

Weekly Focus

July 27, 2012

The mission of the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission is to ensure individuals with disabilities achieve quality employment, independence and disability determination outcomes through integrated services, partnerships and innovation.

On the Road Again

The RSC Executive Leadership Team started the week with an early morning drive to the Northwest corner of the state. We met with Defiance staff at the Fulton County Job Center One-Stop in Wauseon. This is the section of Ohio where the borders of Michigan and Indiana are both nearby.



Homemade Apple Pie

The visit to Wauseon produced outstanding discussion; but before I get into those details, I must comment on the homemade pies that had much of our staff lined up for second helpings. It was great and greatly appreciated.

The Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA), released to all last week, provided the starting point for discussion as our challenges in providing services to the large Hispanic population in Northwest Ohio were taken to the ground level by our Defiance staff who are so well-versed on the issue. The ability to get field level perspective on issues facing service delivery like this from the CSNA is a good example of why I have made site visits such a high priority for the entire RSC Executive Team.

Next Stop Lima

From Fulton County, we moved to the regional hub of West-Central Ohio to visit our Lima office. Both locations made it clear that the Fee Schedule nearing completion has caused apprehension for vendors. We know how important this issue is to our counselors in the field, and I have been able to candidly discuss with most of them how much work has gone into this project and how important more precise purchasing decisions are to RSC's ability to bring consistent service to Ohioans with disabilities regardless of their location.

We discussed in detail our efforts to secure more funding through partnerships with other state agencies who share a portion of our mission to provide employment and independence to Ohioans with disabilities.

In both Fulton County and Lima we discussed our goal to make the AWARE system a tool for enhanced productivity, and we listened to field staff describe the new issues they are confronting because of our new service delivery model in the field. On some of these issues just knowing that we know, and we care about the many new challenges our field staff must overcome, is a morale booster for all of us.



Director Miller leads discussion at the Lima Office.

Moreover, the opportunity to put our current issues in the context of two consecutive Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) audits, finding the same unresolved issues which we have now put behind us, unites field staff and Central Office in the conclusion that RSC is now heading in the right direction and picking up momentum as we go.

Where the Jobs Are

The Director's Advisory Group (DAG) for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) arm of RSC gathered for a day long session at Headquarters on Wednesday. We had a very productive discussion with Ohio Business Leadership Network (OBLN) Board member Andrea Applegate, the workforce expert for the Columbus Chamber of Commerce.

Andrea gave VR DAG members research on employer needs in the 11 county Columbus regional metro area. Her knowledge of current needs of employers and the trends economic development professionals are seeing

from their clients is good guidance in helping RSC consumers develop job skills that are in high demand.

Information technology jobs are widely available to potential employees with the skills to fill the job. That's no surprise, but Andrea's interaction with employers indicates hospital orderlies and hotel maids are now expected to track their job duties electronically and need the computer skills to perform that task to get hired. Andrea tells us that employers are willing to make accommodations to find and keep qualified employees in the hard to fill jobs. So, doing the hard work to find these job categories and getting RSC consumers trained for hard to fill jobs makes finding employment much easier.

The quick takeaways from Andrea's presentation tell us manufacturers are returning work to the states as wages and transportation costs rise in outsourcing locations. But the global nature of business is growing quickly so RSC consumers, with foreign language skills and cultural dexterity to deal with a wide variety of people in professional fashion, go to employers with much needed skills.

I am enthused by the growing collaboration between RSC and the OBLN. Last week they helped us bring employment issues to the Youth Leadership Forum, and next week OBLN leads a presentation at the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce on the competitive advantage of tapping talent with different abilities. Similar programs are scheduled later this year around the state, so the businesses in the market for dependable employees will be getting an RSC message delivered by their professional peers.

RSC Counselor Jerica Kruse earns National Award

The Project SEARCH national conference was held this week in Austin, Texas, where partners in the international transition program for youth with disabilities gathered to share best practices and keep the program on a continuous improvement loop.



