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VR News

Spirit Lake
Vocational Rehabilitation Project



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“I’ll never do THAT again! Lessons we learned in our first five years.

With five years of experience behind us, we have learned some lessons. The next few pages are filled with our success stories again. However, in the last newsletter we promised we would tell you about some of the mistakes we made. Names are omitted to protect the guilty!

I wouldn't work with a person for very long without asking flat out, "You want to get a job, don't you? Because that's what we do here, we get people jobs." When I first started out, there were some people I spent a lot of time with and things just didn't work out. I just assumed that people with disabilities who don't have a job want to get one. Then, it dawned on me that some people just don't want to work. So, now, the first thing I do is I ask them and let them know that this program is all about helping people get jobs.

■ When person is on on-the-job training and lost their job, I would find out why instead of just getting them another job. Early on, I had someone lose a job due to drinking and I didn't find out until later after I had already gotten him another job.

I wouldn't give (some) people gas money on Friday because they drove around all weekend and didn't have gas to get to work and came in again on Monday.

■ I would have a policy for abusive clients ahead of time. When a person came in and yelled and demanded services, NOW, NOW, NOW, I wasn't sure of the best way to deal with it.

(continued on page 2)

“I’ll never do that again” (continued from page 1)

When I agreed that the program would pay for clothes for someone to wear to an interview I would be a lot clearer about the cost. He didn’t exactly buy an Armani suit, but darn near. I swear I’ll never do that again! Now I always put an amount on a purchase order – not more than so many dollars.

Before I even thought of

fixing someone’s vehicle I would make sure they still have a job because that is what we fix their vehicle for is so that they can get to work.

I wouldn’t just assume that because a car repair place says that a consumer’s car needs a new transmission that it does. Now we are more like the insurance company where we get more than one estimate. It has saved us a lot of money.

Consumer Advisory Council Quarterly Meeting

The Consumer Advisory Council held its quarterly meeting in March at The View. The purpose of these meetings is to keep our consumers updated on what the project is doing and to get their opinions on what we should be doing. The last meeting it was suggested that the project could be doing more to get information out about our services. This newsletter is an example of our efforts to address that concern. We recently placed ads on the radio that have resulted in a lot more calls. People are also finding us on our website.

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

One suggestion our Consumer Advisory Council had this time around is to look at more possibilities for self-employment and starting businesses, given the number of talented people we have on our reservation and the lack of jobs out there. Martina Kazena, our project director, discussed the new grant proposal we have just submitted to RSA. Included in that proposal is a new position for a person who would help consumers start businesses.

If you would like to join the Consumer Advisory Council, please let us know. Tell any staff member or call 766-4446.

SUCCESS STORIES

Don: Rider, Father, Tribal Employee (in just about that

Don worked for sixteen years, in the construction industry and as a BIA employee. For 'much longer' than sixteen years, he has been "riding broncs" in rodeos. In 1978, he broke his back in the rodeo. He was advised to file for SSI, but he says, "It was too much paperwork. It was easier to go back to work." After hospitalization due to back problems, his doctors again advised him to quit working but he went back to work anyway.

Despite his injury, Don is back at work now, although he has had to change jobs to accommodate his back problems. He works part-time in the housekeeping department of the Spirit Lake Casino. Such a career switch might be disheartening to some, but Don actually appreciates the part-time hours and working for a tribal employer. You see, what makes Don so remarkable is what he does outside of his working hours.

Germaine knew of Don from his involvement with the Sobriety Rides. These are rides during which riders "...pray for the elderly, the ailing and to get off drugs." Don rode in the Big Foot Ride, which was 18 days of riding in all kinds of weather. Rides include riders from reservations throughout the U.S. and Canada. All meet at a designated spot and ride together. The ride begins with a prayer and, all the way through, the rider prays for the same

person or cause. "It's not a joy ride," says Don. By the time I'm through, I'm aching, but you do it for other people."

Spirit Lake Vocational Rehabilitation helped fund one of Don's rides last year as part of its support of traditional healing services. Per tribal resolution, employers must allow time off for employers to participate in traditional cultural activities. There understanding of the importance of the rides in Sioux culture is another reason that his employment at the Spirit Lake Casino is a good fit for Don. Memorial Rides, Sobriety Rides and similar activities are part of a Sioux tradition. "The purpose of it," said Don, "is that you are suffering for the person you are praying for."

There is definitely some suffering involved. As well as spending eighteen days on horseback, there is the heat – it was 114 degrees two years ago during the memorial ride for Germaine's daughter. Riding through Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota, there is also plenty of cold during the year.

SUCCESS STORIES (Continued)

Don has only fallen off of a horse once, but he is quick to add, to be fair, "It wasn't the horse's fault."

