



‘Another set of eyes’: A day with a transition JPPO

This story is part of a new occasional series shadowing Oregon Youth Authority employees, to help people learn more about what others at the agency do.

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** NOTE: We are not identifying youth in this story by name to protect their privacy.*

It’s 12:30 p.m. on a recent Thursday, and Heidi Lung is multitasking to the extreme. She’s sitting with a youth in the conference room at the Marion County field office, helping him fill out an online food stamps application on her laptop. Between that and texting another youth about whether they can meet up later, she’s eating her lunch from Café Yumm.

The youth sitting next to her, J.C.*, is more concerned about checking Facebook on his cell phone, but Heidi tries to return his focus to the application. As his transition juvenile parole/probation officer, it’s her job to connect him with the services and support he will need to succeed when he leaves OYA custody.

And she doesn’t have much time left. J.C. has been out of MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility for a week, and his time with OYA ends in just three days. He’s 19, has no family to return to, and initially told his treatment team his plans upon release were to “live in a public bathroom.”

“It’s been a whirlwind of trying to get him services over the past two weeks since he learned he officially would parole to Salem,” Lung says. “He wanted to live in Salem, but he literally has nobody and nowhere to go. We needed to find him a place to live, get him a bank account, a bike, an Oregon ID, and a storage unit for his stuff. His entire life was stored away in boxes waiting for him to get out of the facility.”

Lung is one of five transition JPPOs located across the state who provide extra support to youth as they



Transition JPPO Heidi Lung (left) meets with a guidance counselor at a local high school to talk about a youth’s academic record.

transition out of OYA custody. They don’t replace youths’ assigned POs; instead, those POs can call on Lung or one of her four counterparts as an additional resource.

“They’re not managing the cases — they’re enhancing the cases,” says Jim Kramer, chief of parole/probation operations. “Our regular POs like to do transition work, but they don’t always have time, and often they are located far away from the youth on their caseload.

“The transition POs are focused solely on youth who are or will be living in their region, and they can do more to generate resources there. Their job is to build relationships with families and community partners, and to be another set of eyes making recommendations.”

These are just a few of the things Lung has done since she took the position on rotation last fall: taken youth to job fairs and employment orientations; taught them how to build a resume despite not having paid work experience; helped them dress and rehearse for job interviews; connected them with drug or alcohol

treatment services; and helped them apply for college admission and financial aid.

After Lung finishes her recent meeting with J.C., she hops into the car to head to a Salem high school. She's got a 2 p.m. appointment with a guidance counselor and the foster grandmother of another youth, D.L. The 15-year-old recently left a residential program to live with his grandma, and school has been a challenge.

That's understandable, Lung says. It's D.L.'s first time in public school for several years, and his first time ever in high school.

Lung, the counselor and D.L.'s grandmother strategize ways to motivate him to complete his work: enrolling him in Saturday school, giving him a paper planner, and having him carry a card that each teacher can fill out daily with his assignments.

Then they call D.L. out of class to get his perspective and present their suggestions. He doesn't say much, and Heidi pushes him to commit to at least one of the options. He finally agrees to Saturday school and the assignment card.

After the meeting, Lung swoops back outside to drive to her next stop — but not before offering words of encouragement to the grandmother.

She points her car toward the home of R.A., who recently moved in with his dad after leaving a residential program. On the way, she talks about the importance of connecting with families.

"I try to work together with them to make sure the transition home is successful. I want the youth and parents to feel they have additional supports in place," she says. "Ideally I want to be involved when the youth is still in their residential program or facility to start building a relationship early and help them build a transition plan with their PO.

"One of the biggest challenges is if the PO wants the youth to get a job, but the youth doesn't want to work. I'm working with a lot of younger kids who need to catch up on school, so finding work isn't a priority for them right now."

That includes R.A., who is failing all of his classes at another Salem high school. The 17-year-old senior told



Lung visits a high school to check on a youth's progress.

Lung he'd rather get his GED, so she helped him find a local program. But he's on a waiting list.

Lung calls the GED program on speaker phone to check his status. "He's 11th on the list," the staff person tells her, "so he's looking at a couple of weeks."

"Damn," Lung says after hanging up. "Right now he's just sitting at school, killing time until he can get into this program."

Then she considers it a different way. "He's failing, but at least he's going to school. That's a big step."

When Lung arrives at the house, R.A.'s father is making stir fry for dinner. She sits down at the dining table with R.A. to chat.

"Don't forget the judge ordered you to write a business plan," she tells him. "Did you research what that means?"

"It's what your future plans are and what you need to do," he says.

"Good," Lung says. "Now we just need to get you to write one. How can I help?"

R.A.'s dad chimes in, "He's smart as a whip, and an apprenticeship might get his mind going."

Lung nods, then offers to pick up R.A. from school the following Thursday so they can work together on the business plan.



“The youth who want to work with me will stay in contact with me and are motivated to accomplish tasks outside of our time together,” Lung says when she’s back in the car. “But the ones who don’t, I get to do more ‘hand-holding,’ so to speak.

“Hopefully we’re helping our youth be more successful and engaged. I often tell them, ‘I’m here to mentor you, support you and advocate for you.’”

Two other youth Lung had planned to meet cancelled at the last minute, so she pulls her car back into the field office parking lot and walks inside to enter information into JJIS. It was an unusually “quiet” day in her world.

It won’t be long until morning when she heads back out on the road — visiting, making connections, advocating.

OYA’s Transition JPPOs

The pilot for the transition JPPO program ends July 1, but OYA is working to make the positions permanent. We currently have five:

Sara Johnson: Jackson, Josephine, Klamath and Lake counties

Heidi Lung: Marion, Linn, Benton, Polk, Lincoln and Yamhill counties

Levi Miller: Washington, Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook counties

Amy Pena: Multnomah and Clackamas counties

Greg Van Vlack: Lane, Coos, Curry and Douglas counties