



Disability Employment Initiative Grant

<http://sddei.org/>

The South Dakota Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) works with partners, employers, and youth to improve **coordination** and **collaboration**, and to **build effective community partnerships** to better serve older youth with disabilities. The DEI team includes the Departments of Labor and Regulation, Human Services, Education, Social Services, and Corrections; the Board of Regents; and the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative. DEI partners with local and state education, Dakota Link, West River Business Service Center, support organizations, employers, and families. DEI is in the second year of a three year grant.

The DEI project is designed to help youth 18-24 transitioning from high school to postsecondary education or to the workforce by improving the educational, training, and employment outcomes of the youth, and improving the accessibility and accountability of the public workforce development system.

Facts

- DEI project received \$1.9 M for a three year program. Year One is for development, Year Two is for service, and Year Three is for service and transition to sustainability.
- DEI has served 49 youth with disabilities with 15 moving on to postsecondary or employment.

Strategic Service Delivery

- **Integrated Resource Team (IRT):** a team of public and private sector representatives to collaborate in the coordination of services and supports for a job seeker with a disability.
- **Guideposts for Success:** Key career and education interventions.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Impact the ability of youth with disabilities to participate in education, training, and employment opportunities.

Activities

- Career Development Forum, a week-long event targeting young adults with disabilities planning to enter the workforce (resumes/interviewing, job search, labor market information, etc.)
- Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills, business leaders in the Black Hills area with an interest in integrating those with disabilities into the workforce (Black Hills Power, Wal-Mart, National Park Service, Caterpillar Engineering among others)
- Training for the public to increase awareness (Ben Snow: *Creating a Successful Workforce*; VJ Smith: *The Richest Man in Town*).
- Training DLR and partner agency staff (Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Services, eight school districts, and local support organizations)
- Developing Educators Tool Kit (online resource for teachers and counselors)
- DEI website development

Challenges

- Performance based on Common Measures: placement in education or employment, attainment of degree or certificate, and literacy numeracy gains for youth; and employment, earnings, and retention for young adults.
- Few resources in smaller communities.
- Transportation issues for both rural and city.
- Limited awareness among families and the youth with disabilities, and reluctance for self-disclosure of a disability.
- Helping the youth to look forward to “breaking free” of government supports.

Personal Stories

Johnny

- Initial referral came from Douglas High School as an invitation to participate in an IEP session. Johnny was an active Vocational Rehabilitation client.
- He has a Learning Disability.
- Employment Goal: His employment goal was to find full-time hands on work such as maintenance or janitorial work. Johnny had very limited prior work experience under project Skills.
- Active Resource Coordination: Johnny met with a DLR WIA representative and discussed transportation concerns (lives in Box Elder, no vehicle). He authorized a release of information so the DEI team can coordinate service with his Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. He was, referred to a DLR/DEI for job development services.
- Once enrolled in WIA, Johnny continued to have personal issues and stopped contact. Johnny eventually re-engaged the WIA and DEI team through encouragement of his Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. A job placement effort was provided, and he is now successfully employed at a local hotel in housekeeping. Transportation is still an issue but he often walks or has access to a ride. His employer reports Johnny has excellent attendance. The employer has increased his hours from 20 per week to full-time status based on his performance.
- Continued job coaching and supports are available through the DEI project. Johnny has recently expressed interest in obtaining another job with job search assistance through DEI and WIA. The job developer provides reports on Johnny’s progress to the entire Integrated Resource Team (Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Disability Resource Coordinator, DLR WIA representative, and CLC of the Black Hills).

The take away from this story is the successful relationship Johnny developed with the DEI job developer who was a valuable male role model.

Jenny

- The initial referral came through WIA from family member familiar with the program
- Jenny’s disability is a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).
- Employment Goal: She had little prior experience and wanted to return to her previous employer, a private security firm. She thought she could move into a new administrative job with the company part-time while she enrolled in a computer skill training program offered by the Career Learning Center of the Black Hills (CLCBH).
- Active Resource Coordination: Jenny was enrolled in WIA intensive and training services, referred to Vocational Rehabilitation for enrollment. She met with the DLR Disability Resource Coordinator and a benefits specialist for assistance.

- Jenny also participated in a WIA work experience and received job coaching through a DEI job developer/coach from the CLCBH. Assistive technology was provided through her VR counselor as well as DEI.
- The WIA Work Experience provided Jenny with valuable experience and insight into her limitations and skills post-TBI. The DEI project and WIA helped her learn how to advocate for her needs. Following the WIA work experience, Jenny was hired at a local hotel as a breakfast bar attendant. She utilizes her assistive technology for lists and step-by-step reminders. She calls together her Integrated Resource Team, which now includes her employer, when needed.

The take away from this story is the Integrated Resource Team approach was a huge support for Jenny. She felt comfortable to call the team together for help. The IRT evolved to include the employer.

The DEI personal connection, whether individual or IRT, resulted in success for Johnny and Jenny.