLOYMENT FIRST INITIATIVE TO EXPAND COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES

WHEREAS, Tennesseans with disabilities, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders and other disabilities, disproportionately experience high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and dependence upon publicly funded programs; and

WHEREAS, my Administration is committed to supporting the Employment First Initiative establishing competitive and integrated employment, where work is performed in a typical work setting for a competitive wage.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bill Haslam, Governor of the State of Tennessee, by virtue of the power and authority vested in me by the Tennessee Constitution and the laws of Tennessee, do hereby order and direct the following:

1. State agencies coordinate efforts to increase opportunities for integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, substance abuse disorders and other disabilities.

2. The Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities convene an Employment First Taskforce ("Taskforce").

3. The Taskforce shall consist of representatives from the agencies administering disability services, family members of persons receiving employment services, vocational rehabilitation, workforce services and education, as well as consumer advocates and third party disability service providers.

4. This Taskforce shall:

a. Identify state agency policies and procedures that create barriers and disincentives for employment of people with disabilities and develop recommendations to reduce or eliminate those barriers and disincentives to better meet the needs of individuals who desire employment;

b. Identify best practices, effective partnerships, sources of available federal funds and opportunities for shared services among existing state agencies to increase integrated and competitive employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities;

c. Review and consider the recommendations of the Office of Disability and Employment Policy (ODEP) to increase opportunities for integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.

d. Develop training on disability employment for state agencies, provider agencies, individuals being supported and their families in order to raise awareness of effective strategies for achieving integrated and competitive employment outcomes.

5. The Taskforce shall convene for its initial meeting on or before August 1, 2013. Thereafter, the Taskforce shall meet quarterly and provide an annual progress report to the Governor.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have subscribed my signature and caused the Great Seal of the State of Tennessee to be affixed this 19th day of June, 2013.

ATTEST:

SECRETARY OF STATE

GOVERNOR

CHAIR

- **Jordan Allen**, Deputy Commissioner of Program Operations, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- **Cherrell Campbell-Street**, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services

LEADERSHIP TEAM

- **Amy Gonzalez**, State Director of Employment and Day Services, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- **Yovancha Lewis-Brown**, Program Director, Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services
- **Elise McMillan**, Co-Director, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
- **Wanda Willis**, Executive Director, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

MEMBERS

- **Susie Bourque**, Director of Policy & Special Projects, Department of Labor and Workforce Development
- **Erik Carter**, Associate Professor, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
- **Stephanie Connell Cowherd**, Associate Director, University of Tennessee-Knoxville's Center for Literacy, Education and Employment
- **Barbara DeBerry**, Director of Provider Supports & Services, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
- **Abigail Dowell**, Housing Specialist, Long Term Services and Supports, Bureau of TennCare
- **Susan Feltner**, VR Transition Director, Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services
- **Alison Gauld**, Behavior and Low Incidence Disabilities Coordinator, Division of Special Populations and Student Support, Department of Education

EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE MEMBERS **CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 ››**

MEMBERS CONTINUED

- **Donna Goodaker**, Executive Director, Progress Inc.
- **Joey Hassell**, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Special Populations, Department of Education
- **Lynnette Henderson**, Associate Director of Community Services, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
- **Carrie Hobbs-Guiden**, Executive Director, The Arc of Tennessee
- **Michelle Morse Jernigan**, Deputy of Long Term Services and Supports Quality and Administration, Bureau of TennCare
- **Sue Karber**, Director of Consumer Wellness and Employment, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- **Bianca Knight**, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Tennessee
- **William McMillan**, Self-Advocate
- **Robert Nicholas**, Coordinator, Project SEARCH Knoxville
- **Doria Panvini**, Parent Advocate
- **Lauren Pearcy**, Director of Managed Long Term Services and Supports Quality and Administration , Bureau of TennCare
- **Blake Shearer**, Coordinator for High School Intervention and Transition, Division of Special Populations and Student Support, Department of Education
- **Dwayne Webb**, Director of Day & Employment Services, St. John's Community Services

PARTNERS IN **COLLABORATIVE IMPACT**

As the Employment First Task Force works to expand employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities, an increasing number of public and private stakeholders have joined this collaborative effort. The following eight partner agencies have taken on the role of sponsoring the Partnership, "walking the talk" by making significant changes within their own organizations, and providing resources necessary to sustain collaborative impact.

DEPARTMENT OF

INTELLECTUAL & DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) is the lead agency for the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program and with Executive Order No. 28, Governor Haslam mandated the Department to convene the Employment First Task Force by August 2013. Through becoming an Employment First state, DIDD and the Employment First partners have benefitted from training and technical assistance in key areas important to the initiative including: waiver definitions, renewal and redesign; rate restructuring; Customized Employment and Discovery; developing family coalitions; provider transformation; employment data collection; and policy analysis and development. DIDD staff leads key Task Force meetings and engages other members through work on policy developments, the three-year strategic plan and specific activities to eliminate barriers to integrated employment. Among recent accomplishments related to its role in Employment First, DIDD has created an employment data collection system, worked with Arc of Tennessee and TennesseeWorks to develop Family Coalitions, facilitated the MOU on Transitioning Youth, increased the number of Employment First providers which has resulted in an increase of integrated employment opportunities and created an Employment First website that features employment success videos from both cities and rural areas in all three regions of Tennessee.

