



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

September 19, 2013

Alexander woman with visual impairment earns achievement award

Jillian Watson-Hulum, Ph.D., of Alexander, sets the bar high when it comes to multi-tasking. She has balanced furthering her education with a career, a disability, motherhood, and dedication to improving the lives of others.

As a result of her determination to overcome adversity, succeed at work, and serve others, Watson-Hulum has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

She will be recognized at a meeting of the Bryant Lions Club at the Home Plate Diner on Oct. 8, at 5:30 p.m. The award presentation falls during October's Blindness Awareness Month, as well as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

Watson-Hulum is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Matt Lyles nominated her for the award from an area that includes Saline, Garland, Grant, Hot Spring, and Clark counties. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

Her employer, ITT Educational Services, has been named as an area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment. The company's online distance education programs, which employ Watson-Hulum, are based in Indianapolis and serve a global community.

"Everybody may not be a person with a disability, but everybody has something, a family issue or something, that could hold them back. You just have to move on," she said. "When I was growing up there were people who told me I couldn't do anything because I was blind, so it motivated me to try

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even harder to succeed.” Fortunately, she said her mother, other family members, and close friends were supportive and expected more from her.

After receiving her Bachelor’s degree in psychology with a minor in sociology from Henderson State University, her DSB counselor encouraged and assisted her in applying for a job at DHS. After she was hired for a position in personnel, she continued her college studies and graduated with a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2006.

She worked at Arkansas Rehabilitation Services from 2007 through 2011. Continuing to full time employment, she went on to earn a doctoral degree in educational psychology from Walden University. DSB provided the equipment she needed to complete her education, and she still uses that computer, printer, and specialized software in her current position. In addition to work and school, she also became a mother during that period. She and her husband, Jeff Hulum, have a six-year-old daughter named Jadyn.

Because of advances in technology, Watson-Hulum can use the internet to connect with and instruct students from around the world. One class she teaches is online only, and another class is a hybrid, where students attend classes both online and on campus. “I enjoy helping them meet their goals and aspirations,” she said. She has taught general psychology, and now teaches upper level classes in social psychology.

Watson-Hulum is member of Delta Sigma Theta Inc. sorority; the Arkansas Chapter of the National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation (NOAH); and several other albinism groups. People with albinism have little or no pigment in the eyes, skin, and hair (or in some cases in the eyes alone). According to NOAH, the lack of pigment during the development of the eye affects the development of the retina and the formation of the nerve pathways from the eyes to the brain, which causes decreased visual acuity, as well as an acute sensitivity to light.

This is the sixth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults who are blind or severely visually impaired and have a goal of successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB’s programs and services, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 1-800-960-9270, 501-682-5463, or TDD 501-682-0093.