**VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION**

**February 2019**

**VS Field Services:**

Chris Brannaman has been selected as the new Programs Manager in Tulsa VS #64.

His official start date was February 1. Chris has been with the agency for several years and has held multiple positions, including VS Counselor, VS Transition Counselor and Job Placement Specialist. Chris brings a wealth of knowledge and experience with him to this position and we are excited to have him on the leadership team!

On Tuesday, January 22, 2019 Debra Mendez and Jeff Baker attended the Caddo Kiowa Technology Center Job Fair in Fort Cobb. They spoke with representatives from a number of employers and organizations in Western Oklahoma, answered their questions about hiring people with disabilities, and distributed information about DRS and Visual Services.

Employers represented at the job fair included:

Caddo Kiowa Technology Center, Cowley College, Hamm & Phillips, GEO Group Great Plains Correctional Center, City of Anadarko, Corn Heritage Village and Rehab, Binger Nursing Center, The Physicians Hospital, Kiowa Tribe, Kiowa Casino, Bar S Foods, Delaware Nation Vocational Rehabilitation, Cohesive Healthcare (Carnegie Hospital) and Wichita Tribe/Sugar Creek Casino. This is a great example of VS staff working with area partners to get the word out about what DRS does, and to cultivate new employers.

On January 25, 2019, VS was proud to host an eye pathology training which was attended by all of our counselors, Rehabilitation Teachers, O&M Specialists and AT Specialists. It was presented by Dr. Ann Acres-Warn from Dean McGee Eye Institute and was intended to help teach and refresh knowledge and understanding of common eye disorders and treatments that might affect our clients and for which we might be able to determine eligibility and provide services.

On January 29, 2019, the OKTVR meeting was held, which consists of directors from all of the Tribal VR programs, as well as staff from DRS, ORC and the VA, in addition to other interested parties who meet and discuss how all of the agencies can partner to better provide services to our clients who are Native American. This collaborative meeting, which is held in different locations each time and hosted by Tribal VR offices, was held in the Chickasaw Community Center on NW 39th in Oklahoma City. DRS Director Melinda Fruendt was present, as were Teresa McDermott, Stacey Birchfield, Danny Robison, Charity Eidson, Nido Tomagos and Jerod Gleason from Visual Services.

There’s a new type of Project Search employment training program in the works for an adult population, the OKC Disability Inclusion Initiative. Mercy Hospital is taking the lead as the employer. Other participating partners are DRS, OU, Dale Rogers and the VA.

Vacant Positions: Counselor- Enid=1 Tulsa=2; Rehabilitation Teacher- Idabel=1 Tulsa=1; Orientation and Mobility Specialist- Tulsa=1

**Transition:**

Transition Coordinator (TC) attended a conference on Division and Career Development in Transition and gained ideas and skills for the Pre-Ets (pre-employment transition services) contract that OU has begun hiring for the pilot. It started in full swing on February 1st, 2019.

Project Search meetings are being held every month at each location and Brandi Hurley and TC are making every effort to attend those meetings and to be a resource to staff, the host locations, skills trainers and job coaches at each site. There are currently 9 sites. Students are doing well at each site. There has been one current Project Search client hired at Integris in Yukon as the hospital loved her and the work she was doing. It is the time now where our job coaches and skills trainers are helping those students apply within or other places for employment. Project Search will be celebrating their 10th year this year for Project Search. Very exciting times! Still in the process of discussion with Georgia and OU about another Project Search site to be in Muskogee VA where we will focus on the School for the Blind.

We have attended multiple Open House opportunities for Project Search this month.

Bonnie Allen from the Edmond Office and TC have met with Whitefield’s (another OJA facility for at risk youth) and she is currently meeting with those students on a regular basis and we are developing a SWS contract so that the kids can work and help pay some of those debts that they have as well as “rent” at the facility.

TC has been involved with the Oklahoma Transition Council and they are in the process of developing their 14th Annual Transition Institute for some time in October 2019. No date has been confirmed.

TC, Jonathon Cook, OU, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Coalition, Chris Dvorak and Lisa Barnum with Edmond Public Schools are in the process of developing a one week Deaf and Hard of Hearing Camp with the name of Summer Career Academy. MOU has been developed and sent to Joe Hill. Working on contract information currently.

Pre-Ets contract through OU is up and running. 3 people have been hired to work in the schools. One was hired to work in the Oklahoma City Public School System (all high schools); another is hired to work the “west” part of the start (at this time including Lawton and surround schools, up to Tuttle, Newcastle, Blanchard and other rural schools; the 3rd will be focusing on Moore/Norman and down through Little Axe, Purcell and other surrounding schools in that area. We are very excited! Judi Goldston and the TC presented the information last week at the Student Success Summit and plan on taking it around the state to educate. The hope is to expand as we go along. Working with the workforce centers as well is one of our many goals. In this Pre-Ets contract, we will be including peer mentoring as part of the contract along with the 5 required fields of the WIOA.

TC with Rick DeRennaux from Tech Now, Brian Zamarripa from the Tulsa office, Brandi Hurley and Tracy Brigham for Rick to show us his “newest” way for the students at OSB to build a car for STEM camp this summer. He did an amazing job and created templates for the students to utilize. Our very own Brian put the car together with little to no guidance and Brandi Hurley was blindfolded and it was equal. He has dedicated many hours and completely developed the idea on his own and for complete accessibility to our blind students. We are excited for him to present it at the OSB quarterly meeting in February 2019.

