

*To Coordinate... To Enhance... To Serve...Through Communication*

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**Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP) Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners Initiative**

The Michigan Department of Education/Office of Special Education has made some changes by hiring two new staff members, June Gothberg and Maria Peak. MRS welcomes June and Maria to Michigan Transition Projects. MRS looks forward to partnering with you, along with continuing our successful teamwork with Leisa Gallagher!!!



**June Gothberg, Ph.D.** is the Director of Michigan Transition Projects for the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education. She oversees two Mandated Activities Projects (MAPs): the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP) and Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners (RTSL). Dr. Gothberg graduated from Western Michigan University in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology with a Ph.D. in Evaluation, Measurement, and Research. In the recent past, June was a Senior Research Associate at Western Michigan University. Her main role was a State Technical Assistance Coordinator for the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC). Prior to that, June spent 10 years working in the classroom, teaching at-risk students, court involved youth, and students with special needs. She was also employed as a vocational evaluator providing assessment and on-the-job training for Michigan Rehabilitation Services and Michigan Works clients.

tional evaluator providing assessment and on-the-job training for Michigan Rehabilitation Services and Michigan Works clients.

*"There is a critical correlation between interagency collaboration and successful postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities. I value the partnerships at the state level between education and rehabilitation partners. In the coming months and years I look forward to wider and deeper collaboration at the state level and working together to increase local capacity to improve transition education and services and increase successful adult outcomes for youth with disabilities."* – June Gothberg



**Maria Peak** is the Coordinator of the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP). The project supports the implementation of effective transition practices to ensure all students are prepared for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. In the recent past, Maria was an ISD Transition Coordinator for Eaton RESA for 17 years working with administrators and teachers to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Maria served as the Region 2 representative for the Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA). She received the 2010 C. David Anderson Award from MTSA recognizing her for leadership in transition.

*"Work experiences and competitive employment are a major focus for students with disabilities. Therefore the collaboration between Michigan Transition Coordinators and MRS Youth Counselors is key. I have personally experienced the force that can occur when these two groups come together for the common goal. Youth with disabilities CAN be successfully employed in Michigan."* - Maria Peak





**Leisa Gallagher** is the Coordinator of the Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners (RTSL) initiative. The RTSL initiative guides Michigan public secondary schools through a three-year program focused on dropout prevention strategies and instructional interventions. The program focuses on improving school culture and academic success through the use of evidence-based practices (EBPs) customized to a school's specific needs. In addition to her project responsibilities, she serves as the Coordinator of the Superintendent's Dropout Challenge for the Michigan Department of Education. Leisa received her M.A. from Western Michigan University in Counseling Psychology. She was part of the school health team that launched the Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (Mi-PHY) a survey of risk and protective factors for middle and high school students. She has expertise in youth development, intergenerational programming, and data-based decision making.

*"Sharing graduation, dropout, and post secondary outcome data regarding youth served by both special educators and MRS staff creates a powerful collaboration and produces benefits for both organizations." - Leisa Gallagher*

The Michigan Transition Projects – Michigan Transition Outcomes Project and Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners, is a Mandated Activities Project (MAP), funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) through the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education.

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### Project SEARCH in Michigan – Five Years Later

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It has been five years since funds from the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant brought Erin Riehle to Michigan to share about Project SEARCH. Hundreds of people came to hear her tell her story about how she created jobs for young people with disabilities in the emergency department at the Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio because she wanted parents and children that were being treated at the hospital to see that people with disabilities can work and function fully in society.

