

Partners in Education

BCBSNE taps 14 ASF students for new program

“This is what we have dreamed about.”

This is how Terry Fischer, team leader of the Career Talent Advisors, describes the Partners in Education program underway at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. The program involves 14 Avenue Scholars Foundation students — all Metro Community College students — chosen to participate in the program after going through a formal interview process, background checks and drug screening.

According to a BCBS outline of the program, the goal is to “give post-secondary students hands-on work in a real business environment. The objectives are (1) to prepare participants for the corporate culture, (2) to foster career readiness and to develop transferrable job skills, and (3) to develop a pipeline of potential full-time employees.”

“Through this program, BCBS seeks to develop highly skilled workers who can potentially continue their involvement with BCBS after program completion.”

Fischer, starting her second year with ASF, is excited because this partner-



PARTNERS IN EDUCATION: ASF participants in the BCBSNE program: Front Row: Kyel Yager, Francisco Pascual, Donovan Contreras, Rosa Olvera, Olivia Aviles, Sophia Baum, Brandilynn Thomas, Alejandro Cardenas, Ismael Pascual, Ka Plue; Back Row: Sekou Murrell, Alex Wells, Quentin Wilson, Nyadoar Wal

ship could become a model for the goals of her team of advisors. Those goals include helping students find a career pathway that aligns with their interests and skill sets.

“We try to design career exploration opportunities to narrow down that pathway,” she said. “We like those opportunities to be hands-on in an industry setting. We try to find and establish business partners in the metro that allow them to get careers at the end of their education.”

Opportunities in the past year included evening workshops and job shadowing at businesses such as Omaha Hilton, B-Street Auto, Institute for the Culinary Arts (MCC), and

Warren Distribution. BCBS, however, is the first to provide a one-year, paid internship program — with the potential of full-time employment at the end of the year. ASF students are working either in the data entry or local claims departments.

Quentin Wilson and Olivia Aviles realize the potential benefits. For Wilson, an Omaha Northwest High School graduate who admits he was “not thinking far ahead before Avenue Scholars,” is grateful for several reasons.

“[Now due to AS] lots of possibilities like this have opened up for me,” Wilson said. “Blue Cross Blue Shield is a great work experience. The money I make will definitely help

around the house — car, bills, etc. People [at BCBS] are great. There is lots of information to learn, but if we stick with it and keep reviewing, we will get the hang of it and be on our way. People are helpful and friendly.”

Aviles has learned about the importance of dealing with stress: “They [quality assurance team] came in one day to talk about accuracy] put pressure on us; errors hurt everybody. One misstep in facts impacts a lot of people.” That pressure and information, however, “makes us feel like part of something bigger,” she said.

BCBSNE is similarly excited about the potential for its partnership with

BCBSNE: ‘win-win for everyone’

BCBSNE continued from Page 1

Avenue Scholars Foundation. Jennifer Richardson, Senior Vice-President of Operations at BCBSNE, says the venture is modeled after a Florida Blue program.

“We try to do a best practice session each year,” Richardson said. “Florida Blue is having lots of success with low-opportunity students in on-site locations in Jacksonville — leading them to jobs where they could have a future. We wanted to start a similar program here. It was very natural to work with Avenue Scholars.”

Fischer says BCBS approached ASF in the spring and began formal conversations in May; by mid-June a program was designed. Interviews of ASF students began in July. All 14 students were engaged in training through August, with employment

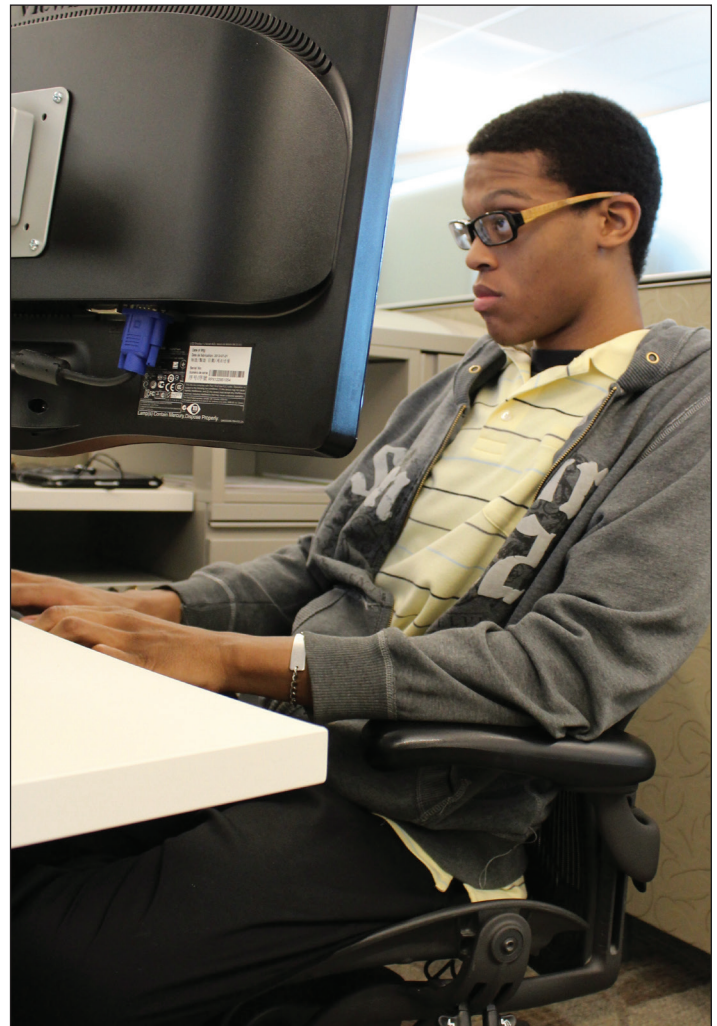
officially beginning Sept. 3. Throughout the 2013-2014 school year, BCBSNE will coordinate students’ workloads — between 12 and 20 hours — around their MCC class schedules.

