



BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Reporting Period: January 1, 2020 -December 31, 2020

Background

AbilityFirst utilizes an *Outcome Management System* to analyze information and measure program effectiveness, efficiency and level of satisfaction regarding the provision of services. AbilityFirst implements services based on outcomes identified by the individuals served, the organization's management team, referral and funding agencies, family/care givers, and business customers. The *Outcome Management System* data is collected monthly, quarterly, and annually to measure and evaluate the programs to assist with achieving the desired objectives. Input from customers and stakeholders is compiled and analyzed to determine trends and actions and help improve the quality of services by implementing changes. AbilityFirst strives for continuous quality improvement for its services and programs. On an annual basis, results and suggestions for improvements are reported via a *management report* and used in an organization-wide strategic and financial planning process.

Executive Summary

The Business and Employment Services program provides job training and employment for individuals with developmental disabilities with the goal of fostering greater independence, choice, and community engagement. As part of the natural evolution of AbilityFirst programs toward a person-centered model, and emphasis on community-based employment for individuals with developmental disabilities, the agency successfully transitioned two sheltered work center programs to a model based on individual interests, goals, and abilities. Participants moved on to integrated settings with continued development of their individual person-centered plans (PCPs), exploratory and discovery activities to help identify their interests and goals. Program staff continue their efforts to identify and provide mainstream community resources and facilitate the community-based PossAbility program in both Los Angeles and Pasadena.

In 2020, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AbilityFirst Supported Employment program provided before and after employment support to empower more than **325** youth and adults to obtain and succeed in community employment.

AbilityFirst continues to remove barriers to employment for all participants who want competitive integrated employment. Active programs include:

- Individual Employment (in the community; job coach fades over time)
- Small Group Employment (in the community; full-time job coach)

- Paid Internships
- Student Placement Services
- Community Careers and DiscoverAbility Program (transitional, time-limited employment assessment and exploration)

The AbilityFirst Business and Employment Services program adheres to procedures and regulations in accordance with Title 17 (California Code of Regulations), individual Regional Center policies and Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) regulations and standards. The programs are also accredited by the CARF International (formerly the *Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)*).

Business & Employment Services Accomplishments

PossAbility is one of the newest AbilityFirst programs for adults, and reflects the agency’s commitment to providing more opportunities for individuals to participate in activities throughout their neighborhoods and communities. PossAbility is vendored with local Regional Centers for individuals with disabilities and focuses on offering them independent choices. Many individuals in the PossAbility program transferred from AbilityFirst Los Angeles and Pasadena Work Centers, both of which closed in late 2019.

The PossAbility Los Angeles and Pasadena staff facilitate the program by helping individuals pursue their own personal goals with assistance from their support system and others who have similar interests. An important component to the program is community volunteer opportunities. The program continues to offer individuals:

- A process to learn about what is important for them to be able to achieve their goals
- Involvement in their communities in their daily lives through volunteer work and recreational and leisure activities
- Opportunities to increase social skills and form relationships with others in the community who share similar interests and goals
- The ability to develop skills and self-sufficiency in conjunction with pursuing their personal goals

PossAbility may also provide a pathway to community employment, should the individual choose to pursue this option.

In March 2020, AbilityFirst promptly modified the PossAbility program model to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic regulations for social distancing and the stay-at-home order. Staff focused on alternative programming, using virtual platforms like Zoom and You Tube. Staff implemented one-on-one programming to keep the clients engaged, continuing to focus on discovering what is important to the client by facilitating remote sessions based on the client’s interests, abilities, and goals. On a limited basis, participants have also returned to some volunteer activities, complying with all applicable health and safety standards.

AbilityFirst provides ongoing support for participants and their families in other AbilityFirst programs by engaging clients using remote programming such as Zoom activities, phone calls, notes, and “activity packages.” Participants, family members, and AbilityFirst staff have shown

great creativity and determination over the past year, and all of AbilityFirst programs continue to provide safe services for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

The **Supported Employment** program participants made significant progress in their efforts to obtain and retain competitive community employment, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As in other programs, staff and participants quickly transitioned from in-person to remote support for many elements of the job search and pre-employment preparation process. A total of 51 individuals secured competitive jobs in their communities, many of them in essential businesses. AbilityFirst job coaches provided more than 15,000 hours of support during the year, both on-site and remotely. Staff members devoted significant efforts when responding to the employee, family member, and employers' concerns about PPE and workplace safety practices during the pandemic.

The staff responded positively to the increased number of referrals to the Supported Employment Program by providing young and older adults with opportunities for internships and helped workers who had been displaced by the pandemic to submit their unemployment claims.

