

Employment First Podcasts

Tips from the experts. News from the field. Success stories.



[Oregon Employment First, supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to work in community jobs. Learn more at iworkwesucced.org.]

Angela Yeager: Hello, and welcome to the Oregon Employment First podcast. I am Angela Yeager, communications officer with Employment First and the Office of Developmental Disability Services. Today, we are discussing National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which happens in October every year. I am joined by statewide Employment First coordinator, Acacia McGuire Anderson, as well as Kim Alejo for workforce and business coordinator with Vocational Rehabilitation and Morgan Rincon, business relations coordinator with the Oregon Commission for the Blind. Thank you, everyone for being here. So, Governor Kate Brown has proclaimed National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. The theme for 2021 is America's recovery powered by inclusion, which reflects the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to employment and community involvement during the national recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. So, my first question is for you, Acacia. Help us set the stage. What is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and why is it important?

Acacia McGuire Anderson: Yeah, thanks Angela. National Disability Employment Awareness Month is a nationally recognized month, um, the month of October, um, to recognize the importance of employing people with disabilities. It's kind of a mouthful. I actually haven't thought of a good acronym for it, so I stick with National Disability Employment Awareness Month, but it is recognized by the Department of Labor, um, and specifically, the Office of Disability Employment Policy. As you mentioned, the topic this year is America's recovery powered by inclusion, and so, based on that, we're gonna have a series of lunch and learns that will focus on people with disabilities working through the pandemic, employers during the pandemic and people that they employed that had disabilities. Uh, we're also going to look at how we're all working together, employers and people with disabilities, our service systems, like the Office

of Developmental Disability Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, Oregon Commission for the Blind; basically, how we're all coming together to move forward.

Angela Yeager: Great, so you, you mentioned a few of them, but what are – tell me again what the state agencies and programs are that are participating in this webinar series.

Acacia McGuire Anderson: Yeah, so, we're excited this year because I think this might be the most participation we've had since, uh, I've been involved. Uh, we have, as you mentioned with us today, uh, Vocational Rehabilitation, who has been a huge partner. Obviously, their main, uh, program is designed to ensure people with disabilities can go to work. Uh, we've also got the Oregon Commission for the Blind, um, who also focus on helping people, uh, who have disabilities, specifically blindness, go to work. Um, and then we've also got Department of Education working with us this year. We have a specific lunch and learn that's gonna be dedicated to transition students, and how people are continuing to transition from school to work, uh, despite COVID-19.

Angela Yeager: Great! So, tell us a little bit about these webinars happening. I know there's, there, it's every Tuesday in October. Right? From, from noon to 1:00 p.m., so with ideas that, as you mentioned, lunch and learn, so that people can, you know, um, listen to these webinars and check them out during their lunchbreaks. So, um, tell me about the webinars and how people can participate.

Acacia McGuire Anderson: Yeah, absolutely. Last year, because of COVID-19 and the pandemic, we did our first virtual lunch and learn, and it was really well attended. I think, Angela, you and I were super excited, because it was the biggest, um, audience we'd had, and I think that was because it was during lunch and it was virtual; so, people with disabilities, self-advocates, families, they could actually attend the event, which was super exciting. Um, so, for that reason, we're going to expand this year. We'll continue to be virtual, obviously, because of the pandemic, and we'll have four, um, lunch and learn events. As you mentioned, it'll be every Tuesday in October to 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Uh, the first topic is called Employment Innovations in the Time of COVID. That will be October 5th. The second is called the Employment Journey during COVID. That'll be

October 12th, and that will, specifically, focus on the transition youth I was speaking to. The third topic is called Maximizing Hours, How to Navigate Services. That will be October 19th, and that's actually gonna, I think, be a panel or at least one self-advocate speaking to their work during the pandemic and, uh, being able to go to work the hours that they wanted to. Uh, we've actually seen some people – just a side note here – increase their hours during C-19 because there's been such a need for workers. Um, so for people who've wanted to work more hours, they've actually seen that, um, come true. And then, the last topic is called Work Force Recovery Powered by Inclusion. It will be October 26th, and it will focus on employers during COVID-19.

Angela Yeager: Yes, and, um, right after this next break, we're going to focus, specifically, on, on that webinar. So, we're gonna take a, um, short break and we'll be right back.

[Do you want a career that makes a difference? Consider a job where you get to work with people with developmental disabilities. ImpactOregon.careers is a new web site. It's where you'll find hundreds of careers to choose from that make a real difference. Jobs range from direct care to administrative and technical fields, from entry level to advanced. Find a career where you can help change someone's life. Got to ImpactOregon.careers.]

This message is from the Office of Developmental Disability Services and the Oregon Association of Broadcasters.]

Angela Yeager: Okay, so we are back. Vocational Rehabilitation and the Oregon Commission for the Blind are key partners in the National Disability Employment Awareness webinar series that we are holding every Tuesday, uh, in October. Um, Kim and Morgan, uh, thank you again for joining us. You are hosting a session on Tuesday, October 26th, called Workforce Recovery Powered by Inclusion, which highlights business partners who embrace disability in the workplace. Can you tell us a little bit about this session?

