

## **Business Specialist**

### **March 2019**

Expansion has occurred with the business specialist position in an effort to align business development efforts and to increase capacity for business services. We have a state-wide Resource Manager of business operations (Michelle Krefft), which is focused on national and state initiatives as well as two specialist positions, one in Iowa City/Cedar Rapids (Melissa Copeland-Silver) and one in Des Moines, Central Iowa (Ashlee Cummings). We have seen significant progress related to linkages with businesses impacting our pre-employment transition hours as well as business accounts that directly led to a number of successful employment outcomes.

During our 2018 state fiscal year, IVRS has fully implemented the dual customer approach and continues to infuse business outreach activities into local and state plans resulting in strengthened business relationships statewide.

These relationships enhance the counselor's understanding of business expectations and are directly connected to the planning process with consumers. It has been found that by increasing business involvement throughout the rehabilitation process, job candidates have better information to make informed choice decisions on their career plans, a clearer career pathway in their chosen goal area and connections for work experience in this area. An additional result is a broader range of employment opportunities available, including work-based learning and training opportunities for our students.

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation is committed to serving business and industry as a valued customer, and in the past year, demonstrated this commitment through a wide range of activities and service delivery.

### **Training Process**

For the past two years, our organization has focused on training. Not only training our staff, but our workforce partners and community rehabilitation providers. It is important when we serve business and industry that we are united to meet business needs. Our training focuses on the importance of a business relationship and meeting business needs with our job candidates, versus just making placements that do not result in long-term employment. We begin with a business intake to learn about the business and move into doing a job analysis/task analysis so that we can make recommendations to help the business. This training is done classroom style as well as in the business community – learning by doing with mentoring. Our business partners are involved in this training as well.

As a result of training, staff and partners have learned the value of the job analysis, which has helped in making a better match for job candidates. Both IVRS staff and community partners have completed more job analyses since being trained. We have had several customized outcomes as a result of staff doing a better analysis with Iowa businesses!

A good job analysis, for example, requires:

- observing worksites;
- interviewing employees and their managers;
- documenting tasks step-by-step; etc.

When staff implement this process, we begin to see potential solutions. For example: We learned that the needs of a business was qualified applicants. Our solution was to connect them to the local high school. Through conversation with this business and the school district, we were able to change some of the welding curriculum at the high school to better prepare students for the current industry demands. Additionally, we were able to identify a student that would make a great employee and he began work based-learning during his fifth year of high school. This allowed him to receive real-life work experience in advanced manufacturing with the support of his high school job coach. As he gained in confidence and skills, he was hired by the company. Another candidate was able to also start working there and our business consultant is working with the company to connect them to more high schools in the area to create career opportunities for our students while giving the business access to their future workforce.

The IVRS Director of Business Relations has been involved in training staff at many levels – including state, regional and national conferences and webinars. In-person trainings include: Iowa Association of Providers conference and the Iowa APSE (Association of Persons Supporting Employment First) conference and the IRA conference (Iowa Rehabilitation Association).

Another exciting project that developed from our business partnerships was the development of a financial literacy program. The World Disability Institute (WDI) director came to Iowa to train on Financial Empowerment for people with Disabilities twice this year. These trainings included our high schools, community colleges, workforce and community partners as well as business and industry.

IVRS gained national exposure through a connection with the Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation; Iowa's efforts were highlighted at the spring national conference with our business partnership with Kwik Star/Kwik Trip. This led to an appearance of our job candidate, Julie Propp, at the Dirksen Building in Washington DC for a Federal Briefing hosted by CSAVR. IVRS was also mentioned in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* as well as the *Chicago Tribune* for employment efforts to help people with the most significant disabilities.

#### IVRS and the Employer Disability Resource Network

The Employer Disability Resource Network (EDRN) has been designed to increase the employment of persons with disabilities by pooling agency resources and providing technical expertise to employers throughout Iowa. Members of this group include staff from IVRS, the Department for the Blind, Veteran's Administration, Small Business Administration, Division of Persons with Disabilities, Workforce Development, Community Rehabilitation Providers, Drake University, and Iowa Medicaid. Persons from high school transition age to the aging population are represented.

