

# Employment Works Task Force

## 2015 Annual Report



**STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

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During 2012 and 2013, as part of the National Governors Association, Governor Dennis Daugaard helped to lead an initiative to identify ways of increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities. Not only did the Governor have a professional interest in this initiative, but he also grew up in a family household where both of his parents were deaf and the primary method of communication was American Sign Language. In July 2013, Governor Daugaard created the Employment Works Task Force that consisted of employers, individuals with disabilities, legislators, and other stakeholders from across South Dakota. The task force met on three separate occasions and developed five main recommendations. The overall goal of the recommendations is not only a more inclusive workforce, but promoting the real benefits of employing and retaining people with disabilities.

This document outlines the progress that was made on the recommendations during calendar year 2015.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

The first recommendation consists of finding and supporting businesses to employ people with disabilities. The representation of employers on the task force suggested having access to a primary point of contact for businesses within the scope of hiring people with disabilities.

### Strategies:

- 1) Create a single point of contact at the state level to interact with business.

Kimberly Hoberg has been employed as the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Business Specialist since July 24, 2014. Contact information for Kimberly:  
Office phone number: 605-626-2398  
Email address: [kimberly.hoberg@state.sd.us](mailto:kimberly.hoberg@state.sd.us)  
Mailing address: 1707 4<sup>th</sup> Ave SE, Ste. A, Aberdeen, SD 57401

Status: completed.

- 2) Partner with business organizations to reach employers (e.g., SD Retailers Association, chambers of commerce).

DRS has established a partnership with the South Dakota Retailers Association (SDRA). Collaborative efforts include a training webinar for SDRA members on

various disability-related topics in August, 2015, and the distribution of an employer questionnaire to SDRA members in November 2015 to identify workforce needs throughout the state. DRS staff have 14 memberships with local Chamber of Commerce entities and Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) chapters throughout the state.

Status: completed.

- 3) Expand the number of business-led organizations that employers can go to for technical assistance and consultation when employing people with disabilities.

In addition to the two current business-led organizations available in South Dakota, DRS is working with the Aberdeen, Brookings, and Yankton communities to develop additional business-led initiatives.

Contact information for current business-led organizations:

Business Resource Network:

Jennifer Erickson, Interim Executive Director

Office phone number: 605-215-1760

Email address: [director@sfbrn.org](mailto:director@sfbrn.org)

Website: [sfbrn.org](http://sfbrn.org)

Mailing address: 2900 W. 11th St., Ste. 101, Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills:

Catherine Greseth, Executive Director

Office phone number: 605-787-2590

Email address: [director@workforcediversitynetworkbh.org](mailto:director@workforcediversitynetworkbh.org)

Website: [workforcediversitynetworkbh.org](http://workforcediversitynetworkbh.org)

Mailing address: 505 Kansas City St, Rapid City, SD 57701

Status: completed.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

The second recommendation consists of connecting businesses to people with disabilities. Part of this recommendation focuses on identifying the needs of businesses as far as matching them with qualified employees, especially in light of South Dakota's current labor shortage.

### Strategies:

- 1) Solicit employer staffing needs.

- The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Business Specialist has worked one-on-one with 48 employers to identify their hiring needs and employee qualifications.

Example of an employer contact:

GF Buche Co. consists of a small chain of grocery stores in Gregory, Mission, Wagner, Tripp, Tyndall, Scotland, and Sioux Falls. This business connected

with DRS through the aforementioned webinar with South Dakota Retailers Association (SDRA). GF Buche Co. is currently participating in the Project Skills program at a couple of its store locations, but there is interest in expanding further employment opportunities to students and adults with disabilities. DRS met with GF Buche Co. and connected all of its business locations with DRS counselors located throughout the state.

- Two employers are now signed on to use the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) in South Dakota, resulting in 107 current job openings in the state. TAP is a website specifically matching people with disabilities to employers. It offers businesses the opportunity to post jobs, search candidate résumés based on skill sets and geographic availability, capture job metrics, interview candidates, and have online job fairs.

TAP website: [tapability.org](http://tapability.org)

Status: completed.

- 2) Host events that support collaboration with employer-led organizations to solicit input from employers.

DRS has developed an employer questionnaire for distribution to as many employers throughout the state as possible to learn more about workforce needs and to provide support on efforts of employing people with disabilities. The questionnaire has been shared with the SDRA.

Status: completed.

- 3) The Department of Human Services (DHS) will work with the S.D. Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) to address workforce needs and labor market trends.

During the 2015 RehabACTion Fall Conference held in October 2015, DLR provided training to DRS and providers on how to utilize SDWORKS, which is operated by DLR allowing employers to list job listings and job candidates to search/apply for jobs.

Status: completed.

- 4) Build the capacity in South Dakota state government to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities.

Governor Daugaard has challenged the state of South Dakota to become a model employer of people with disabilities and has laid out five strategies that involve DHS and the state's Bureau of Human Resources (BHR).

1. Expanding Project Skills work experiences within state government.
2. Providing training to BHR and state staff.
3. Collecting data on current state employees with disabilities.
4. Increasing the accessibility of programs and services in DHS.
5. Reviewing state websites and hiring processes for accessibility.

DHS has reviewed programs and services to ensure compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). No significant barriers to programs or services were identified.

Project Skills is a service provided by DRS in conjunction with local school districts; it is designed to provide real work experience for eligible high school students with disabilities. During the 2014-15 school year, a total of 10 students worked in state government through Project Skills.

Status: completed.

