

Coffee at the Airport – \$4.00

Taxi to the negotiations meeting – \$40.00

Reactions when we presented concrete documentation to support a salary increase – PRICELESS!

On June 25, the Negotiating Team comprising of Steve Shanahan (Rehabilitation Occupational Chair), Valtina Kinermon, Linda Labit, Ellen Schenk, Pam Manwiller and Nancy Swindel presented proposals for Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Counselors to the Department of Personnel Administration (DPA). Steve Shanahan opened the meeting by reading a well-prepared statement that explained what the counselors do for the DOR. In a nutshell, – to spread the word that we contributed nearly 1/3 of a billion dollars to the State of California's revenue, we placed over 12,000 significantly disabled people into meaningful jobs, and those people we placed helped to alleviate other social service needs, AND that our doors are always open.

Steve was passionate and articulate when he explained that our salary disparity as compared to others providing the same service (Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Mental Health, Department of Corrections) is unacceptable. Initially there were snickers and eyes rolling when they heard what we were asking, but that immediately stopped and they immediately readjusted themselves in their seat after Steve distributed supporting documentation including letters from various government officials, legislatures, proclamations from councils, a salary survey DOR and the union completed independently, and articles from the Sacramento Bee – all supporting our request. To say their jaws dropped is putting it mildly and even though they tried to maintain a poker face, they couldn't deny or dismiss the facts we presented.

Throughout the negotiating discussions Steve, Valtina, Linda, and myself continued to emphasize that we are mandated by Federal guidelines, our agency generates millions of dollars in Federal money back to the State of California, and the fact that in five years, nearly 1/2 of our counselors will have retired creating a depletion in our workforce.

Additional proposals passed around the negotiating table included: Disciplinary Representation, Caseload Caps, Liaison Limitation, Workgroup Participation, Counselors for the Blind allowed to make community visits during restricted travel times, Job Duty delineations between SVRC and

SVRC/QRP, Rehabilitation Counselor Licensure, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Fees and Classes, Counselors for the Deaf allowed to cancel meetings when interpreters or other accommodations aren't provided, and Travel Claim Reimbursement should not exceed 10 days. DPA brought to everyone's attention that several of these items, they felt, should be grievances rather than negotiating items. However, we were all proud that Steve felt an obligation to represent all counselors by bringing them to the table.

After the meeting I felt discouraged because I still believe they (DPA) don't understand or care about what we do and the value we contribute to the State of California. Then I realized what has transpired over these past two years can't be dismissed and they simply cannot ignore us any longer. A comment was made when salary enhancements are discussed the state looks at "Public Safety" whereby Steve clearly expressed, "we contribute to the safety of the public when we get a person a job."

I must say, in closing Pam and Nancy were wonderful. They led us through the process, they were equally passionate to our cause, and they have stated on more than one occasion - we have woken the bear and the administration is finally listening. Rehabilitation Counselors are smart and are remarkably good people who deserve respect and compensation.

Steve said it best "We must continue to build momentum one small step at a time... do something! Think of yourself as a leader and your whole world will change!"

Ellen Schenk, M.S., C.R.C.,
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