



## **ALASKA WORKS INITIATIVE 2006-2010 STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **Background**

Since 1997, the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education has worked with individuals with disabilities, state agencies, and service providers to achieve goals identified and supported by the Alaska Works Initiative (AWI). The AWI promotes employment of Alaskans with disabilities. Together, stakeholders are tackling barriers that keep people with disabilities from working, such as:

- fear of losing health benefits;
- financial disincentives;
- fragmented systems;
- lack of comprehensive vocational services that include benefits counseling;
- general lack of knowledge or use of existing work incentives;
- limited work opportunities.

AWI can take at least partial credit for several changes and improvements that show that work is a more realistic option for Alaskans with disabilities and:

- more SSI recipients are working;
- more people have stayed eligible for Medicaid while boosting their income;
- the Medicaid Buy-in program was created and its use is increasing steadily;
- benefits counseling is available statewide;
- self-employment, Ticket-to-Work and assessment policies at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation have changed;
- the Adult Public Assistance program focuses on work for clients; and
- Individual Development Accounts are now an option that permits people to amass resources for important goals.

### **Alaska Works Mission**

Alaskans who experience disabilities are employed at a rate as close as possible to that of the general population.

### **The Plan**

The AWI plan is a road map of strategies that will protect and build on AWI achievements thus far. The plan identifies what needs to be done, who will do it, and when they will do it.

Stakeholders will continue to:

- 1) tackle remaining barriers to work;
- 2) improve Alaska's Medicaid programs and employment services to better meet the needs of working people with disabilities;

- 3) integrate the lessons learned through the Alaska Works Initiative into comprehensive employment services.

Over 70 people from 29 organizations helped develop priority strategies and activities during a March 2005 AWI Think Tank. With an environmental scan as background, participants

considered potential strategies for four focus areas. They also identified indicators and potential data sources.

### **Environmental Scan**

Think Tank participants tore into an environmental scan that provided an overview of strategies, activities, outcomes and lessons not only for AWI but for six associated initiatives:

- Customized Employment Grant
- Youth in Transition Grant; 3) Micro-Enterprise Development
- Assets Building Initiative
- Governor's Alaska Hire Initiative
- Evidence-Based Supported Employment Grant.

Think Tankers also reviewed priorities and activities of the first AWI five-year strategic plan and for four related plans:

- Mental Health Employment Plan
- Youth in Transition Plan
- Unified Workforce Investment Plan
- Disability Policy Summit.

### **Focus Areas and Goals**

Think tank participants developed and prioritized strategies and activities for four focus areas and eight goals:

#### Work as an Expectation

**Goal 1:** Build work expectations and incentives programs and services.

**Goal 2:** Regularly measure and analyze success in employment

#### Outreach and Training

**Goal 3:** Increase awareness, understanding and use of employment-related resources.

**Goal 4:** Service providers have the capacity to meet the employment-related needs.

#### Resources and Funding

**Goal 5:** Blend and braid resources.

**Goal 6:** A variety of funds including under-utilized and non-traditional resources, are being used to fund needed services.

#### Connectivity, Coordination and Workforce Investment

**Goal 7:** Routinely connect job seekers to needed resources, including workforce investment system.

**Goal 8:** Coordinate services and resources are as a part of everyday activities.

A smaller planning group of individuals with disabilities, family members, state agency staff, consumer

organizations, service providers, and advocates convened in June 2005 to refine and broaden the Think Tank's work. The AWI management team has met several times since then to purge duplication, consolidate related plan components, and identify responsible parties, resources, and timelines.

For further information on the Plan, contact the Governor's Council at 907/269-5703 or richard\_rainery@health.state.ak.us.