



## Morningside's New Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Program

Morningside was very excited to expand its partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and area school districts to begin serving students in Thurston/Mason, Lewis, Pierce, Grays Harbor and Clallam counties with Pre-Employment Transition Services earlier this year.

To understand this expanded partnership, it is beneficial to comprehend how serving students changed in Federal legislation. The Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has been reauthorized several times but a reauthorization of this act, now entitled the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), brought monumental changes and was signed into law on July 22, 2014. This act gave more control to local workforce boards and blended funding. The act also strove to improve services to individuals with disabilities by focusing on competitive integrated employment and stipulating that DVR could serve school students as long as it didn't duplicate services the schools were providing. Also, it allowed DVR to serve students with disabilities starting at 14 years of age in pre-employment services.

Under the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category, Morningside has contracted with Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council for the past five years to provide services to high school students in a combined program called Summer Youth Internship Project. In this program, Pacific Mountain provided a classroom experience for students called UpLift! where students learned a variety of soft skills, teamwork, etc. that are important in the workplace. Morningside secured work experience opportunities with local businesses so students could gain on-the-job work experience. At the end of their allotted work hours Morningside issued the students a check for the wages earned while working. This was a very unique and successful program, resulting in some of the best outcomes across the state.



*Bobbie Jo Sweet, program manager*

Bobbie Jo Sweet, Program Manager, indicated that this new program is much broader. It is to be held throughout the entire school year and incorporates the components of Pre-ETS services which are: Workplace Readiness, Self-Advocacy and Work Based Learning activities. Workplace Readiness is to prepare students for entering the world of work and living independently through soft skill training, time management, punctuality, financial literacy, mock interviews, resume building and accessing services and supports. The Work Based Learning components are opportunities where students can try out jobs and gain work experiences prior to graduation or turning 22 years old. This includes touring companies, job shadowing and completing informational interviews, sampling and completing paid internships at businesses up to 120 hours in a year. The program is so individualized that a student can combine several components simultaneously.

Ms. Sweet said that, with DVR's approval, the Workplace Readiness component can encompass aspects of Morningside's curriculum that are currently in use for Transition Students. Additionally, Morningside can choose from a variety of curriculum that DVR has provided. Some of the

Work Readiness and Self-Advocacy workshops are delivered in students' classrooms and some at Morningside's technologically-connected training room, where students can come for the in-person portion but can also join remotely through Microsoft Teams. The remote option will allow for connections from all five participating counties simultaneously. She also can see the use of technology in conducting workplace tours over Facetime or Teams.

Morningside is contracted to provide services to 200 students who have a disability (IEP, 504 or a student without a school plan but has a documented disability). However, the need is great. In Thurston County alone there are over 1,000 students that fall into these categories. The service is for any student between the ages of 14 to 21 years of age. To date, Morningside has met with schools and businesses who have taken a great interest in the program. Morningside has taken students on tours, conducted informational interviews, participated in internships and provided workshops in classrooms. In five counties currently providing PreETS services 83 individuals have signed up to participate in the program of which 45 students have completed learning Work Readiness skills instruction, 26 in Work Based Learning which includes paid internships, 3 in Employment Planning and 23 students completing Self-Advocacy training. Staff continues to reach out to students throughout counties and continue to connect to schools for further recruitment and outreach efforts.

Leah Langer was one of the first Pre-ETS students. She has attended weekly workshops for most of this year. Leah is a Rochester High School student and has participated in several aspects of Pre-ETS services, making the most of the opportunities available to her.

Morningside has dubbed the program ELEVATE (Explore your skills, Lead yourself and others, Experience an internship, Vocational exposure, Advocacy training, Transition and networking skills and Entrepreneurship). Some examples of the topics of the workshops she has attended are: learning about her strengths, preferences, identifying accommodations, creating goals for her future, building her resume, and setting up informational interviews with employers. She has now completed more than 40 hours of Work Readiness training and 8 hours of Self-Advocacy training.

This past spring, Leah attended her first Work Based Learning activity, an informational interview. It was held at Northwest Pediatric Center in Centralia. One of Leah's hopes for the future is to be a medical assistant. She also has several other interests including cooking, agriculture, farming and retail. During the interview with Tara DeHart, RN, Nursing Manager, Leah had a list of questions pertaining to working in a health care clinic and took many notes to learn more about a career in this field.

Leah has a goal of completing a paid internship in the future. Leah said, "I have an interest in this field of health care. In the program I have learned a lot including how to build my portfolio and resume. I like this program."

Leah has participated in several job tours to further explore her interests. She also interned at the Black River Blues Blueberry Farm from July 17-29. She actually researched and reached out to the farm and indicated that she chose this particular company because it seemed like a socially active place, and she liked talking to people that she knew as she handed out buckets to people eager to pick blueberries. Her tasks included putting bags in every berry bucket and lining them up outside for U-Pick customers. Leah also learned to put boxes together.

Whatever her direction is after high school, and eventual choice of employment, the future is bright for Leah.



*Leah Langer PreETS student*



*Mary Stevenson  
Vice President/COO, Employment Services*

## Welcome Mary Stevenson, Vice President Employment Services

Morningside would like to introduce and welcome Mary Stevenson as Vice President, Employment Services/COO, effective October 1st.

Mary was born and raised in Warren, Ohio, and moved to Washington in 2017. She began working with individuals with disabilities in northern California at an adult family home. After this experience, she was hooked, and spent ten years working at Mentor Network, a large multistate organization serving individuals with disabilities in a variety of programs. She was promoted four times while working in three different states, and moved to Spokane to work at Embassy, a multi-faceted company that provides a variety of services in the Pacific Northwest, working primarily in Idaho. For the past couple of years, Mary has worked at Skils'kin as VP Employment Services, assisting individuals to find work in Spokane County.

Through her experience at Skils'kin, she became involved in the Community Employment Alliance, a statewide association of which Morningside is a member. Mary serves on the Board and is active on the legislative committee. She is also involved with Disability Rights Washington.

Mary started her career as a job coach and worked her way up in the organizations she was involved with. She said this gives her a good perspective; when she sits down with staff members, she has a good idea of what each job entails. "I have gotten a diverse perspective over the last 20 years. This is my passion. Positive social change – equality for everyone," she stated.

Mary has a master's degree in General Psychology as well as a master's in Educational Psychology. She is currently working on a master's degree in Industrial / Organizational Psychology. "I came to Morningside because its focus on employment was very attractive to me. If we can have equity in the workforce, we can have equity in society. So, focusing my efforts on employment feels right to me," she concluded. Welcome Mary!