

**LOCAL LEADERS MAKING A
DIFFERENCE IN NEWMEXICO**

Everyday Hero, Olga Olvara



Transition Specialist, Gadsden Independent Schools

An Interview by Marcy Hintz, Program Manager, PFE

When you were a young adult, what made you want to enter the field of Vocational Rehabilitation?

I had just come back from Mexico and was working at an insurance company when I ran into a friend who was working with a program that supported migrant and seasonal farm workers with disabilities and their families. I had worked with migrant farmworkers in the past, so I applied to become a peer mentor.

I then started working on my M.A. in Counseling and Educational Psychology and began working with DVR. During that time, I became more and more involved in the support of the transition-age students in these same families.

How did your work as a DVR Counselor translate into your work as a school-based Transition Specialist?

Knowing the program and people at DVR has been tremendously helpful because I can collaborate with them and connect them with our school staff, parents, and students. Besides DVR, the relationships with DDSD, long term service providers, and PFE have helped our transition program with the schools. Teachers, students, and parents have a much better understanding of what DVR and other programs can do.

Olga has been with Gadsden Independent Schools for 5 years and was previously a DVR Counselor for 16 years.

You just got your CESP credential this summer! Why was that credential important to you?

I believe when you serve someone you need to give the best of you. Having this certificate was a good challenge for me because it gave me the opportunity to grow and stay up with the changes that are happening in the field. I learned more about the Discovery process, job development and job matching strategies, as well as fading.

What are you excited to see happen in our field in the next five years?

I'm excited to see more focus on transition and that we have new transition rehabilitation counselors in DVR. I'm excited to see more people being trained and professionally certified via ACRES or CESP. I'm excited that New Mexico is an Employment First state. I am excited to see that the employment prospects for students with disabilities is looking better because of all these efforts.

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Do you have any advice for younger professionals just entering this field?

"Enjoy the ride, learn as much as you can and collaborate with others. Become a better you."
~Olga Olvara



To nominate an everyday Hero, contact Marcy Hintz at mhintz@salud.unm.edu

“I have found that among its other benefits,
giving liberates the soul of the giver.”

- *Maya Angelou*