IVRS and DNR begin partnership to employ Iowans with Disabilities

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is putting its commitment to diversity into action by partnering with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) and providing training and employment opportunities to Iowans with disabilities.

Last summer IVRS and DNR began to explore customized training for individuals who had the potential to become skilled candidates for state employment. As a part of the program IVRS provided DNR hiring managers with pre-screened referrals and also acted as a consultant in the development of a training plan. The goal of the training was threefold: to teach the trainee specific skills of a job that would help them obtain employment; to help DNR develop a potential pool of qualified candidates; and to help IVRS rehabilitation counselors assess the trainee's ability to perform certain work.

Clockwise from top left: IVRS Counselor Becky Lofstedt, Steve Nussbaum, Donna Gomm, IVRS Counselor Monty South, Mary Davis and Racheal Bradley.

Below: Mary Davis at work for Americorps helping Iowa flood Victims.

Monty South, an IVRS counselor who helped three people find opportunities at DNR through the new partnership said, "As a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with IVRS, I have found our partnership with Iowa's Department of Natural Resources to be extremely rewarding for the qualified clients we serve. The Customized Training partnership has helped with measuring my client's soft skills, identifying vocational strengths and weaknesses, providing on-the-job skills training, and improving their confidence level to help maintain a suitable job. I have three very successful candidates in training with DNR. One has been hired and the other two are strong candidates for future hiring. I think this partnership is a win-win-win for IVRS clients, IVRS, and DNR."

Mary Davis was one of the first candidates referred to DNR. She started her training in a data entry position in the Landowner/Tenant Program last September and was hired as an employee with DNR's AmeriCorps Program in January, 2009.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources recognizes the benefit of working with IVRS in reaching their workforce goals.

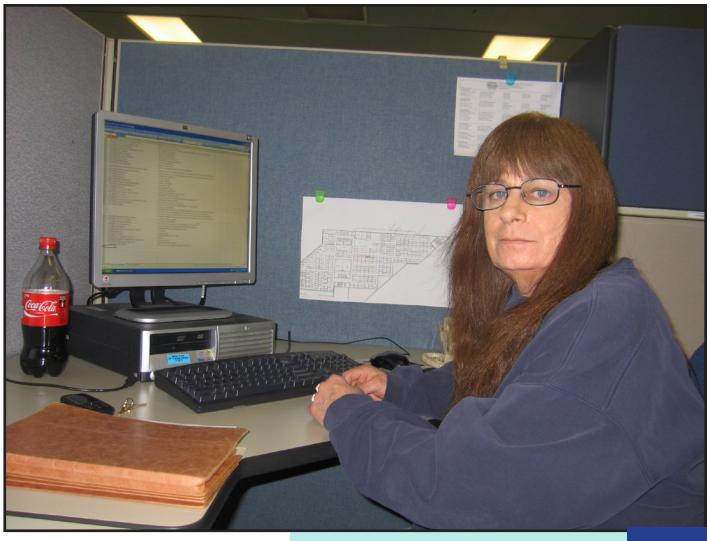
DNR Workforce Planning Coordinator, Jane Mild said, "A partnership with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services seemed to be advantageous to both the DNR and IVRS, but I really didn't understand how valuable it would be to my programs. Through the support and guidance of IVRS counselors, DNR bureau supervisors completed the customized training agreements and the trainees began working. "

Jane initially supervised Mary in her training with a data project.

"After that data project ended, I was in need of some additional administrative support that required someone who was detail–oriented and able to work with a wide variety of people," Jane said. "I thought of Mary as a candidate right away."

Mary had over 25 years of work experience when the office she worked for closed in 2006. Today she has found a new work direction through the DNR's AmeriCorps programs to help flood victims in Iowa.

"After the floods I thought, "I wish I could help"."



Mary said. Now in her new position, she can fulfill that wish.

"I really like the fact that I can be part of rebuilding Cedar Rapids and Cedar Falls. It fits my interests and I'm glad to help in some way," she said.

Another IVRS referral, Racheal Bradley, started as a trainee in DNR's Law Enforcement division last October. Racheal had previous work experience as a secretary and a medical records technician, but with a gap in her work history, she needed to update her skills. With her new experiences at DNR she's been able to update and add new skills to her portfolio.

"I'm still learning a lot of new stuff," Racheal said. "It's a wide variety of things that I do and I learn something new every day. There's so much opportunity here."

Last December Donna Gomm began training in the Wastewater Section where she is learning skills in mail, scanning and spreadsheets.

"I've done a lot of different things – I'm not bored," she said. "I've learned about variances, codes and laws."

IVRS Counselor Becky Lofstedt referred Steve Nussbaum to DNR's Records Center last September. Steve had some prior experience in a records department and his DNR Supervisor Amy Oliver said he is a great addition to the department.

"We're taking our department from paper to electronic," she said. "Our biggest mission is to build a database. A lot of the work is very detailed and that's a great strength of Steve."

Steve has learned new skills working with Microsoft Excel 2007 to build an electronic inventory of records. With these updated skills Steve hopes to find competitive employment within DNR or another state agency very soon.

Steve agrees that his position is a "good fit."

He said the best part of his job is that, "People here are great!"

Above Left: Racheal Bradley
Above Right: Donna Gomm
Below: Steve Nussbaum

"The people here are great!"
- Steve Nussbaum

It's a partnership that's yielding success for everyone involved. The DNR is open to additional training opportunities across the state this summer.

For more information on how IVRS can assist your organization by providing qualified candidates, customized training and consultation services for achieving diversity, please contact our Employment Partnership Consultant, Barb McClannahan at 515-281-0264.