

## **Take a Look....Making a Difference Iowa Disability Program Navigator Success Stories – 9<sup>th</sup> Quarter**

There has been a fair amount of individuals just walk in to the One Stop Center wanting to speak with the Navigator about employment possibility, help with filling out paper work, asking about medical questions, asking about the Navigator program in more detail. I asked them where they heard about the Navigator, most replied from word of mouth or from a friend who had received services.

The Navigator, PJ/WIA counselor, and the IWD supervisor presented about One-Stop Services to 25 Family Development Specialist from our local Community Action program. These workers serve low income families to assist them in becoming self-sufficient. The 2 1/2 hour block was split between the three presenters. I (DPN) facilitated the meeting and presented on the core, intensive and training services available at the One-Stops and also briefly on the role of the Navigator. IWD and the PJ/WIA staff person presented on other resources available on-line to help people decide what type of work they would enjoy, then how to apply for those jobs on-line thru the I-Works which is Iowa's Labor-Matching program. The presentation went very well, and the FADSS workers expressed appreciation for the variety of resources available to them to use with families that they work with.

The chairperson of our local Chamber of Commerce is a fellow Rotarian. Recently, we worked together, along with several other organizations, to co-sponsor our local Community College Job Fair. We assisted others in setting up booths, and also helped host our own information tables for the Fair. Approximately 75 employers were present, and several hundred job-seekers walked thru the Job Fair.

After meeting with and introducing the role of the Navigator to a local psychiatric clinic, the Navigator has received a considerable amount of referrals of job seekers who have never used the one-stop before.

Got placed on local SHRM list serve where I will be able to share disability training opportunities and act as a disability resource for these employers.

This customer was referred to Navigator by local CIL: Female; late 20's; Japanese; bipolar disorder and a temporary disability (broken ankle). This individual was a transfer student to a local college where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology. Upon graduation she was faced with the challenge of having to find a job in her field of study or she would loose her temporary citizenship. I referred her to the New Iowan Center to address her citizenship issues. I assisted her with getting registered with the workforce and equipped her the information that she would need to obtain her job readiness skills. Recently, through her job searching on the internet, she was invited to go to Chicago to interview for a human service agency who was looking for someone who was bi-lingual (English/Japanese). I have recently received an e-mail from her stating that she is going to be moving to Chicago to start her new job within the next week.

This Deaf person has been looking for a job over 2 years. I referred him to VR, SSI ticket to work, Independent Living Center, and Deaf Service Commission of Iowa. He has already got 5 interviews in one week and this is a good start.

Another deaf person moved here from out of state and was not familiar to this area. I referred her to many partner agencies. She is now going to Iowa Western Community College, taking some GED classes. She has not been in school for 25 years. Shes very excited to learn more and be able to get a job after she gets GED.

Worked closely with Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and Vocational Rehabilitation client to find alternative funding sources for the clients medical needs associated with his prosthetic leg. Vocational Rehabilitation was only able to fund his medical needs associated with this once a year and the client would need modifications to his prosthetic done every six months which his insurance would not cover. I was able to connect the client with the Limbs for Life Program and also the Barr Foundation Amputee Assistance Fund which would be able to provide him a grant to help him afford the needs associated with his prosthetic. Once he was able to secure funding for his medical needs he was able to continue his education at the community college to further his career opportunities

I was contacted by Manpower Inc. in Burlington and was asked to provide information on short-term disability insurance along with information on how to apply for SSDI and SSI through the Social Security Administration. Manpower has a temporary employee with cancer and she needed to know all her options available so that she could make the best decision regarding insurance and work. I provided the information needed to the Manpower Staffing Specialist and told them that if they ever needed any other disability related information to contact the navigator or refer their employees to the navigator program.

Social Security Area Work Incentive Coordinator agreed to serve on our Transition Task Force. He has attended monthly meetings, shared information and provided expanded training opportunities. This has resulted in a more positive relationship between numerous community providers and Social Security as well as a more personal face to SSA.

One day of partnered community outreach between Navigator and Disabled Vet Rep. resulted in expanded networking among agencies in outlying counties. Navigator and Vet Rep. each made introductions to known contacts and shared updates with 11 agencies in 3 counties.

