

Consumer Focus Groups Being Conducted Across Kansas

As part of Kansas' new four-year Medicaid Infrastructure Grant to promote the competitive employment of Kansans with disabilities, Centers for Independent Living (CIL) across the state are conducting focus groups with consumers. The goal of the focus groups is to better inform the grant's strategic planning efforts regarding the current status, needs and hopes for the future of employment for people with disabilities in Kansas from the consumers themselves. Focus groups are being conducted by the CILs in Parsons, Lawrence, Topeka, Wamego, Emporia, Wichita, Hutchinson, Hays and Garden City. As of this printing, dates have been set for the following focus groups:

- Southeast Kansas Independent Living Center (SKIL) is holding a focus group on Thursday April 26th from 2:00-4:00 pm at the Pittsburg Area SRS Service Center. For more information about this focus group, please contact Ed Viers at SKIL;
- Resource Center for Independent Living (RCIL) is holding a focus group in Emporia on Thursday May 17th from 10:00 am - noon. For more information, please contact Carrie Boettcher at RCIL.

Other focus groups are being scheduled now. If you are a person with a disability who would like to participate in a focus group near you and would like more information about participating please call your local Center for Independent Living or Working Healthy (1-800-449-1439).

Consumer Voices

As the Working Healthy staff begins the process of creating a strategic plan for the Comprehensive Employment Opportunities grant, we are gathering consumer input about what does and does not work with regard to employment for people with disabilities. The following comments came from participants in the 2006 *Working Healthy* satisfaction survey.

With regard to the role of *Working Healthy*:

- I have less anxiety because I'm not constantly worried about losing my medical coverage. I'm more optimistic about the future.
- My stress level is less knowing I have health insurance.
- I don't have to live penny to penny, or cry when bills come, and I don't have to only buy second-hand clothes.
- I am working for the insurance that alone makes this program worthwhile. Also, being able to still be of use is wonderful; when you become disabled it makes you feel worthless. It is something terrible to face the fact you can no longer make a living. It's a great program!
- With SSDI, Working Healthy, and part time work, I feel like a human being again. Please don't ever give up on the *Working Healthy* Program.
- Provide some type of dental coverage. I wouldn't mind paying a premium for catastrophic dental insurance.

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With regard to other programs that influence work efforts:

- I need better support from the Mental Health Center and Vocational Rehabilitation [VR]. VR closed my case because I had a job, even though it’s part time at a very low wage.
- I need “head hunting” services unavailable to me under any Ticket-to-Work provider.
- Don’t let us lose our food stamps just because we have a small part-time job and a disability check.
- Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this feedback. It would be nice if *Working Healthy* provided information or suggestions about how to find work when one is disabled. I have struggled with how to honestly explain gaps in my work history, short job times, and a large number of diverse jobs.
- I fear that if I tried to return to full-time work that I would lose my SSDI and *Working Healthy* and it would take me another year or two to get it back and my SSDI benefits would be reduced. My husband was receiving SSI. He returned to work for a few years and had trouble with his bipolar and he is unable to get his SSI back.

Comments like these, as well as direct feedback from participants in the focus groups described above, will help guide the content of the Kansas strategic plan. We understand that *Working Healthy* is just one piece of establishing comprehensive employment opportunities for Kansans with disabilities.

Benefits Specialists’ Corner

This issue features *Working Healthy* Benefits Specialist Dan Hallacy from the Pittsburg Service Center in southeast Kansas. Dan can be reached by phone at (620) 231-5300 ext. 330 or by E-mail at CDLH@srs.ks.gov.

We are coming into a period of time when it may be difficult at times to contact your Benefits Specialist. From early spring until early fall, we will be attending numerous health fairs, expos, seminars and forums speaking about *Working Healthy*, including changes in various benefits and their availability. We will also receive training on various issues affecting *Working Healthy* beneficiaries and other disability-related issues during this time.