DEPARTMENT OF

LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The mission and focus of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development is to improve the workplace environment and economic prosperity through workforce development, and to be a national leader in developing an employable workforce and safe workplace environments. The department has six functional divisions: Adult Education, Employment Security, Workforce Services, Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Workers' Compensation, and Workplace Regulations and Compliance. The department administers the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act through the American Job Centers (AJC) across the state. The Act is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Job seekers and employers have access to multiple partner services in the AJCs - Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, WIA and Wagner-Peyser in addition to other partners. Through the AJC, 147,670 individuals have received job service activities and 21,526 received WIA services. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development is a partner with the Employment First Task Force team and the Tennessee Works Collaborative with more than 45 entities that have joined together to improve the employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST PARTNER AGENCIES **CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ››**

DEPARTMENT OF

HUMAN SERVICES

The Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services, administers the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (VR) in Tennessee. The goal of the VR Program is to assist individuals with disabilities to go to work. During the last fiscal year, VR continued three large employment initiatives: Project SEARCH, Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model of Supported Employment, and the Employment First pilot. The VR Program is also expanding the Walgreens Retail Employees with Disabilities Initiative (REDI) in order to develop sites statewide. The VR Program works collaboratively with the Department of Education, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the Bureau of TennCare and also with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. As a result, the VR Program's role on the Employment First Task Force is to leverage partnerships in order to assist in providing employment services to individuals with disabilities and the business community. In the current fiscal year, the program has placed 2294 individuals in successful employment with hourly wages ranging from $7.25 to $211.54, and an average wage of $9.99/hour.

DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATION

The Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) strives to provide all students with access and opportunity to ensure their success after graduation. Through research and collaboration with stakeholders, the department has developed frameworks and best practices to support districts and schools as they prepare students for postsecondary and workforce opportunities. The implementation of Response to Instruction and Intervention has provided a structure for educators to reach students at all levels of performance, creating a system to immediately identify and address gaps in basic math and reading skills. The department has also worked closely with partners across the state to develop tools to support students with disabilities, such as the Special Education Framework and an Occupational Diploma. In the spirit of continuous improvement and our unending commitment to Tennessee children, the department will work to create a new transition framework that is rooted in evidence-based practices, identify specific best practices that improve outcomes for Tennessee students, and align assessment measures, goals, intervention suggestions, and requirements in order to best prepare our students for success after graduation. The future of our state and our children depends on the work we will do in the upcoming years to provide all students access to great schools and, once graduated, make certain they are ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

BUREAU OF

TENNCARE

The Bureau of TennCare, the state's Medicaid agency, is the administrative authority over the state's three 1915c Waivers, which support people with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee. The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) operate the 1915c waivers. Together, TennCare and DIDD, as the administrative authority and operating agency respectively, work in partnership to set policies and author service definitions related to employment services for people enrolled in a 1915c waiver. Thus, TennCare's role in the Employment First Task Force is primarily as a partner with DIDD in providing waiver funded employment services. In the future, TennCare plans to expand its role in promoting employment for people with disabilities by launching employment initiatives for people with other types of disabilities besides intellectual disabilities. Specifically, TennCare is partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation – another Employment First Task Force member – to promote employment supports to people with physical disabilities in the CHOICES program. TennCare is also designing a new, employment focused program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in close partnership with DIDD.

DEPARTMENT OF

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) is the single state authority for mental health and substance abuse services. DMHSAS plans for and promotes the availability of a comprehensive array of prevention, early intervention, treatment, habilitation and rehabilitation services and supports based on the needs and choices of individuals and families served. DMHSAS has partnered with the Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services VR Program to implement the evidence-based practice of Individual Placement and Support (IPS). IPS is the model of supported employment that has the most research and evidence for helping individuals with behavioral health disorders gain and maintain competitive, integrated employment. To date the IPS initiative has served over 270 individuals with an employment rate of 42% and 130 placements. DMHSAS's role in the Employment First Task Force is to advocate for and represent individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders. In the future DMHSAS and DRS plan to expand IPS statewide so all individuals receiving services in Community Mental Health Centers have access to evidence-based supported employment services.