For a refresher, following are Erin Riehle's comments about Project SEARCH:

"You know, we believe that young people with disabilities deserve a full continuum of services and choices, and that there are many good programs out there. We're just one of them. We are fairly different. We work with a group of collaborating partners in any city or town where we have a Project SEARCH; always include education, a community rehab provider, voc rehab, someone from developmental disability councils, and typically Social Security Administration. We bring those groups together and we work together to be able to essentially lift a classroom of young people with disabilities out of their high school and move them into a business for an entire school year. So for example, here at Cincinnati Children's, we take 12 young people from around the Cincinnati area. They come to Children's every single day for a transition year. It's meant to be their final year of high school, and they never step foot inside their school. This is meant to be total immersion and to move them from that kind of high school way of thinking to an adult way of thinking and behaving, and so they come here directly in the morning. They leave directly from us and go home, and while they are with us, they have to dress like we do. They can't wear jeans and Budweiser tee-shirts and baseball hats and sandals. They have to wear clothes that are appropriate to the business that they're located in, and they have to be present. If they are absent a lot, we will exit them from the



program. So we're tough, but we get great results. Over the course of the year, what these young people do, they rotate through two to three internships that are approximately 10 to 12 weeks long, and the whole point of those internships is for them to go into a department and learn skills that will assist them in getting a job later on."

Inspired by what they heard, a lot of people have worked extremely hard to develop Project SEARCH sites in Michigan. At one point there were as many as eight sites. Presently, seven sites exist and are serving students at Delta College in Mid-Michigan, Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo, Fifth Third Bank in Grand Rapids, Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids, Mercy Hospital in Monroe, Blue Cross Blue Shield in Detroit, and Beaumont and Henry Ford Hospital in Oakland County.

## Outcomes

As of September 30, 283 Transition Youth participated in Project SEARCH, of which 102 became employed.

Here is how MRS Project SEARCH participants compare to MRS Transition Youth with Intellectual Disabilities.

	MRS Project SEARCH Transition Youth	MRS Transition Youth with Intellectual Disabilities FY'12-'13
Average Cost Per Employment Outcome	\$9397	\$4648
Average Hours Per Week	22	24
Average Wages Per Hour	\$8.18	\$7.96
Chance of Employment	36%	31 %

Note:

The Project SEARCH data is five years of data that has been averaged. Some of the sites have been in existence for as little as 1.5 years while other sites are over five years old. To give a point of comparison, the Transition Youth with Intellectual Disabilities data is one year of data from 2012 – 2013.

Michigan has not yet achieved the level of employment outcomes that are reported from the original Project SEARCH site at the Children's Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio and is a work in progress. Unique challenges have impacted Michigan in the last five years, most notably, difficulties with the economy. Project SEARCH certainly is a more expensive option. The students seem to earn slightly more per hour and have a slightly higher chance of becoming successfully employed than students with intellectual disabilities that did not participate in a Project SEARCH program.

In terms of benefits, there is more to consider with Project SEARCH programs than just outcomes. Project SEARCH programs are hugely collaborative and offer opportunities for communities to come together around students with disabilities to help them achieve their dreams. Businesses that may have not opened their doors before may find the Project SEARCH brand and model compelling and



as a result have become willing to be involved often with unexpected and surprising results.

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## Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Joins Project SEARCH to Provide Needed Community Internships

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*\*\*This article was first printed in the Blues News Direct newsletter on January 22, 2014.*

When DeSharde McGuffe first came to work at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) in 2010, she said she was extremely shy, and often uncomfortable when faced with social interactions.

“I was quiet,” said the Payroll Services Administrative Clerk. “I didn’t know how to talk, say good morning to everyone, and how to act professional.”

She also struggled with public transportation, making appointments, and managing her money.

Her lack of confidence played a role in her professional development, personal growth, and independence – until now.

Back in 2010, DeSharde was among 12 students for the inaugural BCBSM Project SEARCH class. Project SEARCH serves as a workforce alternative for Detroit Public Schools’ students with disabilities in their last year of high school. The cornerstone of Project SEARCH is total immersion in a large business – every day students report to BCBSM to learn employability skills in a classroom and job skills while participating in two internships/experiences during the year.

Now in its fourth year at BCBSM, the company was the first employer to adopt the program and currently is the only employer in Wayne County that supports it. When DeSharde came to the Blues in 2010 as a Project SEARCH student, she was in her last year of high school.

“DeSharde was so committed and willing to learn when she entered Payroll Services, and we were so impressed with her that we hired her into the department just a month after she graduated from the program,” said Roy Nesler, Director Payroll Services. “We are happy to support the Project SEARCH program because it gives individuals with disabilities an opportunity to reach their full potential.”

