

Addressing Recruitment and Retention in VR

Oklahoma

Melinda Fruendt (MF): Okay. Thank you Dee. Real quickly, I did want to indicate that we are our own designated state agency that I'm a director of. And we have two divisions, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and our Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We have two division administrators over VR is Mr. Mark Kennison and over Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired is Miss Tracy Brigham. Next slide please.

MF: We have been experiencing all the same key issues as all the other states. Our compensation, you know, we hadn't had pay increases. We have been having state reduction of fringe benefits, which was setting us about 20% below the market value. And we were experiencing key vacancies in our council ranks, recruitment difficulties, and organizational culture. Next slide. Under, we did ask as mentioned by John Walsh earlier, we asked Ron and John to be able to come in a year ago this month of April. And they conducted a one day workshop on organizational change, which was coupled with a part of our leadership retreat. And it was also connected to looking at our agencies culture change initiative. We brought them back in May for two days to talk about organizational change. This second session focused on defining priorities for change, beginning to form guiding teams to facilitate change and for the work of the group on their change vision for the organization. Next slide. In looking at our employee engagement, we, they did provide us training and resources to be able to conduct our own employee engagement surveys, to collect data on a level of employee engagement in the agency, and also to have actionable items to increase retention of staff. Next slide.

MF: Since then, actually, we were in the process during that time of changing our requirements for the VR counselor positions. We have since added the degrees of psychology, behavioral science, marital and family therapy, school counseling or special education, or any counseling related field. Next slide. We are maintaining our CSPD in our state standard, by the way. And then we expended our acceptable certifications and licensures. That now includes an addition to the CRC, the LPC and the CVE and PVE. We have added licensed behavioral practitioner, licensed marriage and family therapist, school counselor certification, and certification in special education. Next slide. We also, we added, with additions to the certifications and licensure, we expanded our opportunity to award a 5% skill-based pay differential to those employees who possess any of these credentials. Next slide. Under that compensation base change, we provided significant pay adjustments over the previous two years. On July 1st of 22, I actually was able to give a 10% pay raise across our entire agency, but on July 1 of 2023, we did another pay increase where the majority of our staff received 10% adjustments, with some receiving higher increases, such as 15%, which went to our VR technicians, our VR immediate supervisors, business enterprise program consultants and technicians. And then I was able to bump up 26% to our VR counselors, assistive technology specialists business liaisons, and there were a few other one-off type positions. All those these pay increases undoubtedly have had some effect on our recruitment through attraction of greater numbers of applicants.

MF: These gains were offset by somewhat higher turnover, which is due to the number of factors in addition to the pay. Unfortunately or consequently, looking back at July 1 of last year to current time, there has not been a noticeable improvement on our vacancy rate, but this is really not surprising to us because we did expect that we would take at least a year, if not a two-year process, to be able to either regain or obtain new individuals. Next slide. We have put into place a recruitment and outreach coordinator that is dedicated to the two divisions I mentioned, and I will take the time to go over this person's job title and what the expectations are, but this person does supervise by both of our division administrators. Next slide.

MF: And last, I would just like to mention out of the work with John and Ron, our teams out of Voc Rehab and the Services for the Blind have implemented three change teams, and those are recruitment and retention, organizational culture, and process improvement. Back to you, John.