Kim Alejo: Hi, uh, yes, this is Kim. I would be happy to. We are really excited about this event. Again, it's the Workforce Recovery Powered by Inclusion, and it's October 26th, and during that time, we are highlighting, and we're celebrating, successes of three business partners in particular, and they are in different locations in Oregon. Each business partner is going to tell a brief story about disability in their workplace, and so, the business will, um, the businesses that will be present that day, uh, represent a cross-section of industries throughout the state and, uh, while their stories and experiences will vary, the theme is going to center around diversity, equity and inclusion of disability in the workplace, and the, um, business partners are going to – we've asked them to speak to how they've connected with job seekers with disabilities, what kind of supports they may have utilized during onboarding and training of those employees, so, as an example, if they used a job coach. We've also them to talk about the successes that they've experienced as a result of including disability in their workplace and those successes are really about not only the individual, who they've hired, but, maybe, the department or companywide successes, as well, and anything else that they care to share with us.

Angela Yeager: That's great. That sounds really, really exciting. Um, I'm curious for both of you, for your, um, you know, maybe from the perspective of both of your agencies, from Vocational Rehabilitation, as well as the Oregon Commission for the Blind, why is it important for businesses to hire people with disabilities?

Morgan Rincon: Hi there, this is Morgan, and I will share that both Kim and I feel that it's more important than ever for businesses to be able to connect with workforce talent, and everywhere we look and hear cries from business about being understaffed. Um, you know, I think we've been busier than ever in this past year with requests from businesses throughout the State of Oregon. As such, businesses now have an opportunity to reach a talent pool that's traditionally overlooked, and that's job seekers with disabilities. This is the largest minority population in our country, impacting almost 20 percent of our country's population, yet those individuals experience the highest percentage of unemployment. So, we'd like to see that 20 percent, uh, 20 percent of businesses, business workforce to be comprised of those with disabilities, as a direct reflection of the communities we live and work in.

Angela Yeager: I think that's a really good point, Morgan, and I think we're all seeing the same signs everywhere you go, uh, if you're driving or walking down the street, the for hiring signs happening everywhere. So, it seems like there's some amazing opportunities right there for this really, um, untapped workforce, um, to be looked at. So, what do you hope that participants will gain, um, from attending this session?

Kim Alejo: Well, uh, this is Kim, again, and there are so many things I hope that they, that they gain from it, but I, um, I hope that the attendees will leave with an understanding that disability in the workplace doesn't have to be scary, and disability, in general, doesn't have to be a topic of conversation to avoid because, when we start the conversation and continue the conversation, we learn more and, when we know better, we do better, and that is one of my favorite quotes by Mia Angelo. It's not me speak. It is words from her, but I think they're very wise, and, um, I think that, well, the business representatives that will be there sharing their stories about diversity, equity and inclusion of disability in the workplace, they're really just shoring, uh, excuse me, sharing stories of people and how they've welcomed those individuals into their workplace, and so, um, I really hope that other businesses that are in attendance, I hope that they're motivated to really get outside of their comfort zone, take that net, next step towards, um, reaching out to those with disabilities. I hope that they see all, that all jobseekers have different skills and abilities to offer, and so I hope they see them as individuals and not their disabilities, and, um, of course, in the end, we also hope that we see far fewer help wanted signs, um, in the windows of our business partners.

Angela Yeager: Yes, I think that's a, that's a great, that's a great point, Kim. I really appreciate you highlighting that. Okay, so before we end, I just wanted to ask everyone, uh, then, again, thank you to Kim, Morgan and Acacia for joining us. I would just like to ask you if there's anything else you'd like to add about this webinar series or about the, uh, business specific, uh, discussion on the 26th?

Kim Alejo: I do. This is Kim and I would like to add that, while I spoke to this session being businesses and presenting to, um, audience members that may be businesses, I just wanted to make clear that we hope that the audience is filled with a wide variety of attendees from business representatives to jobseekers, service providers, people with disabilities

and, really, anybody who wants to come learn more about disability in the workplace.

Angela Yeager: Great. Thank you. Morgan, did you have something you would like to add?

Morgan Rincon: Sure, I would like to add that October is, you know, National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Um, in our business community, we use the acronym N-DEAM, so that might be something you hear. Um, it's just not only, eh, uh, it's not only a chance to recognize and celebrate N-DEAM and all the great work happening around our state, but also to hear from some really, uh, inspirational speaker and leaders in our business community.

Angela Yeager: Great, thank you, yeah, and I think we have some really amazing, um, speakers and some stories, as well, from people who have received jobs, um, lined up for this series. Acacia, would you like to add anything before we close out?

Acacia McGuire Anderson: Yeah, thanks, Angela. I just would encourage everyone who's interested to participate in the lunch and learns. I think that there will be a lot of good ideas generated. Uh, we've had a fairly challenging going on couple of year here, but we've still had some super inspiring stories. People are still excited to go to work and they're getting out there, so we wanna take this opportunity to celebrate the positive things happening, so please join us in October, uh, for these lunch and learns.

Angela Yeager: Great, thank you, and I think we could all use, um, some celebration right about now. I think that that's going to be very welcome. So, the registration link, uh, on Zoom for these, uh, webinars, which is open to anyone in the public, um, will be available along with this podcast, as well as a link to some more information about the series on our web site. So, thank you, again, to Acacia, Morgan and Kim for joining us today. This has been the Employment First Podcast. Thank you for listening.

Custom Filename: EF_EP_40_NDEAM
Date: 09/22/2021
Billed Words: 2269