

The Voice

Vision-Opportunities-Innovation-Choices-Expertise

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Message from Dacia Johnson, Executive Director

This summer Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). The Commission for the Blind is Oregon's workforce provider for individuals who are blind to receive specialized rehabilitation services through the US Department of Education. We are looking forward to the implementation of WIOA in the coming months as the legislation intends to place stronger emphasis on services for youth in transition out of school and alignment/joint planning and collaboration of agencies within the workforce system. Oregonians who are blind are ready to enter the workforce and participate in the economy and rehabilitation services are often the key for individuals being able to get and keep a job. I hope to identify ways to increase access to jobs and careers for Oregonians who are blind through this recent legislation.



The Oregon Commission for the Blind is actively engaged in the budget development process for 15-17. This is an opportunity for us to align the strategic vision and direction of the Commission for the Blind with the Governor's 10 year plan for Oregon and the budget request is a direct reflection of that alignment. We are focusing on two key initiatives that are based on stakeholder input and priorities. Oregonians who are blind want timely services that are available statewide.

continued from pg 1

They also want the full range of services that allow them to be fully independent, including braille, technology and white cane travel/mobility. As the sole resource in Oregon for adults needing these critical services, the Commission has called on the agency to develop a budget that will stabilize funding and service delivery, expand services to address the increasing need for seniors who are experiencing vision loss and strengthen the infrastructure that supports businesses in Oregon that are part of the agency's Business Enterprise Program. These investments save the state resources in other programs that aren't needed because Oregonians who are blind are doing things for themselves, working, paying taxes and participating in the economy.

This edition of the newsletter features the Commission for the Blind's Summer Work Experience Program(SWEP). This program combines the opportunity for working in the community with an experience of living independently in a dormitory setting among peers. Youth have the chance to work for the first time in jobs that allow them to demonstrate their skills and abilities. They may also be preparing their first meal, doing their first load of laundry and taking their first trip independently on public transportation. All of these experiences create building blocks toward instilling skills and confidence in young people who are blind who desire to work and live independently as adults.

I know you will enjoy hearing about the SWEP program and its impact on those who participate. This program is made possible through collaborations with the Northwest Regional Program Education Service District, the Blind and Visually Impaired Student Fund, and Portland Public School's Regional Program and school districts throughout the state. SWEP is about making an investment in the development of Oregon's future workforce; demonstrating that vision loss should not be a barrier to pursuing life and career goals and full independence.

Introduction to the Summer Work Experience Program SWEP 2014...



Portland SWEP student of the year: Devon Appling

The Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) has been providing students throughout Oregon the opportunity to attend the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) for over 30 years. This is a program in which students develop employment related skills on the job through paid work experiences at

businesses throughout Salem, Portland and surrounding areas. These students also take part in social, educational and recreational experiences that expand their thinking around what is possible for those who experience vision loss. Students in this program make invaluable life-long friendships with peers who have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to live with vision loss. They learn alongside one another and from one another.

Upon exiting Salem SWEP, each student has an associated comprehensive report that is provided to their vocational counselor and their regional program. This allows for continuity of training for these students as they move back into the school year and ensures skills learned during SWEP are practiced, maintained and built upon throughout the school year. Through this sharing of information, SWEP staff, counselors and regional programs work hand-in-hand with students and their families to ensure students are able to progress toward independence, employment and full/productive lives.



Salem SWEP @ YMCA

continued pg 3



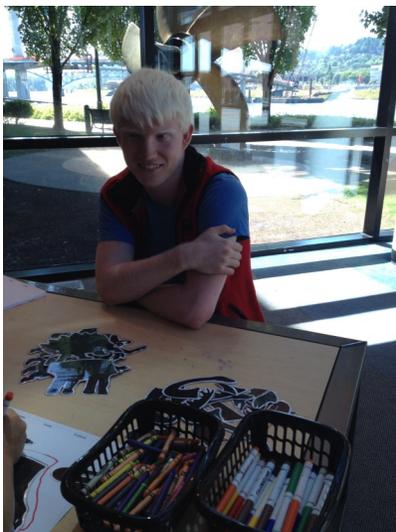
Jesus Garcia feeding giraffe @ Zoo

Portland SWEP:

The Portland SWEP is a six week intensive program in which participating students are housed at Portland State University and get the opportunity to work in the community. The students maintain employment at various businesses locations within the Portland Metro area and work approximately 30 hours each week.

This year our SWEP employers included the Oregon Zoo, OMSI, Tessa's Coffee Corner, YMCA Child Care Center, Portland Development Commission, PSU Little Vikings Drop-in Child Care, and the Multnomah County Courthouse "Coffee Court". These employers provided students with invaluable work experience and professional skills that they will carry with them into their futures.

