



Joan C. Barnish
Director of Communications
Phone: (860) 418-6044
Cell: (203) 233-0150
joan.barnish@ct.gov

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DDS Unveils New “Employment First” Website

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has completely refurbished the Employment and Day Services information on the agency’s website at www.ct.gov/dds. The launching of the new web pages was one of the many activities that DDS was able to complete through funding received from a Connect-Ability Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. The Connect-Ability funds were used to hire consultants from the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) University of Massachusetts to assist with this and other projects. In addition to the new website, the collaboration between ICI and DDS produced a comprehensive employment guide for families and a cache of employment resources for providers, employees and individuals who receive supports from DDS.

In 2011, DDS adopted a new Employment First Policy which states: *“In order for individuals with an intellectual disability to achieve full citizenship, employment opportunities in fully integrated work settings are the first priority. This shall be the first option explored in the service planning for working age adults. This process will begin during the child’s school aged years and may even begin prior to school.”*

The Employment First Initiative was developed to assist families and individuals in finding integrated competitive employment rather than segregated employment, facility based employment or day programs. Employment is a means to higher wages and provides opportunities for people to be part of their local community. Work gives all people a greater sense of competence and self worth and with support, individuals have the opportunity to maintain jobs, work for real wages and build relationships with non-disabled co-workers.

“Employment is the first goal of our five year plan,” said DDS Commissioner Terrence W. Macy, Ph.D. “We are striving to increase the number of individuals who are gainfully employed, including self-employment and double the number of people who are competitively employed. The Employment First Initiative is the roadmap to reach our goal.”

DDS has seen a downward trend since 2005 for individuals working in competitive employment. Of the most recent high school graduates with intellectual disability, only 10% obtained employment making at least minimum wage. The goal is to turn the curve on this trend. The department has already begun to work with the high school graduates from last year and will continue each year requiring real employment outcomes for the graduates.

For more information about the Employment First Initiative and Employment and Day Services, please visit the DDS website at www.ct.gov/dds.