



BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Reporting Period: January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023

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 to help improve the quality of services by implementing changes. AbilityFirst strives for continuous quality improvement for our 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 mission of the Supported Employment Services is to provide job training and employment for individuals with developmental disabilities with the goal of fostering greater independence, choice, and community engagement. AbilityFirst uses a person-centered model based on individual interests, goals, and abilities with an emphasis on community-based employment for individuals with developmental disabilities. Program staff continue their efforts to identify and steward mainstream community resources and facilitate the community-based PossAbility program in both Los Angeles and Pasadena.

The AbilityFirst Supported Employment program provided pre-and post-employment support to empower more than 353 individuals to obtain and succeed in community employment. Job Developers partnered with local businesses to gain an understanding of the organization's goals and hiring needs, resulting in a customized employment plan that matches the individual to the business.

The AbilityFirst Paid Internship Program assists individuals with developmental disabilities to gain work experience through an on-the-job training program, with the potential of gaining part- or full-time employment with the business partner. The fundamental premise of the Paid Internship Program is to help the individual to make informed decisions and help them transition into full- or part-time employment.

AbilityFirst continues to improve our ability to remove barriers to employment and increase opportunities for all participants who want competitive employment. Employment readiness and exploration are integrated into all adult programs. Current programs for adults include:

- Individual Employment Competitive Integrated Employment (as CIE)

- DiscoverAbility Program (transitional, time-limited employment assessment and exploration)
- College to Career
- ExploreAbility Program (facility-based, community integration program)
- PossAbility Program (community integration program with no facility attached)
- Paid Internship programs and Work Experience Program

The AbilityFirst 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 CARF International (formerly the *Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)*).

Supported Employment Accomplishments

The AbilityFirst Supported Employment program supports youth and adults to pursue their goals towards community employment. Job Coaches provide on-the-job training at business sites by supporting the individual through coaching and mentoring, conducting on-boarding support and training through a process of systematic instruction, performance measurement, and natural supports, and by identifying any accommodations and adaptations if needed. This support is gradually reduced overtime until the individual feels comfortable and becomes independent on the job. In 2023, although much of the economy rebounded from pandemic closures, the job market for entry level service positions was sluggish, particularly in retail. Consequently, there were very few seasonal placements in anticipation of the holiday season, which has previously been an entry into permanent placements.

Accomplishments in FY 2023 include:

- Completed milestones for 18-month grant from Department of Developmental Services. The project goal is to reduce barriers to and expand employment opportunities for regional center clients.
- Job coaches provided job readiness training, placement services, and on-site coaching to support 353 individuals.
- 167 clients received job training and job search assistance, and a total of 58 individuals secured community employment, with an average wage of \$16.01 per hour.
- 35 individuals between 18 and 24 years of age participated in time-limited work experience programs offered in collaboration with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) to gain work experience and skills for future employment.
- 14 individuals secured paid internships at community businesses.

OTHER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	
Total Served	353
Job Placements	58

Paid Internship Program Placements	14
Paid Internships leading to permanent jobs	4
DOR Student Work Experience Referrals	35
Students placed in work experiences	18

AbilityFirst Project Search

The Project SEARCH program model was developed at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in 1996 and has been nationally duplicated more than 500 times in ten countries. In the Project Search program, young adults develop the tools necessary for employment and skills needed for self-determination, management, and self-advocacy. 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.

AbilityFirst partners with City of Hope as a Project Search site. City of Hope a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated comprehensive cancer center, is a world-renowned pioneer in cancer research, treatment, and prevention. The 2023 City of Hope Project Search outcomes include:

- Five interns completed the program.
- As a result of the internship training program, 3 of the 5 individuals found employment in the community.
- One individual has decided to attend college.
- One individual secured a paid internship position and was offered a position by the employer, but decided to pursue other job opportunities.
- The second cohort of eight interns (8 individuals) started at City of Hope in May 2023.

Community Outreach

In 2023, AbilityFirst staff focused on educating new businesses and employers on the positive business and community impact of hiring people with disabilities. In addition to contacting 92 new businesses and organizations, staff focused on building relationships with local Chamber of Commerce groups, providing presentations for chambers in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Pasadena, Whitter, Boyle Heights, Glendora, West Covina, and Commerce.

AbilityFirst co-hosted the Employer Award event in October 2023, to *celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month*. Each October for National Disability Employment Awareness Month, AbilityFirst showcases the contributions made by its program participants. Through its customized employment, the program matches local businesses with AbilityFirst participants based on individual’s strengths, interests, and capabilities while job coaches provide on-the-job training at business sites. For workers with disabilities, finding employers who are supportive, implement inclusive policies and practices, and connect with organizations like AbilityFirst can be difficult. According to the U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics, about 21% of people with a disability in the United States were employed, up from about 19% in 2021. However, the unemployment rate for people with a disability, ages 16 to 64, was 8.2% in 2022, which is twice as high as it was for people without a disability. Following the successful three-month internship at Volunteers for America, AbilityFirst participant Romo was hired as a part-time employee. Today, Romo works approximately 20 hours a week. He loves his job and has a job coach who works with him to ensure a successful transition into his new position and encourage job retention. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 marks its 50th anniversary in prohibiting discrimination based on disability in employment by federal agencies, federal contractors, and recipients of federal funds, and in the delivery of federally funded programs and activities. AbilityFirst and Volunteers of America are examples of charities that provide access and promote equity in the workforce for individuals who traditionally have been faced with numerous obstacles.

2023 Satisfaction Survey Results

Supported Employee Participant Survey

- 100% express satisfaction with the quality of services received from AbilityFirst.
- 95% feel safe with the services provided by AbilityFirst.

- 84% agree that AbilityFirst staff helped them find the job of their choice.
- 98% agree AbilityFirst Staff are helpful.
- 98% stated, “AbilityFirst Staff treat me with respect.”
- 94% stated, “AbilityFirst Staff take care of my needs.”
- 72% stated, “Staff give me enough support for other job opportunities.”
- 98% stated, “I have everything I need to do my job.”

Family and Support member survey result

- 100% of families have stated that their loved ones are supported in making choices.
- 100% of families are satisfied with the services their loved on received from AbilityFirst.

Referral Agency

- 86% of referring agencies express satisfaction with AbilityFirst's Person-Centered approach.
- 87% of referring agencies express satisfaction with the quality of the AbilityFirst Supported Employment program and services.

Business Partners and Employers

- 100% of Business Partners and Employers express satisfaction with the quality of the AbilityFirst Supported Employment program and services.
- 100% of Business Partners and Employers express satisfaction with the effectiveness of AbilityFirst Supported Employment staff's ability to meet their business needs.