



Iowa Workforce Development

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Region 13 Workforce Partners Employ New “Deaf” Navigator

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA - Iowa Workforce Development, on behalf of a collaborative partnership with state agencies, has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and the Social Security Administration to create new positions for Iowa's Workforce Development Centers.

Known as a disability program navigator, one of these positions is housed at Council Bluff's Workforce Development Center, 300 West Broadway, Suite 13, to facilitate access to employment and services for area job seekers who are deaf. Region 13 includes Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie and Shelby counties.

Deb O'Meara will join current navigator, Karen Goehring, and partner workforce agencies in working to enhance quality employment outcomes for area job seekers who are deaf. Deb O'Meara will assume the post on March 28, 2005. Deb has an Associate in Applied Science Degree in Sign Language Interpreting from Iowa Western Community College. She has served as the Assistant to the Dean of Boys for the Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD) since 1991. Since 2004, she has also served as a Freelance Job Coach for the deaf and hard of hearing consumers for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. From 1999 to 2004 she served as Residential Program Coordinator for the Iowa School for the Deaf Summer Enrichment Program. Prior to this, Deb served as the Resident Advisor for the Therapeutic Education for Abused Children with Handicaps or T.E.A.C.H. Program for the Boys Town National Research Hospital (1989-1990); Houseparent for the Nebraska School for the Deaf (1987-1989); and Residential Counselor for Rem, Inc. (1987-1988).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Iowans with disabilities have an unemployment rate that exceeds 34%, but most would prefer to be pursuing a career. Disability program navigators will not duplicate services offered by agencies supporting local workforce services, but support job seekers with information and connection with service programs that will provide career enhancement.

The model that the state agencies will use for the implementation of this program was developed through a grant from the Social Security Administration called “Bridge to Employment”. Through this project, staff knowledgeable in social security benefits and work incentives worked closely with state and local employment and training programs in Mason City and Cedar Rapids.

These staff were housed in Workforce Development Centers in those two communities and operated as agents of the system. A thorough understanding of social security benefits, including the implications of earnings on benefits, and local support services (housing, childcare and transportation) is an important qualification for the disability program navigators.

“The creation of these positions should not be seen as a new service program,” stated Barbara Bobb, Iowa Workforce Development’s chief of the Targeted Services Bureau. “They will serve a role within the system designed to enhance the capacity of all of our partners in services designed to fully include Iowans with disabilities in the workforce.”

Iowa Workforce Development is meeting with State agency partners, including the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Division of Persons with Disabilities, the Iowa Governor’s Developmental Disabilities Council, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Human Services and others to plan and support the project implementation. Representatives from the Iowa School for the Deaf and Iowa Deaf Services have also participated in the planning process.

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