

Press Release

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Innovative Internships with Businesses Open Job Opportunities for Floridians Overcoming Mental Illnesses

TALLAHASSEE – Floridians who have been treated for mental illnesses will have the opportunity to be employed by private businesses under a new partnership between the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Florida Department of Education’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

Twenty-five paid internships will be available within the next few months for persons who are ready to go to work as part of their treatment and recovery from serious mental illnesses. Typically the unemployment rate of adults with significant mental health issues is extremely high – around 80 percent.

“We are putting into practice Governor Scott’s call to get Floridians back to work by linking businesses with the people who are ready to go to work as part of their treatment and recovery from mental illnesses,” said DCF Secretary David Wilkins. “Adults with a history of mental illnesses will be employed as paid interns with private businesses sympathetic to their situation. Education and training for employers will be a key component of making this working relationship long-term and successful.”

While the internships will last just six months, they will provide adults who have been treated for serious mental health illnesses with a chance to prove themselves on the job as a step toward permanent employment. The internships are expected to be in places like grocery and hardware stores and health care facilities.

“Work experience is the best predictor of continued employment, and these on-the-job work experiences help to lay the foundation for employment for our customers with mental illnesses,” said Bill Palmer, Director of Florida’s VR Division. “As the labor market improves throughout Florida, we want individuals with significant disabilities to be ready to fill many of those jobs.”

“We hope to plant a seed so more private businesses consider hiring people who have been treated for serious mental illnesses, are in recovery and want to support themselves and their families,” Wilkins said.

The \$207,784 contract between VR and Wilson Resources, Inc., will benefit adults who receive mental health treatment through DCF and local providers also served by VR. Wilson Resources, Inc., one of seven vendors contracted to improve employment services for individuals with significant disabilities, will arrange the 25 internships with businesses in Jacksonville, Tampa and Miami.