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**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Mike Maley, Statewide Employment First Coordinator**

**Re: Employment First: Margaret Theisen at Full Access**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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Margaret Theisen, chief executive officer of Full Access, Oregon's largest support services brokerage, is retiring in June 2015. She has led Full Access for 13 years, and spent 25 years total in the developmental disabilities field.

Margaret's departure brings many changes to Full Access. For one, the organization is separating into two distinct agencies. Heather Hopkins-Slechta will take over as executive director of Full Access High Desert, serving Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook and Lake counties. Todd Teixeira takes over as executive director of Full Access in Lane County starting July 1. More details are available on the Full Access [blog](#).



Margaret Theisen

Margaret was recognized in March by the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities as a DD Champion for her work on behalf of people who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities.

As she prepares for retirement, we asked Margaret to reflect on her work in the developmental disability field.

**Question:** Tell us how you started in development disability services?

**Answer:** I first worked with Goodwill Industries of Lane County after moving to Oregon from Texas. As a native Montanan, I was drawn back to the Pacific Northwest and Eugene was the place that called me. When I read about the opportunity at Goodwill, I was inspired, but not convinced. What convinced me to accept the position was the gauntlet the hiring executive offered: 'This is like jumping into a fire; are you interested?' From Goodwill, I went into the private sector, including work for a high-tech company that had significant focus on building in quality and process improvement. That instilled values that remain with me today. Upon hearing about the opening to start Full Access in 2002, I jumped at the chance.

**Question:** Full Access has put a lot of energy and emphasis on community employment. Can you explain why this is important to you?

**Answer:** My first job was at age 6 – no kidding! I delivered newspapers. I value my work as my personal mission statement – which is love, peace and justice, available to everyone, everywhere. With that as a hugely aspirational goal, I can't be at peace while there is work to be done with and for others. To not include the customer population in employment as an essential part of life would be to betray not just the values of our system, but my personal mission as well. I am very proud that five of our staff (more than 10 percent) also receive support services. One is doing his own job development within Full Access by identifying his own goals to expand the impact he has on our agency's mission. Additionally, we have done significant outreach around community employment because of the transformational effect that work has on people's self-esteem, sense of being a contributor, and being able to buy a few modest things for quality of life.

**Question:** At the recent DD Awareness Awards, you were recognized for your passion and work around self-determination and person-centered services. Can you explain why this is important to you?

**Answer:** I think this is simple, yet profound. I felt different growing up for a variety of reasons and I think that sense of difference is something all human beings can experience – and different in a way that makes us feel “less than.” I want and pursue in my life that which gives me the most challenges (which includes experiences that can be awful), as well as joy, sense of accomplishment and feeling of belonging. Person-centered services give challenge, joy, a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of belonging – a sense that our personal life is of value.

**Question:** As you retire, Full Access is dividing with two new leaders. How do you think this will help better serve clients?

**Answer:** In the beginning of Oregon Support Services Brokerages, there was a strong emphasis on managing services in a way that was not bureaucratic. That was the organic, community-based intention. Limiting the sizes of brokerages to 700 was a marker for this value. We grew well beyond that to respond to the needs of our customers. We also recognized that two brokerages of 400 to 500 people would be less bureaucratic than one of 900. In doing community surveys, we heard from people that a regional focus would be more responsive to the cultural, social, geographic and service delivery realities. Less time coordinating the size of the agency and more time on customer service will be the outcome of this change.

**Question:** What do you hope your legacy will be?

**Answer:** That's quite a question! I still have a long life to live. For this phase, in this role, I hope it will be that I had my priorities aligned with my values and the values of our system, in service for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families. Most importantly, I hope my legacy is that I voiced what sometimes was difficult to say, but had to be said, on behalf of and for, those who are rarely in the room when the most impactful decisions are made.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon.

If you have comments or other questions, please email them to [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).