



February 2022

vol. 12, no. 19

The Focus



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Oregon's *Brokerage Services* *20 years later*

2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the creation of brokerages in Oregon. Founded on the principles of self-determination, brokerages now serve roughly 8,000 Oregonians who choose to live on their own or in their family homes, and have access to an array of services beyond what had been traditionally offered. Over the last 20 years, this freedom of choice has resulted in a dramatic expansion of home and community-based services. Namely, this includes innovation in employment services...toward integrated employment. We wanted to trace the history of the Oregon brokerage services and how they have partnered with community stakeholders to develop effective, high quality person-centered services and to hear about current employment efforts. We asked two Brokerage Directors with long histories with Oregon's systems to share their thoughts on how the Brokerages have had an impact on employment for people with I/DD. Both had experience working in the traditional case management system prior to joining the brokerages so bring that perspective to the conversation.



The Focus: Person-Centered approaches fit within Oregon APSE's mission and vision. How does that connect with brokerage values?

Laura Noppenberger, Executive Director of [Eastern Oregon Support Services Brokerage \(EOSSB\)*](#): We will totally help you through [the process] regardless of what you are facing. Brokerages are very person-centered; our agents see the human-being at the center of the process. We know Information is still not universal throughout the eastern region, but we have created a streamlined process that is individually-based which gives access to support 365 days a year in the communities people live. **[For context; EOSSB is a brokerage that covers the entire eastern third of the state, from Hood River east and from northern to southern Oregon borders, 13 counties.]*

The Focus: What was the intention or vision with creating brokerages? How did the creation of brokerages change the way Oregonians can access services?

Dan Peccia, Executive Director of [Self-Determination Resources, Inc. \(SDRI\)](#), Washington County: The brokerage system was conceived during a time when many factors were at play. The major impetus was that the State of Oregon was out of compliance with Medicaid [funding] as people were not receiving services as required by the federal government. [\(See a recent Disability Rights Oregon article\)](#) Prior to the brokerages, I was a Case Manager and recall telling people upon enrollment that they were likely to die before getting into a group home. Indeed, the brokerages were developed to answer the State's dilemma of limited funds and extensive need. Instead of offering fully funded residential services, the State would provide limited funds/services to many people with the understanding that the Brokerages would use the State's resources to leverage other community resources. During those early years, the brokerages were busy enrolling individuals and families into basic services. Brokerage Personal Agents provided more personal attention than the Case Management system and assisted Individuals to access the community resources in addition to what they were entitled to from the State. Before the brokerages, individuals requesting services would often have to "fit" into an existing service, and if one were a "square peg," s/he/they may not have access to the needed or desired service. The brokerages applied the concepts of person-centered planning to develop services that were individualized and tailored to the person. This was true of employment services as people no longer were "fit into" existing jobs but had opportunities to find more unique jobs that were carved or created.

The Focus: How has the evolution of brokerage services shifted employment services for people with developmental disabilities in the state of Oregon?

Dan: The early years of the brokerages were not as positive for employment as many had hoped. As individuals had limited funds, they had to prioritize how funds were spent. To the dismay of many people including APSE, some chose leisure activities or paying their family caregivers over employment services. Few had predicted that these State funds would be used to escape poverty or making a meager standard of living more comfortable. This was before the K-Plan when individuals



were forced to choose between employment and other services. After the K-Plan (a Medicaid state plan option authorized under the Affordable Care Act) and the Lane vs. Brown lawsuit, individuals were able to choose employment in addition to their daily living services without a penalty of funding. This resulted in many more people seeking and securing employment.

Laura: In a vast geographic area, Eastern Oregon faces a shortage of every kind of service provider, particularly in the area of supported employment. Access is uneven from community to community. I can count the number of vocational providers on one hand. In some ways, Lane v. Brown left Eastern Oregon out in the cold. Sheltered workshops provided a place and continuity which, upon closing, was not replaced by local employment providers. We have people that want to work but don't have the service providers to assist them.

The Focus: *What do brokerage staff do to prioritize employment as a viable option, especially while we are navigating life in a pandemic?*

Dan: Although early in the pandemic, many brokerage customers were losing their jobs or having hours cut back, currently it appears that people are getting jobs. Like the rest of the country, individuals with disabilities are being sought for their skills to fill the plethora of jobs that are becoming available. SDRI has been fortunate to hire many former job developers as Personal Agents. Because of their perspective and skills, they are natural advocates for employment as they understand and appreciate the importance of employment for a full life. They also tend to be "good investigators" which is at the heart of being an effective Personal Agent as well as a Job Developer.

The Focus: *What other initiatives, over the years, have you engaged in to promote employment?*

Laura: In terms of employment and increasing capacity, EOSSB came up with a unique solution. Three years ago, EOSSB hired a Capacity Coordinator to both promote supported employment and to actively work at increasing quality providers in job development and job coaching in rural areas through local enlistment and training. EOSSB has also lobbied for ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) development funds from the federal government to be spent on increasing the number and quality of employment providers. EOSSB is hopeful that this will help meet a very critical need in their very rural region.

