

NEWS RELEASE

For Regional Distribution



For Immediate Release

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Region 7 Workforce Partners Employ New Navigator

Des Moines, IA – Debra Hodges-Harmon will be the new Disability Navigator for the Waterloo Workforce partners. Iowa Workforce Development, on behalf of a collaborative partnership with seven state agencies, would like to welcome her to the Waterloo Workforce Development office, located at 3420 University Ave., Suite G.

With a long history of working with people with disabilities, Hodges-Harmon is a graduate of William Penn University in Oskaloosa. She previously worked in Colorado as a community provider of service and also for the Department of Human Services for nine years. In addition to working in the Waterloo area, her region includes Butler, Bremer, Black Hawk, Buchanan and Grundy counties. She will facilitate access to employment and services for area job seekers who have disabilities. In addition, Hodges-Harmon will work to enhance their ability to facilitate quality employment outcomes.

If you have questions or would like her assistance, Debra Hodges-Harmon can be contacted via e-mail at Debra.Hodges-Harmon@iwd.iowa.gov or phone at (319) 235-2123.

According to the 2000 US Census, Iowans with disabilities have an unemployment rate that exceeds 34%, but most would prefer to be pursuing a career. Disability program navigators do not duplicate services offered by agencies supporting local workforce services, but support job seekers with information and connection with service programs that will provide career enhancement.

The Navigator program began in Iowa in 2003, and has been instrumental throughout the state and in 46 states. One of the priorities of the Navigator program is to promote a work incentive called the Ticket to Work, available to people who have a disability and are receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration. Ticket to Work is one of many work incentives offered by Social Security. The workforce centers are Social Security Administration approved Employment Networks under the Ticket to Work program, and works closely with the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Iowa Department for the Blind. To help people with disabilities understand other work incentives and other programs available in the state, the Navigators partner with the Iowa Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program and the Iowa Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. These collaborative efforts all endorse a model that strives for improved customer services, to ease “navigating” a complex system with the ultimate goal of obtaining employment.

The seven state agencies that oversee the Disability Navigator program include the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Division of Persons with Disabilities, the Iowa Governor’s Developmental Disabilities Council, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Human Services and Iowa Workforce Development.

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