Columbus Chamber of Commerce OBLN Member Andrea Applegate provides input at the VR DAG meeting.

Counselor Jerica Kruse from the RSC Butler County team not only made a presentation on her six years of involvement with the Project SEARCH program, but the Butler Project SEARCH team also was honored with a 100% Competitive Employment Outcome Award.

The 100% Competitive Employment Outcome Award recognizes exemplary success to organizations that have placed transition students in the community working more than twenty hours a week and earning at least minimum wage. Jerica has worked as the counselor in partnership with Project SEARCH in Butler County since its conception in 2006.

Jerica and Tony Huff, Project SEARCH Transition Team Supervisor, shared the collaboration strategies that have led to their 100% employment success award.

"VR is vital to the Project SEARCH program and the more closely we work together, the stronger we all become; we are more than a funding source, we are a partner," Jerica said.

Over the past six years, Kruse and Huff have worked with more than seventy-five interns with disabilities by assisting them with goals for increasing their independence through competitive employment.

"Project SEARCH and its founders, Susie Rutkowski and Erin Riehle, have created an impressive following of experts all working toward a greater good to improve the quality of life for our transition students. It is an honor to be a Project SEARCH partner and part of the national convention," said Jerica.

Next year, the Project SEARCH national conference will be held in Ohio and I look forward to attending.



Butler County RSC Counselor Jerica Kruse (left) with Project SEARCH Transition Team Supervisor Tony Huff at the Project SEARCH national conference in Austin, Texas with her award

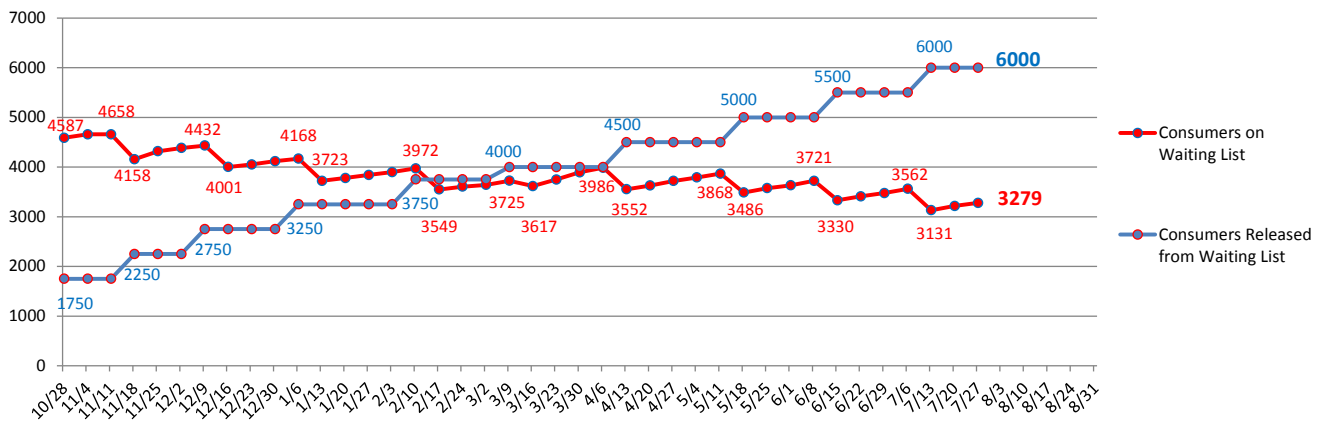


The Butler County team: (left to right) Reena Fish, AJ Huff, Tony Huff, Angela Bryant, Rosi Wood, Randy Joseph, Jerica Kruse and Mollie McIntosh



(right) Jim Hanophy, Assistant Commissioner, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services, addresses the crowd at the Project SEARCH National Convention.

Number of Consumers on Waiting List



For more information or questions on stories in this publication please call Shirley Marchi, Community Relations Liaison, at 614.438.1477.

Produced by the Office of Communications, July 27, 2012.

