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Carolyn Ball, executive director, VRSII

Director's Message

The summer 2016 session of the School-To-Work Program (STW) has ended and 12 graduates have returned to their home states to begin or continue their exciting careers as sign language interpreters.

The VRSII is excited for our most recent STW graduates and wish them success in their careers and

in their lives. One of the most valuable lessons we hope graduates will take home with them is understanding of and tolerance for people who have opinions that are contradictory to their own. An example of interpreters having contradictory opinions could be related to the exercise and adherence to the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC). Even though the contradiction is real, it is vital that sign language interpreters learn to appreciate the perspectives of others. As sign language interpreting professionals, not all interpreters will agree on every issue, yet it is vital that as professionals, we learn to understand how to encourage discussion about the choices interpreters make. The healthy discussion of differences, based on facts, not whether or not we like someone, is important. To reiterate, one of the greatest lessons that STW graduates can learn is that there is not always a right or a wrong way to make ethical decisions as an interpreter. It is vital that interpreters learn to be able to discuss professional viewpoints – why they have made a

decision – with supportive evidence, which they can use to defend their views and even change minds once in a while. Finally, if the interns in the STW Program learned this vital lesson: to discuss their own perspectives and represent their positions, then the STW program was a success.

Congratulations 2015 School-to-Work Program Graduates

The 2015 cohort of School-to-Work Program (STW) interns graduated Aug. 7. Dr. Carolyn Ball conducted the graduation ceremonies and introduced guest speaker Dr. Marty Taylor, whom Ball credited with co-founding the VRSII with Dr. Carol Patrie.



Taylor, a Canadian citizen, addressed the graduating class and their attending

Dr. Marty Taylor family members, saying, "I don't know if your families are aware of how important this program is. Families – you need to know that this STW program is very unique. There is no other program like it in the world. It



is the Harvard of the interpreting world.” Taylor expressed her pride in the graduates, saying that in the future, they will help transform and enhance the interpreting profession in a very



positive way. “You are our future models,” she said. Taylor left the graduates with three points to remember: First, she

encouraged graduates to never stop learning, growing and enhancing their skills, even when their work becomes challenging. “By doing so, you’ll never be bored and you’ll continue to be an interesting person.” Second, relationships are powerful – the first and most important relationship with themselves. She encouraged graduates to know and appreciate themselves so they can nurture strong relationships with others. And last, she encouraged them to pay attention, be



observant and “take in” the people and differences they observe. “Maintain eye contact with the person you’re working with,” she advised. In our culture now, we spend less and less time in front of others. Make sure you’re not gazing around and ignoring the person in front of you.” Taylor expressed her excitement to see the achievements of the class in

future years, stating, “You never know what can happen!”

STW alumnus Melissa, who now works for the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, also addressed the interns. She related how STW has impacted her life and how the members of her cohort have



Melissa, STW alumnus

become lifelong friends who still influence her destiny. Melissa said, “If someone would have told me the first day of STW how important the

other 11 people in my cohort would be come in my life, I would have thought they were kidding, but I can’t imagine my life without those other 11 people in it – as well as the faculty and staff of the VRSII. When I first met Dr. Marty Taylor, I was star-struck. I had studied her books during my Interpreter Education Program (IEP). All I could do was thank her for all she’s done for the interpreting profession.”

At her classmates’ urging, Melissa moved from her hometown of San Diego to the East Coast, eventually settling in Pennsylvania. STW classmates helped her find her job. She said she never would have had the courage to make a move like this on her own. “When I graduated from STW, I didn’t think I would call my cohort members ‘family,’ but they are family now,” she said.



Dr. Ball closed the ceremonies by relating a story about her parents. After her father lost

his job in the nuclear industry, he began building furniture. But with six children at home, it became necessary for her mother to work outside the home. Her mother had a friend who helped her find a job doing janitorial services at a hospital from 4 p.m. to midnight. "As children, we didn't realize the sacrifices she was making," said Ball. Later, as an adult, Ball asked her mother if she liked her job. Her mother replied, "It wasn't really my choice, but regardless of where you work or what you do, the most important thing is your attitude. If I go to work and act happy and feel happy, I will like my job. If my feelings are sour, my attitude will be, too, and I won't like my job." Ball said, "My mother remains the most optimistic person I know. It all comes down to attitude. Remember that and keep a good attitude."



VRSII Welcomes a New Faculty Member

The VRSII is pleased to welcome a new faculty member, Dan Mathis. Prior to joining the VRSII, Mathis worked at the Davis Applied Technical College (DATC), one of the campuses under Utah



Dan Mathis, faculty member

College of Applied Technology. At DATC, Mathis established a committee of Deaf leaders and school administrators to address the need for a sign language interpreting program, as there was not a program in northern Utah at the time.

With colleague Jeff Pollock, from the University of Utah,

Mathis co-developed curriculum for a flexible, self-paced interpreting program, with multiple offerings, that allowed potential interpreters to go through the program at their own speed.

Mathis is a native Utahan, but has lived around the country, mostly on the East Coast. In 2006, he and his wife returned to Utah from Baltimore, Md. While in Maryland, he attended and worked at Gallaudet University, where he double majored in ASL and Deaf Studies and earned a master's degree in sign language education. Mathis says his linguistic and cultural background and identity will benefit the VRSII. "I think what drew me to the VRSII is the location in Salt Lake City. There is such a great energy here and a strong and deep Deaf community. Much of what I did at DATC is similar to the training we do at the VRSII. So being here is a good fit."

Mathis' responsibilities at the VRSII will include teaching and mentoring in programs such as the School-to-Work Program, Short Term Advancement Training (STAT,) the Compass Program, Corp ASL, and others. He says his experience living in different areas of the country and attending Gallaudet has

helped him master different regional signing styles and understand cultures which will help him relate to diverse signers and students from around the country. He credits his family, especially his Deaf grandparents, and the Deaf community for his signing abilities. Mathis says his grandparents would often tell life stories that helped him understand their perception of life - the good and hard times. "They helped me understand cultural perspectives and historical perspective through their eyes. There is no way these stories could have been translated into languages other than ASL."

Mathis says the biggest change for him in working at the VRSII is moving from an academic environment to a corporate environment, but he says this type of environment is a "win-win" for both parties.

When Mathis is not working, he enjoys relaxing with his wife and four children and watching football together, particularly the Utah Utes and Baltimore Ravens. Mathis has twice coached a Jean Massieu School-sponsored "Junior Jazz" basketball team for Deaf boys, who are in seventh through ninth grades.

Although Mathis has fond memories of living on the East coast, with its rich history, and calls it an "eye-opening" experience, Mathis says he is very happy to be back in Utah. We at the VRSII concur.

This fall, check the VRSII website often. New 2016 Educator Empowerment Series class schedule and School-to-Work Program applications are coming soon!