“It’s going really well,” Richardson said. “It’s great having Avenue Scholars create the environment for us. Avenue Scholars has been wonderful about getting them prepared for what it means to work here.

“To bring students in from schools all over the community brings more diversity to BCBS. It’s a great fit with the culture of BCBS. We really try to be part of the community in which we work. This [the Partners in Education program] is a win-win for everyone.”

Fischer echoes those sentiments.

“This is what we have dreamed about,” she says.



ATTENTION TO DETAIL ASF student Alex Wells focuses on data entry, in the claims department, during training at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. The Partners in Education program involves 14 ASF students who are working as paid interns at BCBSNE throughout this school year.

Welcome New Staff

Kristin Walsh
Talent
Advisor
College



Duties: Act as mentor and academic advisor to ASF students at Metro and teach Avenue Scholars classes

Education: BA in History with a Minor in Spanish at UNO; MS in Community Counseling at UNO

Previous Work Experience: Counselor Intern with Avenue Scholars, two years

On Working at ASF: I’m most excited about helping students be successful in college and working with each of the students on my caseload individually to help create a plan that will ensure they find a career path they are passionate about.

Amy Rector
Talent
Advisor
Ralston



Duties: Working with high school juniors and seniors as a teacher, mentor and advocate

Education: BS in Secondary Language Arts Education at UNO; MA in English (emphasis in American Lit) at UNO

Previous Work Experience: English teacher, Omaha Westside High School, 12 years

On Working at ASF: I am most excited about working with students. They are the part of teaching that I have always loved, and I am excited to work with them closely through Avenue Scholars.

Evan Feezell
Talent
Advisor
Omaha
Northwest



Duties: Working with high school juniors and seniors as a teacher, mentor and advocate

Education: BS in English & Physical Education at Hastings College; MS in Education at Peru State

Previous Work Experience: Coach at Eastern Kentucky University, 2 years; English teacher at Papillion-LaVista South, 4 years; Strength & Conditioning coach at Papillion High School, 5 years;

On Working at ASF: I am excited to help kids and expose them to all the different resources available to them to help them be successful.

Katelyn Schany
Counselor
Intern



Duties: Work with high school and college students and help them with challenges they face

Education: BA in Social Services at University of Iowa; Working toward MA in Counseling in Graduate School at UNO

Previous Work Experience: Volunteer at AmeriCorps with Kids on Course, a non-profit funded by professional golfer Zach Johnson.

On Working at ASF: I am looking forward to working with high school and college-age students, to learn more about their unique difficulties and helping them achieve success.

Talent Advisors making impact

A Talent Advisor is like ...

“the snooze alarm you can’t hit.”

“a dad figure, he’s on your case about everything.”

A survey team from UNO School of Social Work, headed by Professor Jeanette Harder, collected plenty of anecdotal evidence while interacting with ASF students during the 2012-2013 school year — through surveys and questionnaires — that indicates talent advisors have made a significant impact on students.

“It was really nice hearing information that makes us feel as if we are having an impact on kids,” says Marcus Wagstaff, team leader of the High School Talent Advisors for the first 12 weeks of this school year.

As a team, Wagstaff says they keep evolving and keep making changes while striving to improve the delivery of their curriculum. Wagstaff, a TA at Millard South, says he has seen lots of changes in his “short time” — two years — at ASF, most notably the Senior Academy instituted last year. Through Senior Academy, high school seniors have the opportunity to get a head start on their college career by taking classes at Metro Community College.

“Adding the Career Talent Advisors last year was also a big step,” he said.

Other High School Talent Advisors for this school year are Juan Cangas, Omaha South; Emily Christensen, Omaha Bryan; Cedric Cooper, Omaha Benson; Jamar Dorsey, Omaha North; Evan Feezell, Omaha Northwest; and Amy Rector, Ralston.