5) **Develop the expertise of vocational rehabilitation staff and service providers.**

- DRS made job-development training webinars available at no cost to service providers during 2014 and 2015. Thirty-one agencies took part in these webinars.
- DRS and Center for Disabilities provided two rounds of employment specialist trainings to providers in Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, and Rapid City during 2015.
- DRS is working with nine community support providers (CSPs) to expand their supported employment programs. This initiative will include an additional five CSPs and 3 community mental health agencies in calendar year 2016.
- DRS implemented an initiative to reimburse providers at a higher rate if they are certified by the Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst (APSE) and attended a two-day training on person-centered planning.

Status: completed.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

The third recommendation addresses the elimination of disincentives to employment for people with disabilities.

### Strategies:

1) **Address the CHOICES waiver cost-share requirement for earned income.**

Effective July 8, 2014, Centers for Medicaid/Medicare approved a request submitted by the Division of Developmental Disabilities to amend the CHOICES waiver. The amendment removed the cost-share requirements that occurred if an individual had in excess of \$400 of earned income in a month.

Status: completed.

2) **Increase the number of people in integrated employment opportunities, thereby reducing the number of people in sheltered work environments.**

- The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is currently working with nine community support providers (CSPs) to expand their supported employment

programs. This initiative has resulted in additional full-time equivalent employment specialists/job coaches who will develop community employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities currently residing in a segregated employment setting and/or under the age of 24.

- A financial workgroup was formed to address fees for integrated employment services to incentivize the provision of those services for CSPs. An analysis occurred on a new fee-for-outcomes reimbursement model developed by a consultant well-versed in developing models on community integration including competitive employment. A financial incentive is available for providers, through the CHOICES waiver, focusing more on supported employment in the community.

Status: completed.

3) Provide education to beneficiaries, family members, and providers on SSI/SSDI benefits and employment.

There are six certified benefits specialist available in the state to provide education and technical support to recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

Status: completed.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

The fourth recommendation addresses the development of flexible systems and promotion of promising practices.

### Strategies:

- 1) Develop services and systems to address the needs of underserved populations (e.g., Native Americans and veterans).
  - The Department of Human Services (DHS) collaborated with tribal vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and other disability organizations to conduct the Disability Services Summit held on April 28, 2015, in Mission.
  - DHS and tribal VR agencies held a face-to-face meeting December 15, 2015, in Rapid City for informational and training purposes. The DRS Business Specialist is also distributing in-state and federal job announcements to tribal VR staff.
  - DRS has conducted outreach efforts to veterans with disabilities throughout 2015, including the following:
    - VR information in a Department of Veterans Affairs newsletter;
    - A DRS booth in Yankton and Aberdeen at “Improving Combat Veterans Care” events; and
    - DRS staff representation at a veterans’ conference in Spearfish and at a training event on veteran services in Chamberlain during the month of September.

Status: completed.

2) Expand person-centered career planning services.

In August and September of 2015, DRS provided a second round of two-day training sessions to staff and providers on the person-centered planning model for service provision.

Status: completed.

3) Expand transition services to prioritize employment at an early age.

The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) developed a resource entitled “Achieving Dreams through Employment,” which is a document designed for self-advocates, families, and employment support. The document can be found on the DDD website:

<http://dhs.sd.gov/dd/documents/Achieving%20Dreams%20Through%20Employment.pdf>

Status: completed.

4) Align policy and funding to prioritize employment outcomes.

Beginning June 1, 2015, DRS and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) began offering a higher reimbursement rate for employment-related services to providers who become certified employment support professionals.

Status: completed.

5) Engage individuals with disabilities in policy development.

Members of the Board of Vocational Rehabilitation, Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Council on Developmental Disabilities, Statewide Independent Living Council, DDD Core Stakeholders, and Family Support Council have ongoing opportunities to provide feedback on various program policies and procedures. These boards and councils meet quarterly, and at least 50 percent of the board and council membership is comprised of individuals with disabilities.

Status: completed.

## RECOMMENDATION 5

The fifth and last recommendation focuses on educating the public, providers, employers, and people with disabilities. Education is the focal point of this recommendation. There are several resources available that are focused on information related to people with disabilities.

## Strategies:

### 1) Plan and sponsor events that recognize outstanding efforts of employers in hiring people with disabilities.

- In recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), 13 communities in South Dakota hosted events to recognize employers who employ people with disabilities during October 2015.
- The annual Governor's Awards for the Employment of People with Disabilities was held September 3, 2015, in Pierre.

Status: completed.

### 2) Build and promote employer champions.

As part of the "Ability for Hire" campaign, employers in South Dakota are being highlighted and recognized for employing people with disabilities at the website AbilityForHire.com, through television and radio commercials, via social media, and in print. This positively impacts the business communities throughout the state, allowing employers to connect with other employers. Employer champions were also recognized during the annual 2015 NDEAM and Governor's Awards events.

Status: completed.

### 3) Promote the abilities of people with disabilities to employers.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) worked with a marketing firm to develop "Ability for Hire," an employer outreach campaign promoting the hiring, advancement, and retention of employees with disabilities in South Dakota. The campaign materials consist of a website, printed materials, radio advertisement, TV commercials, and videos of testimonials from the Governor, employers, and other proponents as well as other success stories. The campaign officially launched August 11, 2015, with the release of the website, AbilityForHire.com, and a Facebook page.

Status: completed.

### 4) Assess the current educational materials available to employers and create additional materials if needed.

There are numerous employer resources available on disability-related topics, such as reasonable accommodations, the American with Disabilities Act, people-first language, disability etiquette, business tax incentives (e.g., Work Opportunity Tax Credit), Section 503 regulations, etc. The DRS Business Specialist has an electronic version available of all of the resources compiled into a single resource guide. The guide is utilized during employer contacts and meetings to share resources and information.

Status: completed.