

# HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT



## Youngsters discover strengths at Youth Leadership Forum

They came not knowing what to expect. They left with new-found confidence, new friends and a strong sense of accomplishment.

Fifteen youngsters with disabilities participated in the 2009 South Carolina Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) held July 15 at the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School in West Columbia and July 16 and 17 at Newberry College.

YLF is a career leadership program for high school juniors and seniors between the ages of 17 and 21 who have leadership potential in both their school and their community. The program focuses on building self-esteem, developing personal leadership skills and preparing young adults with disabilities to successfully transition from school to employment.

Activities began on the ropes course at Wil Lou Gray. The high ropes course tested individual resolve as the youngsters navigated ropes strung between two trees 50 feet in the air, rocketed down a zip line and climbed a rock wall.

Teamwork was the goal on the low ropes course as they started with a get-acquainted exercise that required learning names, progressed to building a bridge between two platforms and helping each other maneuver along cables suspended between several trees, and culminated in figuring out how to arrange themselves in birth-date order without falling off a log.

Sessions at Newberry College focused on leadership and skill-building activities along with disability-related presentations, including what to expect in college.

The forum is the result of an interagency partnership called Partners in Transition. Members include the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department, the Developmental Disabilities Council, state Department of Education, state Department of Health and Environmental Control—Children’s Rehabilitative Services, the Continuum of Care in the Governor’s Office, Proparents, the Center for Disability Resources at the University of South Carolina, Lexington School District Four, and Midlands Technical College.



### INSIDE

*Van project a winner* ..... 2  
*VR facilities demonstrate safety pays*..... 3  
*Vocational assessment role redefined*..... 4

*New Horizons* is published by the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD), 1410 Boston Ave., P.O. Box 15, West Columbia, SC 29171-0015.

The Public Information Office provides all news and information. News materials may be reproduced with credit to *New Horizons*.

SCVRD distributes *New Horizons* free by mail. Subscription requests or changes of address may be sent to the Public Information Office at the above address, telephone (803) 896-6833 or e-mail info@scvrd.state.sc.us

In accordance with federal and state laws, SCVRD does not discriminate against any race, color, sex, national origin, age or disability in employment or in provision of services.

**Agency:**

- Derle A. Lowder Sr., chairman, Sumter
- Barbara G. Hollis, secretary, Columbia
- H. Lucius Laffitte, M.D., at-large, Allendale
- Dr. Roxzanne Breland, Greenville
- Timothy W. Evatt, Pendleton
- Rhonda J. Presha, Elgin
- Alease G. Samuels, Walterboro
- Joseph A. Thomas, Conway

**SCVRD:**

- Commissioner—Barbara G. Hollis
- Editor—Sharon H. Kelly

**SCVRD Offices:**

*(All numbers have TDD capability.)*

- Aiken: (803) 641-7630
- Anderson: (864) 224-6391
- Beaufort: (843) 522-1010
- Berkeley-Dorchester (Moncks Corner): (843) 761-6036; (866) 297-6808 (Toll free)
- Camden: (803) 432-1068 (866) 206-5280 (Toll free)
- Charleston: (843) 740-1600
- Conway: (843) 248-2235
- Florence: (843) 662-8114
- Gaffney: (864) 489-9954
- Greenville: (864) 297-3066
- Greenwood: (864) 229-5827 (866) 443-0162 (Toll free)
- Hartsville: (843) 383-2662
- Lancaster: (803) 285-6909
- Laurens (Clinton): (864) 833-4121 (866) 443-0103 (Toll free)
- Lexington (West Columbia): (803) 896-6333 (866)206-5184 (Toll free)
- Marlboro (Bennettsville): (843) 479-8318 (800) 849-4878 (Toll free)
- Oconee-Pickens (Seneca): (864) 882-6669 (866) 313-0082 (Toll free)
- Orangeburg: (803) 534-4939
- Richland (Columbia): (803) 782-4239
- Rock Hill: (803) 327-7106
- Spartanburg: (864) 585-3693 (866) 451-1480 (Toll free)
- Sumter: (803) 469-2960
- Walterboro: (843) 538-3116 (888) 577-3549 (Toll free)
- Williamsburg (Kingstree): (843) 354-5252

**Enabling eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment**

# Van project a winner

Todd Blake has developed a plan that not only will save the agency almost \$2 million, it won an award from the South Carolina Certified Public Manager Program.

Blake, SCVRD's facility management and procurement director, completed his certified public manager (CPM) training in May. The program's goal is to develop public sector managers who meet a prescribed set of professional standards.

Eighteen months of coursework culminates in an exam and a project. Blake's project focused on the appropriateness of the agency providing transportation to job-readiness training clients and the implications related to their future employment. Out of a class of 55, it won the George C. Askew Award, which recognizes the efforts of those who have demonstrated exemplary work in completing their CPM projects.

Nathan Strong is managing partner of organizational development with the state Office of Human Resources, which administers and directs the CPM program. He said Blake's project was selected because it met the critical criteria for a good CPM project: it was of measurable benefit to the agency; it contributed to the fulfillment of the agency's mission; and it addressed the needs of critical customers (clients).

The agency was already looking

at cost-cutting measures when Blake took on the van project.

As of September 2008, SCVRD had 74 van routes plus substitute



**Todd Blake, left, receives the Askew award from Frank Fusco, executive director of the state Budget and Control Board.**

drivers, for a total of about 100 part-time van drivers.

