



**Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) Grant
Alaska Workforce Investment Board
October 10, 2012**

Grant Update:

On September 29, 2010 the AWIB was awarded a Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Training Administration in the amount of \$2,727,000 to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes of adults with disabilities specifically targeting those who are unemployed and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits (SSI and SSDI).

The five primary goals of the DEI are to; 1) Increase the number of adults with disabilities who use the one stop job centers to secure employment by 20%; 2) bring all one stop job centers in Alaska up to level III of “DPN” (Disability Program Navigator) implementation maturity (a model developed in an earlier grant defining a high level of proficiency in serving customers with disabilities); and 3) increase the number of certified work incentive counselors and number of customized employment and /or customized self employment providers in Alaska by 15%. The final two goals are to; 4) increase the availability of local resources e.g. asset building, accessible transportation) that help job seekers with disabilities secure and maintain employment by 15%; and 5) sustain a full time Disability Resource Coordinator within the One Stop Job Center system permanently.

The DEI grant partners (Employment Security Division, Alaska Workforce Investment Board and the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education) chose 5 different strategic service delivery components to enhance the Alaska Job Center Network’s ability to effectively serve job seekers with disabilities. These include, 1) utilizing an integrated resource team approach when serving customers, 2) integrating resources and services/leveraging resources/blending & braiding funds, 3) using a customized employment model, 4) improving self employment outcomes through customized self employment practices, 5) using asset development strategies to help customers with gaining basic financial skills, access free tax preparation services and the Earned Income Tax Credit and building asset coalitions, and 6) increasing partnerships and collaboration.

Staff Training:

To effectively integrate these approaches the State Lead Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) engaged staff in a 40 hour curriculum containing self paced webinars, web resources, monthly meetings and with the assistance of the Employment Security Division liaison built an internal staff resource website to provide information and resources on the above strategic service delivery components that is relevant, current and constantly updated. To date, nearly 70 front line job center

staff, local and regional managers have received training with nearly 50 completing the entire required curriculum for designation as a Disability Resource Coordinator I. In addition to the base curriculum, staff participate as appropriate in ongoing and new training provided by the grant's technical assistance provider, the National Disability Institute. All have received extensive training in Disability Awareness, job center physical and programmatic accessibility and the core service delivery components as described above. This has resulted in a highly educated level of front line staff in providing job center services in an accessible and user friendly environment. Training for the final year will shift focus to staff providing services through the Career Support and Training and Work Services programs. Specific curriculum for these programs has been developed and will focus on customized employment and self employment as these strategies are a good fit for many of the customers they serve with multiple barriers as a result of their disabilities. DRC II's will serve as intermediaries for staff in these programs to assist with identifying barriers, providing guidance on accommodating and eliminating barriers and in some cases, assisting with serving them through the Ticket to Work program. The State Lead DRC will provide guidance, additional training and also serve on teams to serve customers with disabilities as needed.

Disability Resource Coordinator II's

Of those who have completed training, 11 are designated as DRC II's and have received additional training and meet with the State Lead DRC monthly to engage in the 6 strategic service delivery components in various regions of the state. Specific activities include implementing financial literacy workshops in partnerships with local financial institutions in various regions, promotion of the Volunteer Income Tax Preparation services across the state, partnering with local disability service providers and state agencies at the local level to provide services to job seekers with disabilities, engaging in and coordinating integrated resource teams when multiple systems are required to assist job seekers. One such example is the DRC II involvement with veteran agencies to set up integrated resource team meetings with returning veterans with disabilities, their families and the variety of agencies that can assist them with employment, housing, training and rehabilitation services. It is estimated that an additional 4 staff will be trained as DRC II's by the close of the grant in October 2013 with a focus on Career Support & Training staff.

The Social Security Ticket to Work Program

DRC II's regularly serve as a lead in their region for accessibility, disability service coordination and many are now becoming case managers for individuals on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) under the Ticket to Work Employment Networks being established at job centers across the state. To date, the Juneau and Fairbanks job centers are serving Ticket holders with the Anchorage centers opening on October 30th and the Kenai and MatSu offices to follow in the final quarter of the year. This is the first such successful operating Employment Network outside of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with whom a partnership exists to provide ongoing job supports after successful employment and closure from their program. The Ticket to Work program is now bringing in milestone payments for individuals receiving SSDI or SSI who are now working above substantial gainful activity levels and off of these programs.

Partnerships and Collaboration/Integrating Resources

To support the partnerships, collaboration and integrating resources at the statewide level, the State Lead DRC facilitates regular meetings of the Job Center Services Integration Committee which consists of representatives from the Divisions of Employment Security, Business Partnerships, Vocational Rehabilitation, Public Assistance and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. At these meetings, the various agencies present on past, current and future projects to ensure interagency knowledge of ongoing projects and facilitates cooperation and sharing of resources when deemed appropriate.

Physical and Program Accessibility

Onsite physical and programmatic assessments of all job centers has been completed and recommendations for repairs and improvements are being done on an annual basis with another round of site physical accessibility reviews being conducted in October and November by trained DRC's. Programmatic assessment has been completed and assistive technologies to provide access for individuals with hearing, vision, physical and cognitive disabilities are being upgraded with some new technologies being introduced to provide optimal access to these populations.

Activities of National Significance

The Alaska project has been asked by the National Disability Institute to present on several nationwide webinar trainings to other DEI projects on provided training on programmatic accessibility, assistive technologies, and customized employment and self employment. These trainings have received high marks from other projects and the National Disability Institute.

Conclusion and Sustainability

As the end goal is to have all staff within the One Stop Job Centers proficient and to have in place an Employment Network system that is sustainable by the end of 2013, the DEI management team has placed focus of the final year of the grant on:

1. Ensuring all staff are trained as DRC I and/or DRC II's,
2. Completion of all hub centers opening as Ticket to Work Employment Networks to include a remote service provision model for some outlying areas with a goal of serving 60 Ticket holders in jobs that provide income above substantial gainful activity standards as set by the Social Security Administration,
3. Rewriting of position descriptions to reflect the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to replace retiring and exiting staff that serve as DRC II's and Benefits Planners,
4. Integrating a disability training module into the required training given to all new employees of the AJCN,
5. Utilizing receipts from the Ticket to Work program to partially fund DRC II positions, a state Benefits Planner and the State Lead Disability Resource Coordinator beyond the life of the grant and to ensure sustainability of systems in place to serve customers with disabilities effectively.