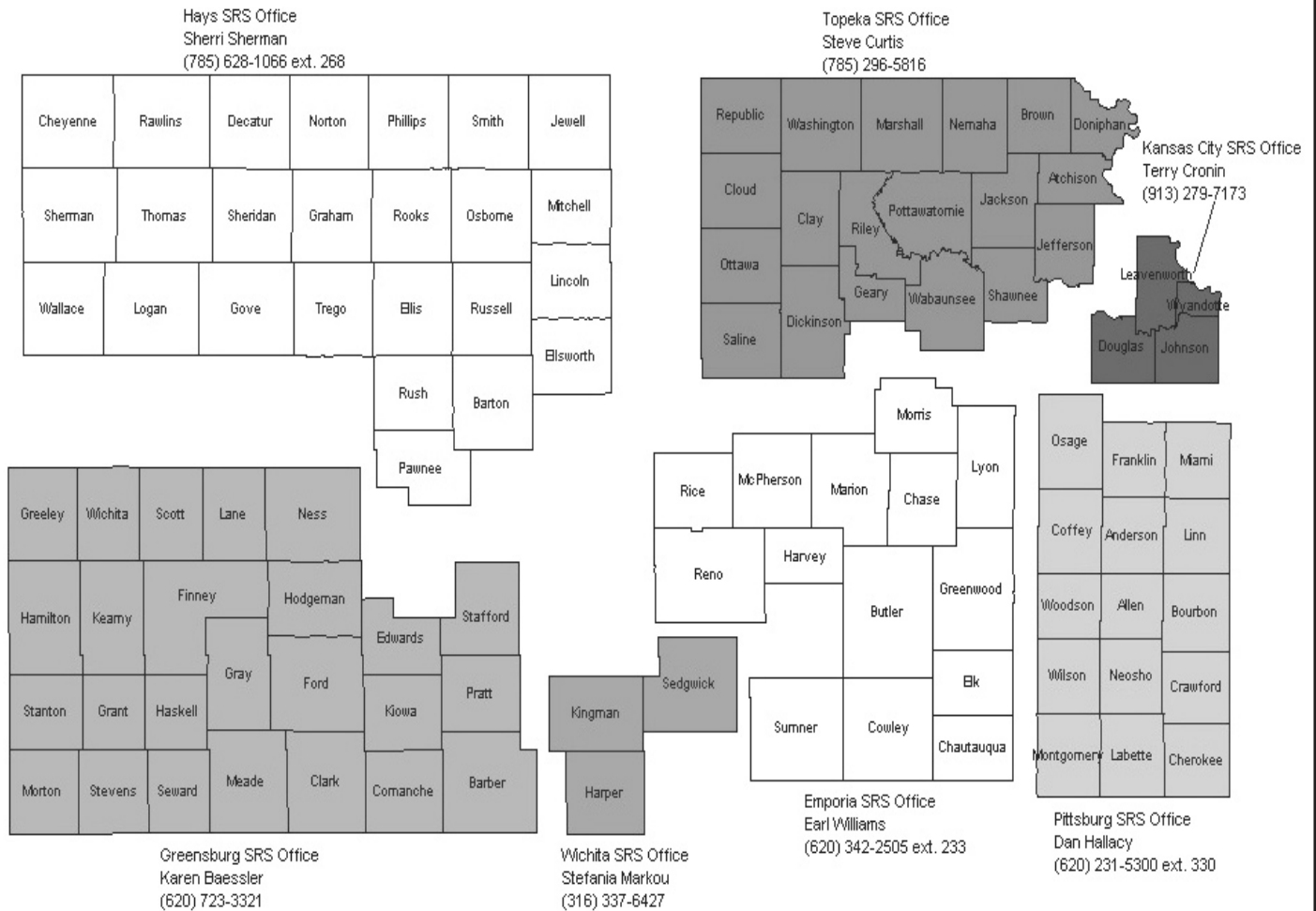
It reminds me of a story of the owner of a large sugar cane plantation in South America. He had 75 workers who cut and stored the large fields of sugar cane for him and all supervised by just one foreman. Late last summer he sold the plantation to a foreign buyer who took over management of the operation. The new management noticed that the workers were given a one half hour break in both the morning and the afternoon to drink coffee and sharpen their machetes and they were also given an hour for their lunch break when they also sharpened their machetes after completing their noon meal. He decided to cut out these ½ hours breaks in the morning and the afternoon and cut their noon meal time to ½ hour. These changes would gain one and one half hours of production time per man, per day or 112.5 hours of production time per week for the whole plantation.

Much to the management’s surprise not only did the production not increase, it decreased. He brought in his field supervisor and asked him why production decreased despite the increase in production hours. The foreman told him that the workers used these break times to hydrate themselves with coffee and gave time to sharpen their knives, but now they had no time to sharpen their machetes and it took many more cuts at the sugar cane to cut it down. The extra time was being used up by extra cuts at the cane when before the machetes were sharp and needed but one cut.

Our time as Benefits Specialists spent at various trainings is like the workers sharpening their machetes at their breaks. We improve and educate ourselves in the policies and procedures in the disability field and this too helps to keep us sharp, much like the machetes of the sugar cane workers. **- Dan Hallacy, Benefits Specialist**

New Working Healthy Coverage Areas

In January, areas covered by *Working Healthy* Benefits Specialists changed in order to accommodate the addition of a second Benefits Specialist in the western half of the state. Seven Specialists still cover the state with the newest member joining the team in the Greensburg SRS Service Center to cover the southwest corner of Kansas. The map below shows each of the new regions and the contact information for the Benefits Specialist in that area. For further information or to reach to put in contact with your area Benefits Specialist you can call toll free 1-800-449-1439.



This map, contact information and region listing by county are also available on the *Working Healthy* website, www.workinghealthy.org

WORKING HEALTHY

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Return service requested

This newsletter and other information regarding *Working Healthy* can be found on-line at: <http://www.workinghealthy.org>

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Additional copies and copies in alternate formats are available upon request by writing the University of Kansas, CRL - Division of Adult Studies, Attn: Noelle, JR Pearson Hall, Room 521, 1122 West Campus Rd., Lawrence, KS 66045-3101, by calling (800) 449-1439, or by emailing, pixie@ku.edu

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