Members of EDRN have presented to individual employers as well as employer organizations throughout the state. This group has been active in hosting Reverse Career Fairs for Iowans with disabilities to showcase and highlight their skills and talents to business partners.

Placement from the job fairs held in Des Moines is at 26%.

This is significant since participants in these fairs include individuals with a long history of unemployment and more significant barriers to employment. The innovation of reversing roles allowed our candidates to present their skills to business rather than a traditional interview.

As a part of the Reverse Career Fair, we are also hosting summits to help educate business partners on the benefits of diversity in their workforce. In Iowa, with low unemployment rates, business and industry are considering populations that they traditionally did not pursue in hiring.

These efforts are integrated into Future Ready Iowa strategies and are consistent with goals and objectives of that statewide effort. With the limited number of work-ready job candidates, the summit agenda was geared toward emphasizing the benefits to employers of hiring people with disabilities. IVRS is striving to create these connections during this economic opportunity.

## **December 2017**

Melissa Copeland-Silver was hired as a business specialist in the Iowa City Area Office and began employment in May, 2017. Initial focus was increasing familiarity with staff employment needs, local business demands and possible connections to build career pathway business connections for pre-employment transition services. Business relationships are being formed and followed up upon with coordination occurring among area office staff. The Iowa City Area office took the lead in hosting a Governor Sponsored Future Ready Iowa event focused on Iowa City High School.

The agenda for the meeting included:

1. Welcome to fourth of four stops on the Future Ready Iowa Tour – Principal John Bacon, who introduces moderator Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator David Mitchell
2. Roundtable discussion including introductions – David Mitchell will moderate (Panelists: Governor Reynolds, Lt. Governor Gregg, Principal CEO Dan Houston, three high school students, a business representative, and school special education work-based learning coordinator Tom Braverman, or Judy Warth, who is an Iowa City-wide work-based learning coordinator.)
3. Q&A with audience– David Mitchell will coordinate Q and A
4. Closing remarks – Governor Reynolds - David will invite the governor to close

The Iowa City staff did an excellent job in organizing and preparation for the event with inclusion of key business, community rehabilitation partners and local high school staff/students.

The Iowa City Area Office also hosted a summer work readiness event for students related to pre-employment transition services. Work readiness skills and interview skills were addressed in their summer programming which concluded in interview and application gathering sessions at the Coralville Mall.

The goal of the Business Specialist position was to focus area office efforts at increasing business outreach efforts through mentoring and direct consultation along with enhancing pre-employment transition efforts through improved career pathway connections.

This will continue to be reviewed and monitored through the months ahead.

## **March 2017**

No progress has been made with the Business Specialist position. We had targeted hiring an individual to be domiciled in the Iowa City Area Office and assigned responsibilities in the Iowa City and Cedar Rapids corridor. There were delays in obtaining approval for the hiring and then the first round of interviews did not result in a candidate, therefore, the position was re-opened.

Changes have occurred in the scope of the position to focus on our transition work based learning process and integrate the position as closely as possible for tracking Required Activities under our Pre-Employment Transition Resources. This should be a good way to connect value to business, establish career pathways and improve career readiness for our students with disabilities. The position will track hours through a daily report to distinguish time tracking.

Interviewing for the second round is scheduled for March with the goal to have someone in place sometime in April, 2017.

## **AUGUST 2016**

### Strategic Plan Website Training Specialist

A Position Description Questionnaire has been developed for enhancing the delivery of business services to improve capacity for field staff as well as to better meet the needs of our business partners. The Power Point presentation discusses the rationale for the program and was based upon work being done through the RSA Technical Assistance Center. IVRS is planning to move this forward in select area offices on a trial basis during the next year.