

Employment First Initiative Launched

Employment First means that having a job in the community should be what we expect and plan for people with developmental, intellectual, and other disabilities. The Council joined the national Employment First movement by making a commitment to work towards systems change and improved policy that supports individuals with disabilities to achieve integrated community employment.

The **Idaho Employment First Consortium (IEFC)** was formed as a group of people from state agencies, advocacy organizations, parents, and self-advocates committed to work together to improve how employment services and systems work in Idaho so that people with disabilities are able to reach their career goals. Sixteen Consortium members met for the first time in April 2012 and decided to meet monthly on an ongoing basis. The group finalized an Employment First message with defined common values. An outcome-driven strategic plan aligned to a timeline was completed and workgroups were formed to continue work between meetings. In addition to gathering information from Idaho systems and services, the strategic plan includes public awareness and educational activities, identifying policy supporters, and forming self-advocate and employer advisory groups.

The Council submitted a grant proposal to become a protégé state under the Office on Disability Employment Policy's Employment First State Mentor Program. Idaho was not chosen to be a grantee but will participate in the ongoing **Employment First Community of Practice** with access to national subject matter experts to help us move our initiative forward.

Tools for Life Conference: Historic Wallace

Council funds supported the 8th annual **Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Assistive Technology Fair** in the small historic mining town of Wallace as this regional conference landed in North Idaho. Wallace businesses welcomed people who came from all over the state for the conference which for the first time was held in a high school. The Council supported presentations on preparing youth for employment in rural areas by Ellen Condon from the Montana Rural Institute. A total of 320 attendees participated in 50 different sessions on transition-related topics including self-advocacy and employment including 124 students and 52 family members. A new evaluation form gathered information to measure the skills and knowledge gained by students who attended. \$5,000 in Council funds leveraged another \$46,465 to support the conference.