Navigator arranged training on apprenticeships by DOL representative for over 20 attendees from the Employer Development Network group including Partners, staff and community job developers for persons with disabilities. As a result, more employers will have information re: apprenticeships as all members focus on job placements.

Navigator was asked to participate in a County Management Planning Board. This team is in charge of planning how money will be spent for people with disabilities in their counties. The team represents three of the 8 counties that I serve. In looking at their budget and how funds have been spent over the last couple of years I noticed that there was little to no money spent on Supported or Community Employment but rather it was used to fund more sheltered work services. I spoke with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation and was told that many times they are willing to fund a person for supported employment but because that county will not pay for follow-up they can not proceed with their services. I approached the team on switching this focus and concentrating more on employing people in the community. Although the team agreed that this needs to be the focus I feel it will be on-going discussion.

Navigator assisted a local Human Resources person to better understand requirements under the ADA. We had a gentleman that was working with Employment Services through Iowa Workforce Development to get a job at a local company. He did not pass the physical that was required by the company. We assisted the employer to understand that the physical did not have anything to do with the essential functions of the job that the individual had applied for. We asked that the individual be given a chance to show them that he could perform all the tasks required. They did that and the individual was hired.

Continuing to work on a project with a local Community Rehabilitation Provider to provide training to individuals they serve to become successfully employed. We are writing curriculum to be taught through their program.

IVRS referred an individual that had questions about how work would affect her SSI. She was on the waiting list but really wanted to get to work so she could move to a different town. She was looking for employment in that community. IVRS could not do a lot with her and she wanted to do something as soon as possible. I spoke with IVRS and we found that she was eligible for the older worker program in our area. She was referred by IVRS and now holds a job as a receptionist.

Navigator provided information on disability-related tax credits and deductions for employers at two employment fairs. One employment fair was in Red Oak, IA and one employment fair in Creston at South Western Community College.

A One-Stop customer with has some mental health issues called me and told me that she has decided to go back to school to get her bachelors degree. She had met with me about 8 months ago and told me that she has an associate's degree from the local community college. The particular job that she wanted at that time required a bachelor's degree. We discussed a variety of different ways that she could get her bachelors degree including getting it online. Two months ago she told me that she was in the middle of moving to another house, but she was very excited to tell me that she had enrolled with a college where she would be able to get her bachelors degree online and would start in the fall of 2006

In Iowa the counties have responsibility of funding services to individuals with entitlement programs. Each county has a central point of coordination and they invite stakeholders for input on local planning. In three of the counties, the navigator was asked to provide a presentation about “changing times”, employment trends and ideas that would assist the stakeholders in being creative looking at future service delivery options that tap into non- traditional partnerships. Thus the navigator was invited to be part of a task force to look at gap of services and how to address the gaps in the county strategic plan.

The navigator is a member of the Transition Advisory Board for local educational agency. A simplified matrix was created by the group for use by educational professionals working with youth in transition and the navigator actively assisted in this special project. This matrix has become so widely accepted, it is now being used as a tool by many related agencies who work with youth who have disabilities. In addition the navigator was asked to be part of a panel presentation with area community college, voc rehab, and community rehab providers to educate personnel from local educational agency about one stop services to youth with disabilities.

The navigator is part of the Northeast Employers Council of Iowa planning committee and instrumental in planning events for the HR professionals and employers in the area. When events are planned, the navigator is always assuring the services are accessible to all interested parties and also able to introduce and announce employment and disability related information to the business community on a monthly and ongoing basis. The navigator was also asked to supply “employment and disability related” articles to local Chamber of Commerce monthly newsletters and a live radio interview as well.

Navigator got a call from Health Services Coordinator of Northeast Iowa Community Action office asking for assistance for a WIC recipient who is deaf. They wanted information on sign language interpreters, etc., etc. I gave them contacts on numerous resources for people who are deaf. I also offered to them they could use the “Interpretype” communication device here at IWD in Decorah, if they knew if the person uses a keyboard. Within minutes the staff person was here for me to demonstrate how it works. They used it for the appointment and reported it worked well and wanted to know if they could use again in 3 months. This is just one example of how you can use the services of the Navigator and also how we can share our resources.

