



For Immediate Release  
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## **Statewide Focus Groups on Employment for People with Disabilities**

**Des Moines, IA** – A series of regional meetings across the state will be held in May in order to bring together key stakeholders who believe that employment in the workforce at competitive wages should be the expectation and outcome for Iowans with disabilities.

The focus group in Des Moines will be held on Wednesday, May 20 from 2:00 PM to 4:30 PM at the Polk County River Plaza.

Individuals expected to attend the regional meetings include people with disabilities, family members, service providers, and educational personnel. Due to space limitations, attendance is by invitation only, but persons interested in offering input may do so by completing the Employment First survey at [www.iowa-apse.org](http://www.iowa-apse.org).

“This is a great opportunity for Iowa to develop new strategies to improve employment policies,” said Pat Steele, of Mainstream Living and coordinator of the Ames focus group. “We hope these meetings will help us identify how Iowa can move forward and make changes leading to increased employment for all youth and adults with disabilities.”

Even though unemployment has increased throughout the state of Iowa over the past year, no group of Iowans face as high an unemployment rate as do individuals with disabilities. Even during times of low unemployment, people with disabilities experience unemployment rates of 55% or higher.

To improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities Iowa needs to promote the fundamental idea that all people with disabilities should exercise their choice to work, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. Accomplishing this objective means changing conventional norms, increasing our expectations and moving Iowa’s secondary education, higher education, and adult disability service delivery systems in completely new directions.

The high unemployment rate for Iowans with disabilities is too often accepted as an inevitable outcome of living with a physical, mental, or emotional disability. Many good reasons are offered for the high unemployment of adults with significant disabilities. However, none can stand the test of objective scrutiny as reasons to exclude people from job placement consideration. National job placement and employment research initiatives have demonstrated repeatedly that people with disabilities can obtain jobs in the workforce.

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