According to Dan, relationship building is at the heart of brokerage services, and Dan and SDRI have a history of building collaborative relationships to promote employment. Dan worked with Nancy Milligan Mock from Washington County [DD services], and the Employment First Team to develop and



UPCOMING EVENTS

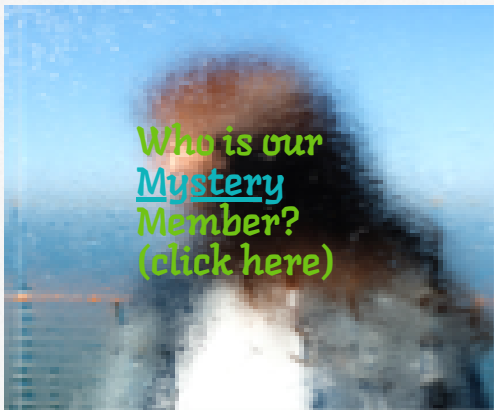


March 2, 2022; Using Digital Portfolios, Routines, and Goals for Job Self-Management and Supports, Tom Keating, Ph.D., APSE Hour, 4-5 PM

March 21, 2022; Technology in the Workplace, NW & Pacific Regional Training. Virtual 11-2

March 30-April 1, 2022; The Journey is a Virtual Adventure, Oregon Statewide Transition Conference

implement the PIES training for VR, County, Provider, and Brokerage staff. They also held formal and informal meetings to support collaboration at all levels, Customers, Families, Providers, Public Employees, and the Community. SDRI was also a leader in Washington County Employment First. SDRI has worked to assure that they have good job developers for their Customers. They publicly recognize employment specialists who provide excellent services and support the work of promising new developers. During times when there were limited numbers of good job developers and when VR was in order of selection, SDRI directly hired and trained their own job developers with mixed success. Since that time and now during covid, it appears that there has been a "blossoming" of higher quality employment providers which can be attributed to the training that has been more available due to the lawsuit. SDRI has also provided small grants to promote employment. For example, they had an initiative to improve the employment outcomes for individuals with autism. ***A special thank you to Laura Noppenburger & Dan Peccia for their time and their thoughts.***



Our first Mystery Member of 2022 is a native Oregonian with roots in the Medford area dating back to the 1800s. They met their amazing partner while rafting and camping on the Deschutes River and have one child. With over 20 years with the same company as a job developer and manager, they still take great pride in assisting Oregonians in improving their quality of life by helping them find and keep meaningful employment. Our Mystery Member has two Golden Doodles. When not

working, life is filled with camping, rafting, live music, traveling, bowling, gardening watching sports and crabbing. Playing Fantasy Basketball has been a favorite hobby with theirs, and their group has been playing together for over 25 years. **Can you guess our February Mystery Member?**

Public Policy Update

by Public Policy Chair, Ryley Newport

The 2022 Legislative Session began on Tuesday, February 1st with Oregon legislators gathering both virtually and in Salem for a five-week legislative session. On the first day, the Senate Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery Committee held a hearing for [Senate Resolution 201](#) to honor Kathryn Weit. For more than three decades, Kathryn Weit was behind every major change in Oregon's DD Services System. Kathryn's advocacy with and for people with disabilities and their families continues to impact the system today and will for years to come.



In honor of Kathryn Weit



Kathryn was a passionate parent advocate as well as a state and federal policy change leader. Her legacy included ensuring people with disabilities could live in the community by closing the Fairview Training Center, get DD services without a long waitlist, **work at community jobs**, and have supports needed to grow up with their families rather than at nursing



homes or institutions. The hearing for SR 201 was a powerful way to honor Kathryn's work and legacy with the voices of partners, advocates, friends and colleagues sharing how their lives were changed due to her influence. If you missed the hearing on February 1st, please watch the hearing via OLIS [here](#). Additionally, on February 10th, the Senate honored Kathryn Weit. If you were unable to watch this moving tribute, you can see it [here](#). It begins at the 19:00 time mark. Senators from across Oregon took opportunities to share stories of Kathryn from their own lives.

During this "short session", legislators want to accomplish two goals:

- 1) Make any necessary adjustments to the budget (sometimes called a "rebalance") and
- 2) Pass a limited number of policy bills.

We are almost halfway through the 2022 Legislative Session. Last week represented a few policy bill deadlines. For a bill to be heard in committee by the second chamber deadline of February 18th, it must be posted on an agenda for work session by February 24th. However, this does not apply to Rules, Revenue, or Joint Committees. Any bills in a policy committee that are not scheduled for a work session by this deadline cannot become a law this session. If you are interested in learning more about bills important to the disability community, you can find a complete list [here](#). Additionally, you can sign up for the GO! Bulletin to receive critical advocacy updates [here](#).