ASF continues to recruit up to 175 stu-



COLLEGE LIFE BEGINS: Laura Miller, ASF Curriculum Director, helps Abbi Davey register and print her course schedule during orientation day at Metro Community College, Wednesday, Aug. 21

dents from the seven schools with which the foundation is affiliated — 22 to 25 students from each school. Recruiting begins in the winter of students’ sophomore year. Students have to complete applications, surveys and interviews. Talent Advisors are always looking for ways to improve the process.

“As a team, I think we can be better at what we’re trying to accomplish,” Wagstaff

said. “It starts with having more contact with students. I want the relationships and the timing of curriculum to be one where they can trust us and be confident in starting their college careers.”

For Wagstaff, another goal is to improve communication with parents.

“I was really struck recently how important it is to have contact with parents,” he said. “One parent just recently told me she had noticed a positive change in her daughter, that she noticed her studying her math without being prompted.”

Wagstaff and his team aim to continue the stimulation of positive changes in students’ lives and being those “alarm clocks” the students can’t turn off.

“**... my TA took that extra step to make me feel like I’m worth something. And when people make somebody feel like they are worth fighting for, that’s when people start believing ...**”

ASF Student, UNO survey response

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LAURA MILLER

Curriculum Director

DEDRICK BELL

Team Leader, College Talent Advisors

College Talent Advisors: Jermaine Jones, Aprille Phillips, Kristin Walsh

High School Talent Advisors:

Juan Cangas, Emily Christensen, Cedric Cooper, Jamar Dorsey, Evan Feezell, Amy Rector, Marcus Wagstaff

TERRY FISCHER

Team Leader
Career Talent Advisors

Career Talent Advisors:

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“Our mission is to ensure careers for students of hope and need through education and supportive relationships.”



BREAKING THE ICE: Dedrick Bell, College Talent Advisors team leader, has students smiling during ice-breaker activities at orientation day for ASF students attending Metro Community College, Wednesday, Aug. 21

College TAs set bar high

Since its inception, the ultimate goal of Avenue Scholars Foundation has been to provide highly motivated students from low-income backgrounds a concrete pathway to a career — whether that be upon completion of an associate degree from Metro Community College or the impetus to enroll in an advanced degree program at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

Now in its fifth year, ASF is beginning to see the fruits of those labors: several students are on track to make the transition from MCC to the workforce or to UNO.

“We will have about 8 to 10 students that will be completers at Metro this year,” says Dedrick Bell, team leader of the College Talent Advisors staff. “Many will elect to transfer and move into programs and majors at UNO. Other students will elect to go right into the workforce.

“We are seeing a few more kids completing programs and moving into the second phase of their overall goals,” Bell said. “The first phase is to graduate Metro; the second phase is to join the work-

force, or to obtain a higher degree.”

According to Bell, for ASF students enrolled at MCC, the College Talent Advisors provide three classes throughout the year — classes that help students be successful in the college setting and be prepared for exploring career options: (1) first quarter: a freshmen seminar class, “pre-

paring them for what college brings”; (2) second quarter, a human relations class: “learning transferrable skills – what it takes to be a marketable employee”; (3) third quarter: a career course, “where it ties all those things together [and provides] opportunities to see if ‘this’ is really what they want to do.”

For these ASF classes, the College TAs meet

with students a couple times a week. In the meantime, students are enrolled in regular MCC classes.

“At that point, we are there for support; we are on campus to troubleshoot — getting them connected to resources, helping them with questions of financial aid,” Bell said. “In a nutshell we provide intrusive support to students. We are there every step of the way.”

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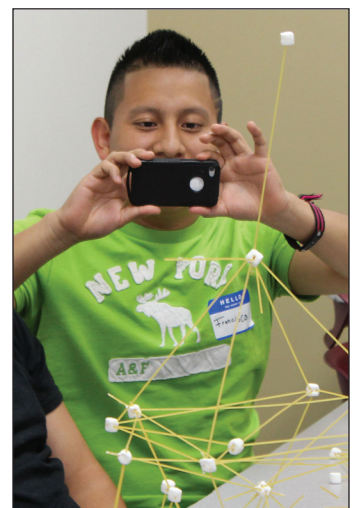
Avenue Scholars is a very amazing program because it helps with your career path — to get enrolled in Metropolitan Community College. Any students who join this program won't regret it.

Francisco Pascual, ASF student

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ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK Rosa Olivera and Nyajuok Pal (standing) work with Sue Meh to put the final touches on a free-standing structure. Students made connections mentally, physically and socially during orientation day activities at Metro Community College.



ICE-BREAKER CHAMPS: Francisco Pascual snaps a photo of the winning model that he and his team constructed during orientation for Metro Community College students.