AbilityFirst and FVO Solutions (FVOS) completed a merger in September 2020, and most FVOS participants and staff transitioned to AbilityFirst as well. The AbilityOne Commission approved the AbilityFirst application to take over FVOS' contract manufacturing business to produce hole punches for the Federal government. Adding this social enterprise and manufacturing operation has expanded the employment and job training opportunities at AbilityFirst.

In 2020, following the merger of FVOS with AbilityFirst, a transition from the pre-employment **DiscoverAbility** work and interest exploration to the Community Careers curriculum developed by FVOS was implemented. Community Careers curriculum provides the means to help individuals focus on the job search process. Opportunities for exploration and self-discovery may include job shadowing, interest assessment and internship opportunities, leading to expanding community engagement and informed career choices. It is a time-limited program and may be used for individuals who are transitioning out of other structured work centers and exploring their options for community employment.

ExploreAbility is an adult day and community integration program. The goal of the ExploreAbility program is to help adults explore and identify what is important to them, to develop the skills necessary to achieve their goals and to be involved in their communities through volunteering and community activities. Individual support and small-group activities promote interaction and learning. The program incorporates volunteering, community activities, independent living and skill-building, using a smaller group model. The ExploreAbility program combines both community participation and site-based programs for individuals who would benefit from a program that offers more direct support and supervision.

Other accomplishments of the Business and Employment Services program during 2020 include:

- AbilityFirst is participating in four different Local Partnership Agreements (LPA). California Department of Developmental Services established an agreement (CIE Blue- print). The purpose of the CIE Blueprint, as well as this written guidance, is to increase the number of individuals with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) who are employed and provide opportunities to work toward and achieve competitive integrated

employment (CIE). It is the intention of these three core local partnering organizations to create a blueprint. These partnering organizations will collaborate to develop a blueprint that includes processes for best practices to support individuals transitioning from school or other adult services to CIE.

- A collaborative effort between AbilityFirst and a large hospitality firm was established in early 2020. This effort was first introduced by the Mayor of Pasadena in hopes of fostering a partnership that would allow individuals with disabilities to be part of an integrated employment venture. However, due to the pandemic this endeavor has been put on hold until further notice.
- When the situation arises that AbilityFirst is unable to serve the client right away, the agency asks their permission to be put on a waiting list. If the job seeker agrees, they are put on the list and are informed that they are required to contact AbilityFirst once a month to check on their status. From 2018 to 2019 there were over 60 individuals on the waitlist. AbilityFirst committed to address the waitlist issue by bringing on an additional Job Developer. By the end of 2020, just 6 individuals were on the wait list.
- AbilityFirst Supported Employment Services works hand-in-hand with Civitan Pasadena to promote employment services for individuals with disabilities. The Pasadena Civitan Club hosts an annual awards ceremony to honor local employers who support the good practice of hiring individuals with disabilities. The awards ceremony also brings in other business partners and creates opportunities to collaborate with a more diverse group of community employers. Due to Pandemic, the Civitan Club decided not to hold their 2020 Employer Awards Ceremony.
- DOR Disability Student Services: Work Experience Service is an employment-based learning experience that offers students with disabilities the opportunity to explore competitive integrated work in a variety of real time work settings. Multiple, consecutive, paid work experiences may be authorized to develop and enhance work skills, including orientation to work environments. In 2020 this program served 30 students.
- Project Search - AbilityFirst is proud to provide employment supports to Project SEARCH interns at the Kaiser Administrative Offices in Pasadena. The Project SEARCH model involves an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers. The cornerstone of Project SEARCH is a total workplace immersion with a host business and related agencies. Participants are on-site at the business location each day for a minimum of six hours. The partners provide consistent on-site staff, including a special education teacher and job coaches. Individual job development and placement occur based on the participant's experience, strengths, and skills. Participants are given support with accommodations, assistive technology, and on-the-job coaching.

Supported Employment

- Assisted 51 individuals with disabilities to obtain jobs in integrated settings. (Pre-pandemic, in 2019, 59 individuals secured CIE.)
- Provided job coaching for 156 individuals.
- Secured an average wage of \$13.90 for all employed individuals.

OTHER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	
Total Served	325
Job Placements	51
Paid Internship Program Placements	3
Paid Internships leading to permanent jobs	3
DOR Student Work Experience Referrals	43
Students placed in work experiences	30
Individuals in group employment setting transitioned to direct hires	0

Satisfaction Surveys

As a result of the pandemic, the Spring 2020 surveys were inconclusive because of the minimal responses returned from surveyed stakeholders.

- On the quality of services, 93% of client workers, 98% of care providers, and 98% of referring agencies rated the program as “good to excellent”
- On the safety of services, 88% of client workers, 95% of care providers, and 90% of referring agencies rated the program as “good to excellent”
- 94% of clients, 100% of care providers and 100 % of referral agencies said they would recommend AbilityFirst to a colleague, family or friend.