Then there are other risks, getting kicked by a horse, falling off a horse. According to Don, he has only fallen off a horse on a ride once. In the interest of fairness, he feels it necessary to add, "but it wasn't the horse's fault." Despite the hazards, riding is starting to become a family affair. Don's thirteen-year-old daughter went on a ride with him last year. Two other children in the family have been asking to go.

As for the vocational rehabilitation project, and his outreach worker, Germaine Thompson, Don has no complaints. He has a job that he can accomplish, despite his chronic back problems. Importantly, the job is one that allows him the flexibility to maintain his cultural traditions and pass those on to the next generation.

Sheila: Exemplary employee and grandmother of many

A recent Four Winds newsletter recognized Sheila as an exemplary employee, specifically thanking her for the extra efforts she has put in on her job in the security department. Sheila has been working at Four Winds since January. Sheila is responsible for working throughout the building, including the elementary school, middle school and high school. She is very comfortable working in a crowd of children, since she has twenty grandchildren of her own, including some who are attending the school where she works. She enjoys her job and particularly likes talking with the students.

Sheila had seen information about the Spirit Lake Vocational Rehabilitation Project and asked one of the outreach workers, Germaine Thompson, about it. Germaine quickly filled her in to the purpose of the project and its services. She let Sheila know that this was a good opportunity for someone with a disability who was interested in working.

Lori La Floe was Sheila's outreach worker at the project, and she found Sheila a job almost immediately. Four Winds had a position open and Sheila had security experience, so it was a perfect fit. Unlike Don, a regular Monday through Friday schedule is fine for Sheila. Her main activities outside of work include occasional bingo and, with twenty grandchildren, mostly a lot of babysitting.

Sheila recommends the Spirit Lake VR Project as a good program for people with disabilities. She states, "It is an especially good program for people who are smart but have trouble with paperwork. I've already told a couple of my family members about it."

DISABILITY AWARENESS: Traumatic Brain Injury

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

What is traumatic brain injury?

It is an injury to the brain caused by external physical force that may produce any or all of the following:

- Problems in memory, concentration, reading or organization
- Problems in physical functioning
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Problems remembering the right word.
- Emotional problems
- Behavior problems.

Changes may be hard for outsiders to notice. A person who used to do five things at once can now only do one or two. Their memory is not as good as it once was. Returning to work can be difficult because the employee cannot do some of the tasks they used to be able to accomplish with ease. This change is difficult for co-workers to understand. “What do you mean you have trouble making change in your head? You never had a problem with it before.”

Emotional adjustment can be difficult. Imagine that you suddenly cannot do some of your daily tasks. Maybe it is remembering what you need to buy at the grocery store, or how to change the oil in a car. You remember that you could do those things before your accident. Now, you just can't do it, no matter how hard you try. You start to make a recipe but can't

remember the next step. You don't know if you have put in the milk or not. You ask your sister if you put in the milk and she gets annoyed with you because you just asked her that question five minutes ago and she told you the answer, but you can't remember it. Of course you feel frustrated and get upset. You get upset when other people don't understand that you are not doing it on purpose.

The good news is that the staff at Spirit Lake VR can help you learn ways to adapt to be successful at school and work. For example, schedule breaks during the day to accommodate fatigue. Start off with part-time work. Use a notebook or calendar for reminders. Your outreach worker can work with you and your supervisor to put this notebook together. If you forget what you are supposed to do after re-stocking the shelves – just look in the book, Use a calculator for math. Just because you can't do math in your head any more doesn't mean you can't do your job. If you don't have the money to buy a calculator, we can help with that, too. Spirit Lake VR staff want to see you succeed. If you believe that you or someone you know has a Traumatic Brain Injury, please stop by the project office or call us at 766-4446.

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

Getting to know us.....

Introducing Tanya Jetty – has an A.A. from Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Liberal Arts, her certificate in Vocational Rehabilitation from Western Washington University. She was born in Devils Lake and raised on the Spirit Lake Reservation where she was spotted by her husband at the young age of fifteen. They now have four children, two girls and two boys ranging in age from five to twelve. She has been an Administrative Assistant for the project for the past four and half years. After earning her certificate in VR, she began assisting the outreach workers in serving a few clients. She has applied to Salish Kootenai

College for her bachelors degree in Human Services. She enjoys her job and loves working with all of the people involved with the project, both the staff and the consumers. She says, “This has definitely been the most rewarding position I have ever held. I have managed to hold a job, take care of four kids and earn my two-year degree and more all at the same time. And my husband is still with me.”

Her phone number is 766-4446. Her email is tjetty@stellarnet.com

Picture of Tanya found on the web:



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.

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

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