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# VR News

**Spirit Lake  
Vocational Rehabilitation Project**

**(701) 766-4446**



## Inside our first issue:

- Consumer success stories
- Latest project accomplishments
- Future plans

A mother's success	2
Succeeding every day	2
Staff Honored	3
Consumer Council	3
Creating Jobs	4
Depression & PTSD	7
Project News	8

## Spirit Lake VR Past & Future

Welcome to VR News! This is the first issue of what will be a quarterly newsletter to share with the reservation community information on our program, our staff and our consumers.

In this issue we will be focusing on our successes, those of our clients, those of our staff and those we have planned for the future.

Our first four years were filled with finding tribal members who could benefit from our services, helping them get jobs and getting them what

they need to keep those jobs. We have bought eyeglasses, completed application forms with consumers and given them rides to work.

Now, with some ideas from rehabilitation conferences the staff recently attended, we are looking at job development. How are we going to create new jobs? Keep reading for our ideas.

Is our program all successes? We wish! The focus of our next issue is "Lessons we learned and things we will never do again." You don't want to miss that one!

## What do you do, anyway? (And other VR questions)

Each issue, this column addresses common questions staff members receive. One answer everyone should know is to the question, "Do you have to be an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Tribe to receive services?" No, but you do need to be an enrolled member of some tribe.

What types of people do we serve? We serve anyone with a disability who is able to benefit from our

services and return to work. (That's what we do!)

Have you lost your job because you stayed up all night at a party and didn't make it to work in the morning? That's not a disability. However, if you have serious depression, could not get out of bed for days because of it, and lost your job, that may qualify as a disability. (See the article on Page 4 on mental disabilities. It may surprise you.)

## Emma: Succeeding for her children

"I just wanted to be able to support my two kids."

When Emma came to the Spirit Lake Project for the first time, she was a young mother, receiving TANF. She said she was interested in working but did not know where to get a job. She said, "Germaine told me she knew where I could get a job and took me right down there." After six months at her first position, Emma had the experience and recommendations to get her current job at the radio station.

Now, in addition to performing clerical and receptionist duties, Emma also hosts a radio show.

Not content with her work at the radio station, once her children were both in school, Emma started a second job at the casino. In both of her jobs, she has an impressive attendance and on-time record. The Spirit Lake VR Project provides Emma transportation home so she can be home from work by the time her children get out of school. When asked what motivates her, Emma says simply, "I just wanted to be able to support my two kids."

## Alfred: A Success Story Every Day

How do you feel when meeting a new person? Nervous? How about walking up to a complete stranger and starting to talk to him or her? That is one reason it is difficult to find people who feel comfortable working the bell desk at a hotel. As Alfred, one of our former consumers, says, "You have to be an extroverted person to do this job. You have to be not bothered at all by walking up to a person you never met before."

Many people find working at the bell desk quite stressful. It is not a job for anyone who is naturally shy. Alfred will have been on the job for three years on December 26<sup>th</sup>.

If you have ever been a guest at the Spirit Lake Resort, it is likely that Alfred's smiling face has been the first sight to greet you as you came in the door. He has not missed a day in three years, earning him several commendations for perfect attendance. He has also received a 110% award for extraordinary customer service.

Alfred credits the Spirit Lake VR Project with helping him become a success. He had become discouraged looking for work by the time he met outreach worker, Lori La Floe. He says, "She helped me find this job. Once I got the job, once I had the chance to prove myself, that was all I asked for."

## Spirit Lake Staff Honored at National Conference

Most new VR projects start like this: A grant is funded. There is no one on the reservation with all of the necessary education and experience for the positions. People are hired out of universities in Minneapolis, Utah or some place like that. They come to the reservation, are not familiar with the resources, challenges and customs. They are not very effective, they are far from home and they are not very happy. They quit and go home. Another person from Minneapolis is hired.

On our reservation, it went like this: The program hired all enrolled tribal members who had lived on the reservation most of their lives. They knew what was here, both the resources and the problems. All of them were required to attend college courses each semester, in addition to their full-time work. The result: Staff turnover has been 0%.

No one has quit, and they are already home. AND Three members of the Spirit Lake Vocational Rehabilitation Project staff were honored at the annual meeting of the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation.

Tanya Jetty, Lori La Floe and Germaine Thompson were all recognized for having completed the college coursework necessary to earn their certification in vocational rehabilitation.

Lori and Germaine are both outreach workers who assist consumers in finding their work goals, getting the resources to get back to work, becoming employed and staying employed. Tanya is the project's administrative assistant, handling the budget, purchases and learning about rehabilitation, all at the same time.

**They wouldn't let us take their picture. To get even we have put personal facts about the three staff members here where the picture would be.**

Tanya was a HORRIBLE student her first attempt at college. She still hates math.

Lori is a big softball fan, and when she is not working with our consumers, can be found coaching little girls.

Germaine speaks Dakota better than anyone else on the staff.

## Consumer Advisory Council Steps up to a New Role

We have always had an advisory council made up of consumers of vocational rehabilitation services. At first, because our project was so new, we met at the project office, the Project Director told them what we were doing, and that was it. In the past year, our Consumer Advisory Council has taken on a new role. Rather than listening to us, we have begun listening to them. (Okay, maybe that was a little obvious and now you know why we are VR staff and not rocket scientists.)

In reflecting their new role, our quarterly meetings have shifted to The View, an upscale restaurant located at the top of the Spirit Lake Resort. These are our board members, and, the

new setting reflects the importance they hold in our program.

The past two council meetings have focused on suggestions for improving the project. The project evaluator attended both meetings and discussed with individual council members their recommendations for the project. The advisory council members had a lot of positive comments, but they did suggest that perhaps more efforts should be made to get information out about our services. So... we now have started a quarterly newsletter. Also, you may have heard our new ads on KABU, reservation radio.