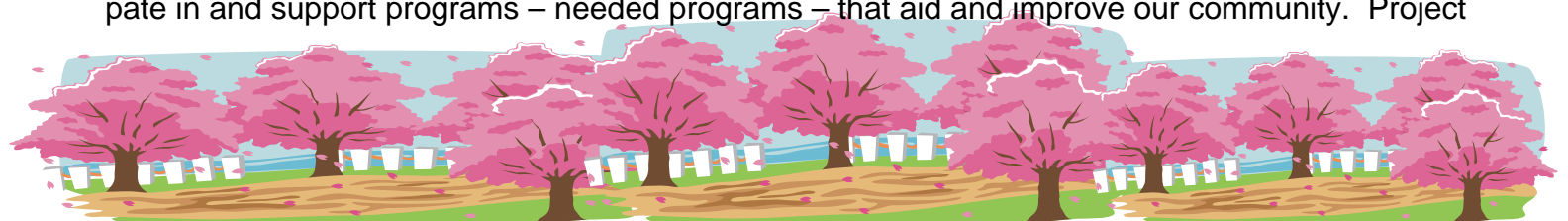
DeSharde was thrilled when she found out the news.

“I was so happy when I got the call, I just said, “Yes!”” “It feels good to be earning my own money.”

DeSharde has been in Payroll Services since 2011 and is now mentoring a new Project SEARCH student, Latasha Jackson who works part-time in her department. DeSharde is responsible for filing documents, totaling phone inquiries, department mail, and attendance correction verification.

Gary Harvey, Vice President, Information Technology, is part of the original leadership and guidance and its introduction to BCBSM, and acts as the executive champion.

“BCBSM believes in and is committed to corporate social responsibility,” Harvey said. “We participate in and support programs – needed programs – that aid and improve our community. Project





SEARCH is one of those programs.”

DeSharde said enrolling in Project SEARCH has made a great impact on her life.

The program taught her how to navigate public transportation independently, and she said she has built self-esteem through mock interviews and scenario role play, along with plenty of interaction with coworkers.

When asking the once shy DeSharde what her favorite part of her job is now, the first thing she says is, “being with my co-workers.”

DeSharde says she has established independence and now goes to the doctor, gets her hair done and catches the bus by herself, along with managing her own money.

This year, 11 new students are spread throughout the downtown campus, in areas such as Imaging and Support, MA Provider Servicing and Analysis and Payroll Services.

“The students stay with us for nine months, and we support them in learning job skills for professional growth, daily living and transportation skills with the goal of creating a foundation that will allow them to reach their greatest potential and find employment in our community,” Harvey said.

Some daily living skills included in the program are appropriate dress, time management, and social interaction.

“The ultimate goal upon program completion is competitive employment utilizing the skills learned throughout the program,” said Sheila Montgomery, Talent Acquisition and Program Manager. “The program has been successful in teaching and exploring a greater level of independence - each student has expanded their knowledge and skills based on their individual skill assessment.”

In addition to DeSharde, three other students have remained employed with the Blues upon completion of the program.

“I want to thank Ms. Sheila (Montgomery), Mrs. Franklin-Shorter (Detroit Public Schools Transition Specialist), and all leaders including Roy Nesler and Sylvia Hawkins for helping all the students. It has made a lot of difference,” she said.

### **Project SEARCH Program Fast Facts**

♦ How do the students get their assignments at BCBSM?

A student’s ability is matched with job requirements set by the leaders.

♦ Are the internship roles paid?

Project SEARCH students are not paid.

♦ What is an example of an impact Project SEARCH has made on our business?



Most of the Cisco phones were assembled by Project SEARCH students. Project SEARCH student-Darian Brown was selected for that role and has assembled more phones than anyone in the company. He has since expanded to headset assembly. Darian was hired to the company as a result of his role and support.

♦ How are students exited from the program?

BCBSM hosts a full cap and gown ceremony with their family and friends and BCBSM leadership upon program completion. This year we will host our fourth graduation.

♦ How many students have graduated through BCBSM's program?