With support from center managers and state office training center coordinators, pilots were held in Greenwood, Aiken and Charleston during February, March and April. Although initially there was some concern that attendance at the work training centers would fall off when the clients didn't have VR-provided transportation, that didn't happen.

"We got great feedback from the area supervisors," Blake said.

The current round began in July in Camden, Florence, Anderson, Gaffney and Spartanburg.

As the vans are eliminated, State Office staff is working with the areas to help clients find other means of transportation and van drivers find other jobs.

*continued on next page*

# SCVRD facilities demonstrate safety pays

Safety is paying off at VR.

An increased focus on safety has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of client and employee injuries and that translates into a reduction in insurance premiums.

Insurance companies calculate rates using an experience modifier or EMOD, said Neil Lown, SCVRD safety coordinator. In 2007-08, the statewide average EMOD was 1.29. In 2008-09, that has dropped to 1.20. Client trainee injuries are down from more than 2 percent in 2006-07 to 1.4 percent in 2007-08. For the same period, employee injuries dropped by half—from 3 percent to 1.5 percent.

“Safety is definitely a priority,” said Commissioner Barbara Hollis. “It’s important for both clients and staff. Our trends are good as we move toward a safer environment.”

The agency’s safety record will save it about \$111,500 this year in insurance premiums, Lown said.

“We’ve been tracking injuries since 1997-98 and we instituted the safety program in 1999-2000” Lown said. “When injuries started increasing, we started doing safety assessments for the area offices.”

The Rock Hill Work Training Center’s attention to safety has earned it the first Commissioner’s Safety Award, which was presented at the July supervisors’ meeting.

Center manager Jon Robinson and his crew had a perfect score on their safety assessment and reduced the client trainee injury rate from six in 2007-08 to two in 2008-09.

“For six of ten years, the experience modifier [for Rock Hill] has been less than one,” Lown said. “That’s a good sign of a consistently healthy safety program.”

The Rock Hill center’s premium went down almost \$2,500 this year.



**From left, staff attorney Job Batten, Rock Hill center manager Jon Robinson, Commissioner Barbara Hollis and safety coordinator Neil Lown show off the Commissioner’s Safety Award.**

The Charleston DDS office also received a perfect score on its safety assessment this year, Lown said.

He attributed that to an “excellent” safety coordinator and a “good job” of staying on top of potential violations.

Statewide, employees and clients alike go through safety training, which teaches employees the importance of safety in the workplace and clients learn that safety is part of a productive work environment.

Lown oversees 27 safety coordinators who, in turn, monitor safety in all 70 of SCVRD’s facilities. Lown has completed extensive safety training with OSHA and each of the coordinators has completed 10 hours of OSHA training.

Lown monitors violations and accident occurrences using an agency-wide database. When potential accident trends emerge, he conducts training to prevent similar injuries.

Supervisors are ultimately

responsible for safety in their facilities and safety goals appear on their performance appraisals

The Commissioner’s Safety Award is based on the center’s experience modifier and the safety assessment score.

## Winner

*continued from page 2*

All around, it’s a win-win-win situation.

- The clients are more self-sufficient and better prepared for employment.
- The agency saves \$1.9 million that can be used to provide additional services to clients.
- Staff workloads for administering the van system decrease and the time can be redirected to serving clients.

Blake’s project will be in the running for the national Askew Award in September.

**South Carolina Vocational  
Rehabilitation Department**

1410 Boston Avenue  
Post Office Box 15  
West Columbia, SC 29171-0015

**Return Service Requested**

Non-profit  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
West Columbia, SC  
Permit No. 255

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department reports that it printed 5,200 copies of this newsletter at a cost of \$622.80, or about \$.12 a copy.

4

## Vocational assessment role redefined

Informed choice.

In vocational rehabilitation circles, it means empowering clients with enough information to successfully choose their vocational path.

It also means providing VR staff members with enough information to ensure that clients go to work in jobs or careers they can sustain.

That's the goal of the new Vocational ACES—assessment and career exploration specialists—role.

J.P. Geiman of Oconee-Pickens came up with the name during a two-day training in June that mapped the transition from career planning and employment specialists to vocational ACES.

Dr. Steve Sligar, director of the graduate program in vocational evaluation at East Carolina University, provided the training for the first

day. The second day was devoted to familiarizing participants with the new workflow.

For the 34 staff members who attended, it was total immersion in the vocational evaluation process, which will provide a logical framework for the vocational ACE specialist and a vocational direction for the client.

Since each client is unique, “we need to gather as much information as we can to ensure that our clients can work to their maximum potential,” said Linda Lieser, assistant commissioner for client services.

The assessment explores education, vocational interests, work history, and potential employment impediments. Other activities may include an interest inventory, job shadow or tryout, work evaluation,

aptitude or achievement testing, and finally, career exploration.

Using the results, a recommendation is made to the counselor or employment coach about an appropriate vocational objective, planned services and placement needs.

Lieser cited a 2003 Institute for Rehabilitation Issues study that said “in the 68 percent of the cases where recommendations were followed, 92 percent of the consumers were successfully placed. In the 32 percent of the cases where recommendations were not followed, only 28 percent of the consumers were successfully placed.”

“We have revisited and redefined assessment and our clients will benefit,” said Gloria Plotnik, client services specialist for vocational assessment.