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Partnership to Provide Employment Opportunities to People with Developmental Disabilities



Northeast Delta Human Services Authority (<http://nedeltahsa.org/>) has launched a workforce initiative in partnership with Families Helping Families of Northeast Louisiana (<http://www.fhfnela.org/>). Partners in Employment (PIE), is an employment-based program aimed at addressing the lack of employment opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities during and after graduating from high school. PIE seeks to combat this structural inequity so that everyone who is willing to work can.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for people with developmental disabilities is twice that of those with no disability, despite there being a desire and willingness to work.

"I have listened to what many well-meaning people said can't happen due to any number of real structural challenges associated with improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities," said Dr. Monteic A. Sizer, Executive Director of NE Delta HSA. "I believe in what is possible! Our employment initiative is in keeping with our agency's problem-solving disposition and my word to make developmental disabilities a regional and state priority."

PIE will support individuals with developmental disabilities with job training, counseling and placement. Further, it will utilize a person-centered approach to meet individual participant needs, wants, desires and goals to ensure positive programmatic outcomes and increased participation levels.

PIE is a huge step in the right direction and it couldn't have come at a better time for the hundreds living in northeast Louisiana with nothing to do post high school. Director of Families Helping Families of Northeast Louisiana, Stacey Guidry, whose son has been diagnosed with a developmental disability, will soon graduate from high school. She will get to witness and assist those just like her son who had limited work opportunities not so long ago. "Individuals who have developmental disabilities are no different than you and I, they want to be self-sufficient," said Guidry. "Every year after graduation, we get calls from parents whose children have graduated and are sitting at home gaining weight and now have health issues. My son is not going to fall through those cracks, sit home and not have opportunities; we are kicking those doors in and proclaiming these individuals matter."

Figures released this month from the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics indicated that the graduation rates for students with developmental disabilities have seen rapid increases in the past five years. With this growing reality, NE Delta HSA's PIE program intends to create opportunities for those seeking to grab a piece of the proverbial pie.

"People with developmental disabilities can make a significant societal contribution if afforded an opportunity to do so," said Dr. Sizer. "I believe our PIE initiative will unleash a wave of newfound hope and opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities and their families."