



## **BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM PERFORMANCE**

**Reporting Period: January 1, -December 31, 2021**

### **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/caregivers, 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**

AbilityFirst embraces the individual person-centered plans (PCPs) planning model when assisting individual searching for employment in the community. The employment plans are based on individual interests, goals, and abilities. 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.

In 2021, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AbilityFirst Supported Employment program provided before and after employment support to empower **392** youth and adults (193 ongoing and 199 referrals) to obtain and succeed in community employment. The total number of persons served in 2021 represents a 21% increase from 2020. AbilityFirst fully embraces the Employment First model: "all citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life." In 2021 AbilityFirst decided to transition away from the group employment model.

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

- Job development and placement services
- Job coaching services (in the community; use of job coach fades over time)
- DiscoverAbility program, pre-employment assessment and training services
- Paid internships
- Student work experience services

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)*).

### **Employment Services Accomplishments**

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. Supported Employment was one of the first programs that returned to in-person services in early 2020 and the service delivery continued throughout the pandemic. Job coaches support individuals with disabilities working in the frontline like grocery stores and other vital services. In 2021, a total of 87 individuals secured competitive jobs in their communities (a 70% increase from the prior year), many of them in essential businesses. AbilityFirst staff members provided more than 23,000 hours of support during the year, both on-site and remotely. Staff members devoted significant efforts to helping individual and their circles of support to obtain vaccines and comply with city and state health orders. Staff members also provided much needed PPE to clients and worked with participants to follow workplace safety practices during the pandemic. Staff responded positively to the increased number of referrals to the Supported Employment program.

**DiscoverAbility** is a time-limited program and may be used for individuals who are transitioning out of other services and exploring their options for community employment. The 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. In 2021 AbilityFirst provided pre-employment assessment and career training support to 11 individual job seekers who were transitioning out of the work group environment.

Other accomplishments of the Business and Employment Services program during 2021 include:

- The program successfully completed the evaluation process in 2021 and received the maximum three-year accreditation from *CARF International* (formerly the *Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities [CARF]*). The Employment Services program also 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.
- AbilityFirst transitioned away from group employment in 2021. Supported Employment personnel and the Human Resources Director met with work group members and referral sources in early March of 2021 to discuss the Employment First policy and strategies to exit the services. AbilityFirst offered individualized job development services to ensure a smooth transition. Of all the 11 individuals affected, three were placed immediately into community employment. Five individuals took a few months of job searching and were able to transition into community employment. Three found other day programs closer to home that met their personal interests and goals.

- 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. Civitan Club hosted the 2021 Employer Awards Ceremony at Villa Esperanza. The honorees included The Home Depot, Michael's Pasadena Store and Smart and Final.
- 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. was place on hold during the pandemic. This program started back up in last quarter of 2021 and served 3 students
- Project SEARCH - 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 instructors 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. AbilityFirst developed two projects under the flagship of Project SEARCH. The program at the Kaiser Administrative Offices in Pasadena is on hold and pending health department lifting restrictions. The City of Hope partnership is due to start in early 2022.
- Paid Internships – It was very difficult to restart the paid internship program because of health and safety requirements. Many employers are concerned about COVID exposure and risk issues. We were able to place a few job seekers into jobs that allow for greater social distance safety protocols. As a result, three were hired on by the employer after their internship term was over.

**Supported Employment**

- Assisted 87 individuals with disabilities to obtain jobs in integrated settings
- Provided job coaching for 193 individuals.

| <b>OTHER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT<br/>OUTCOMES</b>    |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Total Served</b>                               | <b>392</b> |
| <b>Job Placements</b>                             | <b>87</b>  |
| <b>Paid Internship Program Placements</b>         | <b>5</b>   |
| <b>Paid Internships leading to permanent jobs</b> | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>Students placed in work experiences</b>        | <b>3</b>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Individuals in group employment setting transitioned to direct hires | 8 |
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### Satisfaction Surveys

2021 - 45 respondents from *SE worker participant survey* (this represents 25% of clients participated in the survey):

#### The percentages are based on those who answered the questions.

1. How do you rate the overall **quality of services** of AbilityFirst?
  - 2021 – 98% SE Participants rated “good to excellent”
2. How would you rate the overall **safety** of the AbilityFirst program?
  - 2021 - 98% SE Participants rated “good to excellent”
3. 100% said they like the work they do, and are happy with their jobs.