



Oregon Competitive Employment Project

Oregon Department of Human Services — Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

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The Oregon Competitive Employment Project (OCEP) seeks to enhance the quality of life in Oregon by achieving, maintaining and advancing the competitive and inclusive employment of persons with disabilities. The project is funded by a four-year Medicaid Infrastructure Grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and is part of the Oregon Department of Human Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Strategic Plan completed

The project recently completed its 2006-2008 Strategic Plan. The 278-page document, *A Blueprint for Change*, outlines the mission, goals and objectives of the project, and the strategies and activities that it will utilize to make competitive and inclusive employment possible for Oregonians with disabilities.

The *Blueprint* was developed through an intensive effort by the project's Leadership Council, staff and consultants over a five month period that began in September 2005. The planning process involved a number of successive procedures that included reviewing Oregon's disability and employment-related systems and identifying:

- The strengths and beneficial elements that need to be preserved and sustained.
- Gaps, barriers and problems that limit persons with disabilities from gaining and maintaining meaningful employment.
- Ideas, recommendations and strategies for sustaining strengths and addressing gaps, barriers and problems.

This information and the subsequent analysis were obtained through a number of processes, including:

- Interviews and surveys of 22 "key informants" about disability and employment issues.
- Community forums that were held in nine Oregon communities to obtain input from persons with disabilities, employers and public and private service providers.
- Production of papers on key issues and developments.

Through a series of planning meetings, the Leadership Council, project staff and consultants developed a comprehensive and prioritized set of strategies and activities for advancing competitive employment of persons with disabilities.

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The *Blueprint* was finalized and submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS) on February 15, 2006. In April 2006, the Project received an award for “best strategic plan” from CMS.

Copies of the complete *Blueprint* and *Executive Summary* can be obtained through the OCEP office. Contact information can be found on the last page of this newsletter.

Project staff attend New Freedom Initiative Conference

From April 10-13, the OCEP staff attended the New Freedom Initiative Conference, held in Baltimore, MD, by CMS. The conference addressed many issues, including the Deficit Reduction Act, Stakeholder Development, and Integrated Datasets from Medicaid Infrastructure Grants (MIGs). The conference also offered an opportunity to build relationships with other MIGs on issues surrounding employer engagement, benefits planning and data collection.

Oregon Business Leadership Network is Department of Labor “Best Practice”

One of the Competitive Employment Project’s key partners, the Oregon Business Leadership Network (OBLN), was recognized as a “best practice” organization by the United States Department of Labor (DOL) in its April 2006 newsletter. The DOL recognized OBLN’s commitment to improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities while maintaining a business perspective. According to the

DOL newsletter, “One of the unique aspects of the OBLN is that it is business led and driven. The OBLN provides workshops, trainings, tools and resources to make it easier for employers to support current employees with disabilities as well as those who become diagnosed with a disability during their working years.”

Advisory workgroups convening

As the OCEP is moving from planning to implementation, workgroups dedicated to advising the project’s activities for the life of the grant will be convened. The workgroups will act as committees of the Leadership Council. The workgroups will formulate recommendations and present them to the Leadership Council. The council will then evaluate the recommendations from the workgroups and determine the activities of the project.

There will be a workgroup created to address each of the issue areas found within the strategic plan. Some of these workgroups have already begun to meet, and others will begin to meet shortly. For a full list of workgroups, meeting schedules or other information, please contact the OCEP.

National consultants visit Oregon

Joe Entwisle and Peter Baird, consultants from the National Consortium for Healthcare Systems Development (NCHSD), visited Oregon to offer national perspective on benefits planning, work incentives, employer supports, and transportation. From May 1st until May 4th the OCEP organized a number of workgroups to address these topics.

Through the expertise of NCHSD and workgroup members, the project was able to generate a significant amount of information regarding each of these topics. Reports and minutes of the meetings are available by contacting the OCEP.

OCEP holds round table discussion

On February 22, policy makers, providers and consumers gathered in Portland for a round table discussion hosted by the Oregon Technical Assistance Corporation (OTAC), in conjunction with the OCEP.

The mission of the round table discussion was to identify, explore and analyze policies and strategies that maintain or increase the availability of supported employment services and supports to persons with developmental disabilities. Facilitated by OTAC's C.J. Webb, the discussion focused on Washington state's improvement and expansion of supported employment even during times of economic hardship.

After intense discussions on the nature of employment, expectations of persons with disabilities, transition and successful strategies in Washington, the group made recommendations to the OCEP. The result was a list of more than 50 strategies and ideas to expand supported employment for persons with developmental disabilities living in Oregon. This list is currently being evaluated by an OCEP workgroup dedicated to improving supported employment for persons with developmental disabilities. A report from the round table discussion will be available shortly. To obtain a copy, please contact the OCEP.

Project helps sponsor “Building Futures Conference” on transition to employment

The “*Building Futures*” high school transition conference returned in 2006 after a five-year hiatus. Emphasis on transition planning to achieve better outcomes for students with disabilities is growing across the nation. Youth with disabilities need to be better prepared for life after high school. The “*Building Futures Conference*” addressed all of these issues.

In partnership with the Oregon Parent Training and Information Center, Oregon Department of Education, Office of Student and Learning and Partnerships, the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the Oregon Department of Human Services, the OCEP assisted with the planning and implementation of a two-day conference for teachers, parents, students, case managers, vocational counselors, employers and others to discuss issues facing young adults as they transition from schools to employment.

More than 440 people attended 30 different sessions on such topics as person centered planning, assistive technology, independence, leadership and self-direction and more. Keynote speakers included Assistant Secretary John H. Hager, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The conference was a success and plans for next year are in the works.

Future Leadership Council meetings

The Leadership Council held its first meeting of 2006 on March 30. Business included reviewing the strategic plan, formation of work groups and discussion of the OCEP's next steps. Future meetings for the Leadership Council are scheduled for June 30, September 14 and December 14 at the Department of Human Services Building. These dates are tentative and may be changed. Other meetings may be scheduled as needed. If you wish additional information about the meetings or wish to attend, please contact Paula Fitch at 503-947-5469 or paula.fitch@state.or.us.

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