TC has attended, with OSB staff and Teresa McDermott, quarterly meetings at OSB to discuss the students and plan for current and future transition and employment needs.

TC attended Business Services Meeting and is always getting information from Fatos Floyd about new ideas for the Transition programs. There are plans to start a vending machine program in the Lawton district soon.

We are currently in the process of developing the summer programs, which consist of Camp WOW – June 10th – 14th for one week. Applications are being developed currently for accessibility.

We are currently in the process of developing flyers for STEM camps this summer as well. Working on accessibility, locations and date/times for the summer. This will include OSB and OSD again this year.

The new name for the summer employment program formerly known as iJobs is STEP, Summer Transition Employment Program. We don’t have a start date yet, but the flyers have been sent out for deadlines to applications and applications are being developed currently for accessibility. We will be having the STEP in Norman/Moore, Edmond and Owasso this year. We are bringing in 2 new counselors this year to learn how to begin and develop to include OKC and Lawton next year!

TC and Brandi Hurley will be having regional transition meetings in March for staff to learn more hands on about actual services and how to record them in AWARE as well as other training needs for transition counselors. These meetings will include PM’s, Counselors and Techs. We will be conducting 4 different meeting locations as Enid will be having a large unit meeting and we will attend her meeting to incorporate Woodward and Guymon areas. Dates will be March 23rd – April 3rd scattered in between!

TC sent out a quarterly Trendy Transition Newsletter for the counselors and Transition staff to keep them apprised of what is going on in Transition and what to be looking for.

We are working with Brett Jones on new brochures for Transition to include a parent brochure, a school brochure and one designed for the student. We are also, working on brochures to just focus on the programs that Transition currently has and will be doing.

TC and Brandi Hurley attended Senior Days at OSD with Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff to encourage, teach, present and mentor the young students who are leaving in May for college or other experiences. It was fun and we really appreciated the invitation from Jonathon Cook and his staff.

TC and Brandi have had multiple conversations state wide regarding students and guardians who have needed some guidance and assistance with getting their case moving along. We have met with schools and those guardians to be the “mediator” between the counselor and family. All has turned out well, but those meetings are happening and our staff are responding well to those request. Brandi and TC have offered to help take applications at parent nights and open houses for Project Search students so that we can have sufficient applicant numbers for the different programs.

TC and Brandi met with Lori Chesnut on January 29th to discuss the MOU with Department of Education to develop a strategic plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

**Business Services Program:**

BSP staff continued to forge relationships and create awareness of Business Services by attending and presenting to workforce partners and workforce business services committee meetings in the Tulsa and Altus areas.

BSP staff made visits to DRS unit meetings in Tulsa, Ardmore, OKC, McAlester and Enid

The first BSP internal committee meeting was held December 4 at state office with all the stake holders from various areas of the state, including VR and VS counselors, Program Managers and specialty area reps from Transition Services, and Assistive Technology.

December 21, the BSP Coordinator meet with Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance (manufacturing group) at Ditch Witch in Perry, OK and toured the facility. Reasonable Accommodation training was also provided to the group that day by Charles Watt.

BSP representatives also toured the following facilities in December and January;

Ebsco Spring, Tulsa, OK

Cintas, Tulsa

BSP staff represented DRS at the Innovative Employment Opportunity Council meeting in Tulsa January 3 and will be representing monthly.

BSP staff represented DRS at the Mosaic meeting at Oklahomans for Equality in Tulsa, OK January 15 and will be representing monthly.

Liaisons began working relationships with the Lions Club of Waurika, Ok; Davis Chamber of Commerce, Business Professional Women of Lawton and the Hispanic Resources Association of Tulsa.

Began work on the Asset Creation and Preservation for People with Disabilities Summit to be held April 24 and 25th in Norman, OK.

Business Advisory Council meetings were held in OKC, Tulsa and Lawton in the month of January.

BSP Coordinator and Area Liaison meet with President of the Lawton Chamber of Commerce

BSP was featured in the Lawton *Monday Minute* newsletter January 28

Kickoff of *Brown Bag Lunch and Learn* in the Tulsa area (open to businesses and the public) was held January 31 at Brookside Library.

**Business Enterprise Program (BEP):**

Interviews have been set for February 20 for the BEP Program Coordinator position.

We will begin the next training program for new managers after the new Program Coordinator has been hired.

Conducted a team meeting between MSD and BEP staff to refine processes regarding BEP inventory.

**Production:**

Title I:   Applications to date = 114       Cases in Service Status = 855        Cases in Delayed Status = 75          Successful Closures = 13

Older Blind:    Applications to date = 72           Plans Written = 57       Cases Currently Being Served = 321       Goals Met = 31

**Division Administrator Activities:**

Highlights---WINTAC/YTAC Pilot Project; SILC; Progressive Discipline Training; Blindness Agency Community of Practice Meeting; VR/VS Client Services Meeting; ETeam Meeting; VS FC/PM Field Services Meeting; CSAVR Call; MSD/BEP Inventory Meeting; VR/VS Client Services Meeting; OKC Disability Inclusion Initiative Meeting; Field Staff Territory Meeting; Client Success Stories; PreETS YTAC Discussion; Microburst Presentation; PM Interviews; Transition Meeting; ORCAM presentation; Eye Pathology Training for staff

Respectfully Submitted:

Tracy Brigham, MBS, LPC, Division Administrator