Look here in March for what our advisory council has us doing next!



## Creating New Jobs: The next step

“What kind of job do you find for a person who doesn’t know how to read?”

When we began the first little baby steps starting this program, we did the easy things first. They weren’t easy for us, then, because we were all new at this. We helped consumers complete paperwork to prove they had a disability. We drove them to job interviews. Sometimes we even gave them rides to the store and money to buy clothes so they could be dressed right for the interview.

We are pretty used to those sorts of tasks now. What we are finding the harder task is for those consumers who cannot do the type of jobs that are available at the casino, hotel or other employers. What kind of job do you find for a person who doesn’t know how to read? We serve some consumers with very severe learning disabilities. They might be able to put a car together or do beautiful beadwork. They might even want to start their own businesses.

Another common challenge for us is how to serve an individual with a physical disability or illness who can only work a few hours at a time.

How do you go about finding a job for a person with special needs and equally special talents? The answer came to us at some of the conferences we recently attended as part of our staff training. You have to create a job that isn’t there. So, that is our plan for the future to expand our services.

Here are some ideas we heard:

▶ On one reservation, the vocational rehabilitation project hired a bookkeeper to do the paperwork for an individual who had a learning disability.

▶ Another reservation program started a thrift store. They hired their consumers as drivers, to pick up donations, as clerks to ring up the merchandise, to stock the shelves, and as a bookkeeper.

▶ We heard a lot of talk about setting up a website to sell arts and crafts our consumers make over the Internet. No one has done this yet, so, if we followed through on this idea, we would be the first in the country.

▶ Helping a consumer start a business isn’t only giving money for materials, it may also be helping with a business plan and managing cash flow.

We plan to take some of those ideas and use them here, with changes to fit our reservation. Our Project Director, Martina Kazena, will be meeting with the Tribal Council to discuss our plans and how these can be combined with any tribal programs for creating jobs and businesses.

“Helping a consumer start a business isn’t only giving money for materials, it may also be helping with a business plan and managing cash flow.”

## DISABILITY AWARENESS: Depression, PTSD

(NOTE: Each issue this column will provide information on a type of disability found on our reservation.)

This issue, we discuss one of the more common mental illnesses, depression, and one that is becoming more common, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). If you have never experienced depression yourself, you almost certainly have known someone who has. *Depression is a feeling of intense sadness; it may follow a recent loss but is out of proportion to that event and lasts beyond a reasonable length of time.*

What does that mean? For example, you break up with a man you have been seeing. It would be reasonable to be sad. However, if you are so sad you cannot get out of bed in the morning because the day seems so bad, and you feel this way for six months, that seems like depression.

### Common symptoms of depression include:

- ▶ Difficulty experiencing pleasure. Imagine how you feel when your child runs at you in the morning and throws her arms around you. Imagine how you feel when you go to a friend's home, it is a beautiful day out and they have made your favorite meal. Now imagine never having those feelings. The world doesn't have any color, joy or laughter in it.

- ▶ Loss of appetite.

- ▶ Difficulty sleeping.

- ▶ Lack of energy, feeling just too tired to do anything and not seeing any reason to bother.

- ▶ 50% of people with depression are work-impaired. If you don't get up in the morning too many days in a row, if you don't have the energy to do your work, you lose your job. That may contribute to more feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

consumers with disability include insuring that the individual has a complete physical evaluation to identify and treat any physical causes. As with all other consumers, we work with these individuals to write their career goals and plans, and to find jobs where they can succeed. We also provide follow-up after employment. If an individual begins to show symptoms of depression again, we try to get them therapy before these symptoms cause them to lose the job due to poor attendance or performance.

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a disorder that happens after violent trauma outside the usual range of human experience. This can include war, rape, witnessing murder or abuse and other acts of physical and psychological violence.

Symptoms of PTSD include nightmares, sleep difficulties, depression, recurrent thoughts and memories of the event. Although PTSD is most well-known among veterans, women who have been victims of rape or domestic violence may suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as well.

Individuals who believe they, or a family member, may have either of these disorders are encouraged to contact our project at:

(701) 766 -4446

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"I thought I was going crazy, waking up in a sweat trying to choke my wife ... I'd always kept my feelings to myself, but now I didn't seem to have any feelings except anger... when I tried to numb the pain with alcohol I just got more angry and out of control."

One activity the Spirit Lake VR staff take to assist

American Indian veteran with PTSD

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**Helping people with  
disabilities find and  
keep jobs.**

<http://www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/vr/>

How about that- we have a website. Our high school and college students probably are yawning right now. Yeah, yeah, website. For us, who remember when the reservation did not have a newspaper or radio station even, having our own website is pretty exciting.

Check it out. You will find

information on our program services, links to vocational rehabilitation information in general and information on different types of disabilities.

If you are like our Project Director and are not really into the Internet, make your children print out the interesting pages for you.

### Interested in joining the Consumer Advisory Council ..... ?

Current or former consumers of vocational rehabilitation services, or family members of consumers are all eligible to join the council.

We meet quarterly to discuss the project's accomplishments in the past three months, get recommendations from our consumers, and ask their opinion on future plans.

We will also begin providing monthly updates to our council on project activities. They are encouraged to drop by the project at any time to give us their advice.

If you are interested in joining, please call Tanya Jetty at 766-4446 or drop by our office, in the Johnson House, just north of the Police Station.

### WE WANT YOUR YOUTH !

If you know a young person with a disability who will soon be graduating from high school, or who has dropped out of school, please ask them to call or stop by the Spirit Lake VR office. We provide transition services from school to work for youth with disabilities and would really like to work with your family.

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