BCBSM has exited 25 students with an overall graduation rate of 80%

♦ How does our program rate nationally?

The BCBSM Wayne County program has been asked to present at the national conference regarding the program's success. It has also received an employment outcome award for achieving a placement rate after graduation of more than 70%.

♦ How can employees help?

Employees can share their experiences including how to tie a tie, assist with mock interviews, mentoring, and so much more.

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## JVS Program Creates Harmonious Transition from School to Work

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*\*\*Reprinted by permission, JVS Matters magazine, Winter 2014*

### JVS Success Story

He gets up and sings morning, noon and night! Sometimes he chooses gospel music, and sometimes he prefers hits from the Temptations, Four Tops or anything Motown. Josef Bynum sings at home and he sings at work.

Josef's co-workers and supervisors on the housekeeping staff at Cadillac Place in Detroit enjoy his singing talent. They also appreciate the upbeat attitude and solid work ethic he brings to his janitorial job.

"Joe is a very reliable, hard-working employee," says Jeremy Vinyard, JVS manager at Cadillac Place. "He stays focused on his work and often sings while he's working. Otherwise, he's kind of shy and reserved."

Now an 18-year-old with a dream of college and a career involving computers, Josef was diagnosed at a young age with a learning disability. He was part of the special education program in elementary school. By middle school, Josef's mother, Josette Bynum, advocated for his inclusion in general education classrooms. She stayed in close contact with his teachers throughout middle and



high school at the Frederick Douglass Academy for Young Men in Detroit to ensure his academic achievement.

He ultimately graduated high school with honors, but he worried about finding a job and being successful. That's when the family heard about the JVS School to Work Transition Program as a way to help Josef transition into the work world.

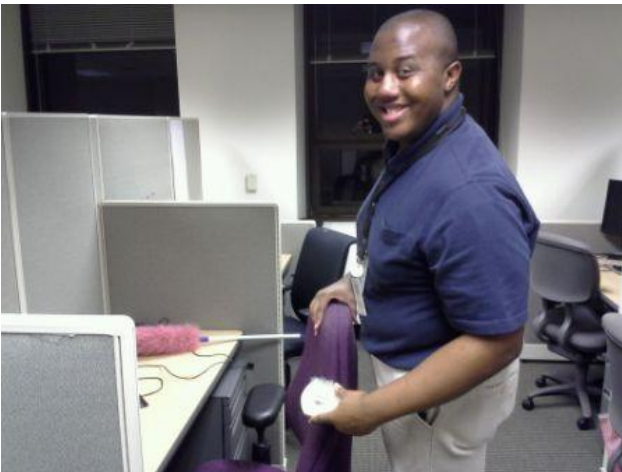
The four-week program was coordinated by Ardale Hayes, JVS transition specialist, through a partnership with Detroit Public Schools and Michigan Rehabilitation Services. It included a classroom component focused on career exploration and job-seeking strategies. Other sessions helped strengthen interpersonal and employability skills. A second phase included an internship followed by job placement assistance.

"Josef maintained a great attitude throughout the program," says Hayes. "He did not miss a single day of class or his internship, and he was never tardy. Once he started working in the Cadillac building, he quickly became one of the go-to people because of his great attitude and hard work."

Josef's mom credits the program with building his self-confidence and helping him believe that he could succeed in a work environment.

"Josef was nervous at first, and he wasn't sure if he could handle it," she explains. "He has really blossomed."

Communicating with others in the workplace was Josef's biggest worry.



"JVS has taught me a lot," says Josef. "I've learned how to talk with supervisors, co-workers and the people who work in the offices. I've also made some friends through JVS."

With his positive attitude and solid work ethic, Josef Bynum has gained the admiration of his family and co-workers. Or, as Aretha Franklin would sing it: he's earned R – E – S – P – E – C – T.

*For more information on the JVS School to Work Transition Program, contact Lydia Gray at (248) 233-4480.*

#### *Cutline:*

As someone who has struggled with communication skills all his life, Josef Bynum was afraid he'd never be comfortable in a work environment. With the help of the JVS School to Work Transition Program, he found the confidence he needed.

