

WEEKLY FOCUS

The mission of the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency is to ensure individuals with disabilities achieve quality employment, independence and disability determination outcomes through integrated services, partnerships and innovation.

Northeast Area Meeting

The executive team traveled to Akron on Tuesday for the Northeast Area Meeting to provide updates on key agency initiatives and get feedback from area staff. Raivo Murnieks, Deputy Director of Performance and Innovation, gave a presentation on the new reporting process that is being developed to give staff easier access to key information in one convenient location. Jon Hackathorn, Business Relations Manager, discussed progress in business engagement training and implementation.

Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Deputy Director Susan Pugh gave an update on the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act and its potential impact for the agency and the VR program. Assistant Executive Director Bill Bishilany discussed a number of agency initiatives and stressed that the agency will be focusing on ways to make it easier for staff to do their work, with the ultimate goal of helping more individuals with disabilities achieve independence and quality outcomes. Area staff had the opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback.

The meeting also provided the opportunity to recognize Kathy Kimble, a supervisor in the Akron office, who is retiring after 21 years at OOD. Thank you Kathy for your service and best of luck in retirement.

Thanks to Traci Conkling, Northeast Area Manager, and area staff for the warm welcome and useful discussion.

Project SEARCH receives 100% Employment Award

LifeCare Alliance was awarded the 100% Employment Award at the 8th Annual Project SEARCH Conference in Omaha, Nebraska on July 22. OOD supports the LifeCare Alliance (LCA) Project SEARCH site in collaboration with Functional Training Services, Columbus City Schools, and the Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Project SEARCH provides real-life work experience to help youth (ages 18-22) with significant disabilities, make successful transitions from school to adult life. This program provides job training and job readiness instruction (resume writing, mentorship, job coaching, money management, etc.) at a host business.



Project SEARCH interns who found employment are (back row left to right) Andrew Dorton, Darryl Small, Andrew Crouthers, David Browne, Shedrac Spears, and Isaac Hoffman; (first row left to right) Watchen Greene, Destiny Ford, Joy Greshem, and Xaviera Goins.

Interns are evaluated for ten weeks by instructors and are then instructed to apply for job opportunities within their communities. This year, all ten LCA interns were able to secure employment at businesses such as Kroger's, Giant Eagle, Steak and Shake, nursing homes, and a childcare center.

Congratulations to LifeCare Alliance and to the interns who successfully made the transition to employment! It is great to see the continued success of Project SEARCH and its positive impact on lives here in Central Ohio.

VR Performance Update

Agency efforts to improve policies and procedures continue to pay dividends in the form of more effective outcomes and more efficient use of resources. Through June 30 we have completed 121 more eligibility decisions, 825 more plans, and 716 more rehabilitations

than at this point last year. We have also served 1,841 more individuals with disabilities, increased our rehab rate by 5% and decreased the average time from application to rehab by 2 months.

Also, the waiting list for individuals with significant disabilities has been eliminated and the number of days to determine eligibility from date of application dropped by over 20 days.

It is important to remember that each of those numbers represents an individual who was served by our program. The great work done by our staff, and by our partners and providers, over the past year has allowed us to serve more individuals and do it in less time.

I am grateful for the hard work and dedication this progress represents and I am confident we can do even more in the coming year.

Ohio Means Accessibility

I am pleased to share the good news that the "OhioMeansAccessibility" website has been launched. A collaborative project between state agencies, with the site funded through a Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) demonstration grant, secured by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The grant seeks to improve the education, training, and employment opportunities and outcomes for adults who are unemployed, underemployed, and/or receiving Social Security disability benefits.

The OhioMeansAccessibility website allows users to search for jobs using OhioMeansJobs and provides other resources including information on Social Security and other benefits, how to start a business, and how to connect with other services in Ohio. Employers can use the website to register through OhioMeansJobs, learn about reasonable accommodations, and better understand the potential return on investment that comes from hiring someone with a disability.

You can visit the site at <http://ohiomeansaccessibility.com/>.

Nottingham to Direct Montana Disability Determination Services



*Jennifer Nottingham, DDD
Supervisor of Unit 7S.*

Jennifer Nottingham, Supervisor of Unit 7S at the Division of Disability Determination (DDD), was recently offered and accepted the top post at the Montana Disability Determination Services (DDS). The Montana DDS is part of the Montana Department of Health and Human Services Disability Employment and Transitions Division. We offer our congratulations and best wishes to Jennifer as she heads out West.

For more information or questions on stories in this publication, please call the Office of Communications at 614.438.1476.

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