COUNCIL ON

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities (Council), an independent office in state government that works to improve disability policies and practices in Tennessee, provides the state with a central point of expertise on disability data, service system trends and most promising practices. As a member of the Employment First Task Force, the Council convened representatives from programs that support individuals with developmental disabilities to develop shared strategies to improve program efficiency and effectiveness. The Council worked with DIDD to facilitate an interagency work group that developed and executed an MOU delineating the roles and responsibilities of state agencies in transitioning students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and employment. The Council also partnered with the state departments of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities to initiate expansion of Project SEARCH in Tennessee for youth transitioning from school to employment, and will sponsor the state's first Project SEARCH conference this year. In 2014, the Council worked with the national Autistic Self Advocacy Network to host an employment leadership academy for Tennessee citizens who have an intellectual or other developmental disability and will host a second leadership academy in 2015. The Council has also sponsored a series of webinars for artists with disabilities, covering topics such as how to build a career in the arts, connect to employment resources, and network with other professionals in the art community. These webinars have been well received and are now a national model. Finally, the Council has been pleased to coordinate the effort with its Employment First partners to develop and publish the Expect Employment report to the Governor.

VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. The VKC is currently working to increase employment of Tennesseans with disabilities through Training, Service and Technical Assistance, Research and Information and Dissemination. The VKC, in collaboration with numerous state and community agency partners, is the administrative lead for the TennesseeWorks Partnership, and has worked to support systems change to increase employment in Tennessee. Several VKC faculty and staff are members of the Employment First Task Force. The VKC also organizes and supports the workgroups of the Employment First Task Force. Accomplishments to date include the TennesseeWorks website, building of Tennessee's Longitudinal Data System to include information on Tennesseans with disabilities, training across the state to build the capacity of Tennessee's service systems to support people with disabilities seeking employment and policy analysis. The VKC, along with TennesseeWorks Partners, is now planning the third annual Think Employment Summit.

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STRATEGIC PLAN 2015/2017
GOALS AND 2015 OBJECTIVES

GOAL #1 – ALIGN SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND STRENGTHEN COORDINATION TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TENNESSEANS WITH DISABILITIES.

OBJECTIVES:

- Inventory, incorporate and share all available data within an Employment First Partnership dashboard.
- Execute the Memorandum of Understanding for youth by May 2015.
- Draft a section to include in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan focused on persons with disabilities and incorporating the Employment First partners.
- Set a collective targeted employment rate for 2016 by fall 2015.
- Inventory partner initiatives and practices (and indicate those that are evidence-based and promising practices) by July 2015 and present to the Employment First Partnership for input and recommendations to support partners in determining what works.
- Evaluate the functioning of the Employment First Partnership each year.
- Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities will share technical assistance from the U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy with the Bureau of TennCare to help inform the design of a new, employment-focused program targeting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Tennessee Department of Labor will collaborate with the TennesseeWorks team to host a series of employment focused Community Conversations that will inform the entirety of the State's efforts.
- Inventory, develop, and propose policies, regulations, and legislation annually to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

GOAL #2 – BUILD SHARED COMMUNITY COMMITMENT TO "EMPLOYMENT FIRST" FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

OBJECTIVES:

- Host six Community Conversations throughout Tennessee in 2015.
- Identify, recruit and support a cadre of leaders, employers and employees who will serve as champions for Employment First.
- Develop effective communication approaches (including distribution of existing materials to individuals and families) by November 2015.
- Develop a plan by December 2015 for capturing input/perceptions of employers.

GOAL #3 – INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYERS THROUGHOUT THE STATE WHO ACTIVELY SEEK AND HIRE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

OBJECTIVES:

- Take inventory, organize and regularly track available data related to businesses that employ people with disabilities (i.e. business name, business size, industry sector, etc.).
- Based on the collection of baseline data in 2015, set a collective target for total number of businesses that employ people with disabilities to achieve as an employment goal for 2016 and 2017.
- Present 75 Employer Outreach Initiative presentations to state and local employer groups.
- Start three additional Project SEARCH transition programs and at least two additional employer partnerships.
- Implement an employer information section of the TennesseeWorks website.
- Explore opportunities to develop a single point of contact for employers statewide.
- Develop training by November 2015 to educate corporate counsel about employment of people with disabilities.

GOAL #4 – MAKE TENNESSEE A MODEL PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYER THROUGH ACTIONS TO EMPLOY MORE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THROUGH POLICY AND REGULATORY CHANGE.

OBJECTIVES:

- Convene a meeting with the Commissioner of Tennessee Department of Human Resources in 2015 to discuss strategies to increase employment of people with disabilities by the State of Tennessee.
- Invite up to five communities (with city/county government representation) by year-end to explore opportunities to become a model employer community.

GOAL #5 – PREPARE STUDENTS IN TENNESSEE SCHOOLS FOR EMPLOYMENT THROUGHOUT THEIR EDUCATION AND CONNECT THEM TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES.

OBJECTIVES:

- Embed a strong transition strand into the next Partners in Education (PIE) conference.
- Complete a statewide survey of secondary educators to identify critical training and resource needs.
- Identify a better pathway for communicating and sharing resources directly with educators working on employment.
- Refine the TennesseeWorks website to ensure it includes the right resources for educators.
- Continue to advertise the Occupational Diploma and support schools pursuing this with their students.
- Carry out a successful Think Employment! Summit, scheduled Fall 2015.

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