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## **Over 300 Students Gain LIFE Skills at Regional Transition Conference**

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By Jessie Bachmann, Program Manager at Disability Network





Over 300 high school students with disabilities participated in the regional LIFE Student Transition Conference on December 10, 2013 at the Grand Traverse Resort. Youth from 17 schools gathered to hear key note speaker, [Anthony Ianni](#), share his experience living with Autism. “Don’t ever quit or give up on yourself or your school work. I struggled a lot in school, but worked hard to get my degrees from Okemos High School and Michigan State University,” he said. Anthony encouraged the local students to be self-advocates and ask for help when they need it. “If things are hard, just remember that there’s always somebody there to help you,” he explained.

In addition to hearing the key note, LIFE students attended various breakout sessions throughout the morning to learn life skills. Topics included: self-advocacy, communication, health & nutrition, banking, how to handle bullies, job skills, the process of buying a car, how to apply & get accommodations in college, and stress management. “The most important thing I learned at the LIFE Conference is to never be afraid to speak up for myself,” stated Nathan, who participated in the event.

“The goal of the LIFE Transition Conference is to help local students with disabilities prepare for life after high school,” informed Jessie Bachmann, Program Manager at Disability Network. “The event is important because it provides a hands-on learning experience for our youth, while offering the opportunity for our students to build relationships with people in our community who genuinely care about their future.”

Presenters included: Jennifer Taylor from TBA Credit Union; Ben Zork from Weathered Beard; Kim Smith and Brenda Majestic from Northwestern Bank; Tim Collins from State Farm Insurance; Brad Giglio from Fit for You; Amanda (Rodasi) Campbell; Debbie Caperton from Reigning Liberty Ranch; Trooper Greg Hubers from Michigan State Police; Leanne Baumeler and Melissa Jelinek from Northwestern Michigan College; Michelle Smith from MSU Extension; Caiti Anthony and Norm Bowbeer from Grand Traverse Resort & Spa; and Anthony Ianni from Autism Alliance of Michigan.

In addition, employees from Michigan Works, Traverse Bay Intermediate School District, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, and several community members volunteered at the event. American Sign Language interpreting services were provided by Tom Hoxsie from LIS’N. “The LIFE Conference was a huge success thanks to our volunteers. Disability Network expresses deep gratitude to all of the businesses, agencies, and individuals who volunteered their time to connect with our students. We would not be able to provide this engaging learning opportunity without their help,” said Annie Campbell, who coordinated the event.

Disability Network hosts two conferences during the school year for high school special education students participating in the LIFE Program—one in the fall semester that focuses on various aspects of transition, and one in the spring that focuses on employment. Students are invited to attend both events in preparation for life after high school. Funding for the program is provided through a partnership between Traverse Bay Intermediate School District, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, and





Disability Network Northern Michigan. For more information about LIFE, or to learn how you can get involved, contact Jessie Bachmann at 231.922.0903, ext. 13.

### **ANNOUNCING ...**

#### **Michigan Transition Projects (MTP) Leadership Institute, May 1-2**

MTP invites MRS counseling staff and managers to join them for two days of training to:

- Increase knowledge and skills for postsecondary goal directed IEP planning;
- Increase knowledge and skills for triangulating postsecondary goals; and
- Increase collaboration between education and adult service agencies to promote successful post school transition for students with disabilities.

#### **TO REGISTER CLICK ON THIS LINK:**

[http://reg.abcsignup.com/reg/event\\_page.aspx?  
ek=0006-0014-  
31b4a753d71c41dc835cd8a0086d46df](http://reg.abcsignup.com/reg/event_page.aspx?ek=0006-0014-31b4a753d71c41dc835cd8a0086d46df)

Deadline for this training is April 24, 2014. If lodging is needed, you will need to make your own reservations and request reimbursement.

### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

#### **ANNOUNCING**

#### **The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual MRS Summer Transition Training**

**Tuesday, August 12, 2014**

**Lansing Community College**

**West Campus**

**5708 Cornerstone Drive  
Lansing, 48917**

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