

6-20-14

**To: Employment First stakeholders**  
**From: Statewide Employment First Coordinator Mike Maley**  
**Re: Employment First: Marion/Polk County Employment First Network**  
(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

As part of the Employment First initiative, local leadership teams around the state started gathering in 2011. This week's message is to inform you about one of those teams, the Marion/Polk Employment First Network.

The strategy behind local teams started with the recognition that in order to implement Employment First successfully, efforts at the local community level needed to be organized and supported. Nine initial teams [formed](#) in March 2011, with three more joining since. The Department of Human Services contracts with the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE) to provide support to the local leadership teams.



Marion/Polk County Employment First Network

(Photo: Lightflies)

These local teams include providers, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, schools, self-advocates, family members, and others. Teams act independently, defining goals, activities, and projects.

Local leadership teams are charged with: 1) communicating the state's Employment First vision, 2) recruiting stakeholders to participate, 3) sharing best practices, 4) promoting collaboration across agencies, and 5) coordinating community activities to expand Employment First on the local level.

The Marion/Polk Employment First team started in August 2013 and functions as a network.

“We wanted to make a bigger impact in our communities and chose the idea of being a network as it was more open to the many that attend our group rather than having specific members on the team,” said Michelle Furman, facilitator of the Marion/Polk group. “At each of our meetings, we have had new people attend and

we have more than 100 professionals, advocates and family members on our contact list.”

The Marion/Polk network has listed the following as its goals for 2014:

- Networking with brokerages and counties to help transition for “Discovery,” a new service under the Waiver.
- Discovery Tool: The group decided to make its own tool for staff to use locally for career exploration. They are also exploring developing a mobile “app” to help with the Discovery process.
- Success stories meeting in Dec. 2014: the group will dedicate an entire meeting to sharing employment success stories in December.
- Create and/or learn to use a county vendor list to help facilitate referrals for employment services.

Furman said the group includes educators, VR counselors, employment providers, self-advocates, parents, job developers, job coaches, and county developmental disability staff. Average attendance is about 25 at the group’s monthly meetings, typically held on the last Thursday of each month.

“It has been incredible to see the growth and support of our network” said Furman, who works as a Certified Employment Support Professional for Shangri-La. “If people are interested in participating, just contact me or come to the next meeting. There is no formal procedure for people to attend, it is an open door.”

To get involved with the Marion/Polk Employment First Network, contact Furman at: [michellef@shangrilacorp.org](mailto:michellef@shangrilacorp.org).

Besides Marion/Polk counties, there are Employment First leadership teams in: Umatilla County, Multnomah County, Washington County, Clackamas County, Tillamook County, Central Oregon, Jackson County, Lane County, Yamhill County, Mid-Columbia and Josephine County. For more information on the local Employment First teams, visit <http://employment-first.org/local/>

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).

~ Mike