Adults with Disabilities Funding Proposal

Vocational Employment Supports and Training Program

Until July 1, 2015, the Adults with Disabilities Funding (AWD) program provided post-secondary education and employment related services to individuals with disabilities who could not receive needed employment services and supports through other funding streams. Unfortunately for many provider agencies and the individuals they serve, about $10.8 million in General Revenue funding dedicated to the AWD program was eliminated by the 2015 legislature because lawmakers believed the program did not show sufficient outcomes. Of concern was the fact that funds were used for various initiatives including recreational and day activity services that did not generate employment outcomes.

Although the overall mission of the previous AWD program varied by funding locale, 22 Florida ARF member agencies worked in conjunction with their local school boards or community/state colleges to provide employment services and supports through certified educators or vocational instructors. The types of services provided included employment related skills including: Interviewing, resume writing, appropriate behaviors at the workplace, and other employment related skills such as social and living skills to improve client participation in the community.

Florida ARF members seek reinstatement of funds to provide employment supports for individuals with disabilities who need ongoing supports to obtain and maintain competitive jobs. It is noted that the AWD program was disability neutral and served as an available resource to assist individuals who needed supports that were not available through other revenue streams.

Vocational Employment Supports and Training Proposal

An increase in the complexity and severity of persons with disabilities served, recent federal and state legislative actions, and the current national and local economic environment means persons with significant disabilities need multiple options to assist them in transitioning to competitive integrated employment at the highest possible levels. Individuals with disabilities, their support systems, and the business community must be educated, trained, and supported to positively evoke meaningful employment in our communities, and adequate supports must be available to ensure that employee/employer needs are met. A concerted effort by multiple professional disciplines, community agencies, as well as the employment community will be required. Involving appropriate stakeholders in the design and implementation of a comprehensive employment plan is recommended to result in positive and sustained employment outcomes. Interagency advisory groups should be formed to ensure community coordination and participation in this model which will be known as the Vocational Employment Supports and Training Program.

Phase 1 - Assessment and Plan Development (30-90 days)

The reinstated AWD programs will assist persons with disabilities by identifying, enhancing, and/or improving their work behaviors, attitudes, and tolerances to a level that allows the opportunity to obtain and sustain employment at the highest level achievable. Certified teachers or vocational instructors will assist clients through each step of this process. Each participant enrolled in the program will complete a vocational assessment in order to determine an appropriate job goal and to identify at least two areas to address throughout the program year which will assist them in achieving
their identified goal. The identified job goal could be to obtain or maintain employment. Other acceptable job goals would be to accomplish specific employment outcomes or trainings which have a direct correlation for the participant to become more employable for acceptable area businesses.

**Phase 2 - Vocational Training (9-12 months)**

Upon completion of the vocational assessment, each participant will work with a certified teacher or vocational instructor to develop an Individualized Employment Plan which will detail a specific job goal, vocational assets, and areas that need to be addressed, and will identify steps needed to attain their job goal. At least two short term objectives will be developed for the identified areas which will outline observable and measurable steps to achieve the short term objective. Progress will be monitored at least monthly to determine if each participant is accomplishing the steps necessary to obtain their job goal. The implementation of the plan will occur in a structured/controlled environment, led by paraprofessionals or vocational trainers. The Plan will address work skills, social and behavioral expectations, emotional aspects that contribute to work attitudes and tolerances, as well as other individual peripheral issues that could present a barrier to employment. Individuals will learn in actual and work like environments in order to learn the needs and expectations of community employers.

**Phase 3 - Supported Employment (On Going)**

AWD teachers/instructors will work with individuals with disabilities who are placed in competitive jobs earning minimum wages or above. The primary role of the teacher/instructor will be to provide follow along services to address concerns that may impede successful employment outcomes. While it is intended that the services/supports will eventually fade, it is recognized that some individuals may require ongoing supports particularly in individuals with mental health diagnoses who may require continuous supports.

**Caseloads**

For individuals served in phases 1 or 2, the instructor/teacher ratio will be one staff per 15 individuals served. For individuals who are employed and in need of Supported Employment supports, the staffing ratio will be 1 staff per 20 individuals served.

**AWD Outcome Measures**

The following outcome measures will be used to monitor program outcomes and return on investment. (Each grant recipient will be expected to track each of the following outcome measures based on their unique program designs.)

- 90% of the Vocational Employment Supports and Training participants will select an appropriate job goal and identify two short term objectives within 30 days of entering the program or each program year.

- 80% of the program participants will successfully complete both short term objectives identified through their Individual Employment Plan.

- 75% of the participants employed in the community earning minimum wage or above will maintain continuous employment status. (Job Retention is defined as not being unemployed for four or more consecutive weeks)
Florida ARF acknowledges that other employment models could be developed that would be responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities who seek employment supports and services. We encourage the Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to pursue support of the above model as well as others to meet the needs of individuals with severe disabilities. Reinstatement of the AWD funds to fund such models should alleviate earlier concerns about the viability of the AWD program.