During the first week of Portland SWEP, the students attended orientation in which they are provided training by vocational rehabilitation staff on what it takes to research and prepare for a job. Students developed their resume, worked on job interview skills, met with their employers to ask questions and learn about employment expectations. During this first week, students were also provided orientation and mobility (white cane travel) training by OCB mobility specialists in order to learn routes to and from their worksites and to key locations throughout Portland.



Devon Appling @ OMSI Dinosaur Exhibit

SWEP students were also provided a Wednesday evening class focused on college preparation. In these sessions students learned about advocacy, services available through OCB, financial aid and scholarships, organizational/note-taking skills, how to work with disability services, information about specific colleges, etc. Students also had the unique opportunity to meet professional mentors with vision loss who had completed their degrees and were now working successfully in the community.

continued from pg 4

Portland SWEP is designed to give students experience living independently in a dorm setting. Students learned to create and maintain a budget based on the money they earned as a result of their work. They were responsible for planning, shopping for and preparing their own meals. They were expected to keep their laundry, bathrooms, kitchens and common area clean. Students were provided with training and coaching as needed in order to maintain or develop their skills around task of daily living/independent living skills.



Mahdi Saad @ OMSI Dinosaur Exhibit

In addition, the students participated in many exciting and challenging activities. Among the students' favorites this year were the Iron

Chef challenges, self-defense class, white-water rafting, mini-golf, and the challenge course.



Sierra Burgess w/ Little Vikings childcare

Portland SWEP 2014 concluded with an awards ceremony to acknowledge the students' hard work and to recognize their employers' generosity in granting the opportunity to gain real life work experience. As a result of this year's program, some of our students were even offered per-

manent positions at their places of employment—which is a strong testament to our students, our staff and our participating employers!

Salem SWEP:



Salem SWEP is a five-week intensive program in which students are housed at the Oregon School for the Deaf and work in/around the Salem area. Students worked approximately 30 hours a week and got the opportunity to gain new independent living skills and also tackled new exciting challenges alongside peers who experienced vision loss. Students worked in a variety of jobs and employers gave very positive feedback about their work and the inspiration and motivation they brought to all those at their worksites.



continued from pg 5

This year worksites included: Black Rock Coffee Bar, Bureau of Land Management Campground at Fisherman's Bend, Family YMCA of Marion & Polk Counties, Grocery Outlet, Marion-Polk Food Share, Salem's Friends of Felines, Sal's Cafeteria, and The Salvation Army.

During the first week of Salem SWEP, students attended orientation where they were provided training by vocational rehabilitation staff on the necessary skills, abilities, and personal conduct to prepare for employment. They identified how their individual skills and interests fit into various careers and learned effective ways in which to pursue those areas of interest. Students had the chance to speak with various representatives from Cherriots, Access Technology Inc., The Kroc Center, and Marion County Health Department to learn about their services and potential employment opportunities. Students were also provided orientation and mobility assessment and training in and around the Oregon School for the Deaf's campus. Those students who were able to travel independently were given additional training on how to get to and from their worksites to the dorm and other key locations in Salem.

Salem SWEP is also designed to assess and train students around living independently in a dorm setting. Students were assessed and trained on: budgeting (using the money earned in their work experience), planning meals in a team, shopping, preparing meals, doing laundry and cleaning bedrooms/bathrooms/kitchens/common areas. Staff supported students in growing these skills and students exited the program with noticeably increased aptitudes in these areas.

Students participated in many recreational/social activities. Among the students' favorites this year were golfing and their time in Portland with Portland SWEP students getting oriented to the dorm/campus and getting to know their peers in the Portland program. Salem SWEP 2014 concluded with an awards ceremony to acknowledge the students' hard work and to recognize their employers' generosity in granting the opportunity to gain real life work experience. Employers personally commended the students who worked for them and many requested individual students back if they return to the program next year.

Conclusion for Portland and Salem SWEP:

SWEP students of 2014 made a lasting impression on the employers they worked for and the cities they worked in; securing a strong foundation for future SWEP students, staff, and employers to continue building a program that exudes excellence and forges pathways for persons with disabilities in Oregon to gain and retain meaningful employment for years to come. With SWEP 2014 successfully concluded, students and staff are already gearing up and getting excited for SWEP 2015!

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**OREGON
COMMISSION
FOR THE
BLIND**

“Expanding Opportunities for
Oregonians with Vision Loss”

Do you know that Blind Oregonians...

Have jobs, careers and participate in their communities

Engage in leisure, recreational, and volunteer activities

Travel independently, read, and experience life to the fullest

For over 50 years, the Oregon Commission for the Blind has been a resource for visually impaired Oregonians, as well as their families, friends, and employers. We have nationally recognized programs and staff that make a difference in peoples lives every day.

Our vision is to achieve full inclusion of visually impaired people in society. Towards this aim, we help people make informed choices about their individual goals and plans.

These aspirations ultimately lead to successful employment, independent living, and social self-sufficiency. For Cecelia (pictured), success meant learning skills that al-



lowed her to keep her job as a forensic scientist and be come an expert witness on DNA fingerprinting.