According to local direction by our manager in Region 8, I have started working the P.J.(Promise Jobs- the employment service for Iowa’s TANF program) clients who are on disability; along with our VR counselors. The navigator has become more visible in the Promise Job area. We are collaborating on the Iowa Advantage workshops together the third week of each month with other one-stop partners in IWD, P.J., and the Navigator positions. I see it as a positive and sharing experience working as a team.

A young man who was always at the resource computer just outside my office asked for my help. I was puzzled by the fact that he was a laborer setting up monuments on call. He seemed to have the ability to find a better job and was getting very frustrated. One day he came in and was very angry. He found out his boss was told about his past substance abuse problem. I encouraged him when he calmed down to visit with his boss the next day and clear things up. Fortunately he had applied for a position as a loader for Sara Lee Bakery during the night hours at \$16.00 + health insurance and was called in for an interview and hired. The reason he took the evening position was that he has a hearing problem and cannot work with a lot of people at a time. Six months later he is doing very well at his job and is now training another employee. Two weeks ago he came in a big smile on his face thanked all of us for our help and encouragement.

As a result of increased contact with the local CIL, there has been a change in the relationship between the one stop and the CIL. The CIL is located in Illinois, but also serves Iowa. They had not been as familiar with services in Iowa. With discussions between the Navigator and the CIL, they are more aware of Iowa resources. We are also working together to train One-stop staff on different disability topics.

The Navigator provided training to TANF case managers on Social Security Work Incentives and Job Accommodation Network.

A local employer approached the Navigator about an employee that had requested a job accommodation. The employee had a medical condition that required more frequent breaks, building accessibility, and workspace accessibility. The Navigator provided the employer information on JAN and some specific job accommodation ideas as well as addressing some of the accommodations with universal design to benefit all employees. The Navigator provided the employer with information on tax incentives. The employer worked with the employee to make the needed accommodations and some of them were made universal to all employees, including the option of splitting up their break time to allow for more frequent breaks.

The local Emergency Management Director in Fort Dodge asked navigator to provide information on hiring of persons with disabilities. He wanted to consider hiring a person with MS who is a wheel chair user and receiving SSDI. He had concerns about ADA and how work affects SSDI. Also he wanted to know about disability etiquette so as not to be offensive. I was able to provide information and also referred him to JAN and the potential employee to BPAO services. After getting the information and feeling comfortable about the situation the employer interviewed the person and has hired him as an operations manager.

The Navigator became a member of the Webster County Disability Alliance Strategic Planning Group and helped to develop a plan to provide information to employers on employment of persons with disabilities. We have begun to implement our plan and myself and the IVRS supervisor will present to an employer group in May'06.

The Navigator's relationship with the mental health and substance abuse providers in the region has greatly improved and I participated in a Decision Accelerator Workshop to assist with revamping the services provided to residents in Pottawattamie County. I asked to participate in order to coordinate the employment needs of persons with mental health and substance abuse issues with their treatment. This is an ongoing project and will continue for the next 6 months.

John Doe is a gentleman in Sioux City who has been "underemployed" most of his working years. He has epilepsy, and no other known disabilities. He has always told employers during the initial interview of his epilepsy—even at times writing it on the job application. He did not understand why he was having such a difficult time finding employment. His family heard about me, and thought I may be able to help him. I visited with him, and the biggest advice I gave him was that his health information was his, and that he isn't required to give it all away—especially in the initial job interview. That he only needs to disclose when requesting an accommodation. I suggested he apply for services through IVRS and talk to the CIL. He did both, and began seeking employment in his degree field—he found employment. He doubled his income. After employment he sat down with the manager to let them know of his epilepsy—just in case of a seizure. No problems have occurred.

The Navigator is working with rural county Community Employment Committee to transition all consumers from sheltered to community employment. Providing multiple resources as support.

The Navigator coordinated with BPAO to assist two individuals to start businesses.

Navigator provided resources for individual to move from supported employment to post-secondary education and then on to self-sufficiency.

The Navigator was accepted on Business Service Team creating complete access to all business activities to coordinate business outreach.