

# CAREER PATHS

## THE IMPACT OF MENTORING

*Each month Buncombe County Health and Human Services spotlights a local person to share their experience of working with a mentor and mentoring others, as well as acting as a sponsor to advocate career satisfaction. It is hoped that readers will increase their efforts to find a mentor and be mentors to others.*

### An interview with **Olga Allen**

#### What do you like best about your job?

I love helping people in need and integrating them into American society. The reason why I say this is that many people (from the Eastern Block Countries) are not familiar with the American social and political system. There is a difference in the way things are done in other countries. It is a drastic change in America, which is not easily understood. They look at me as a bridge between American culture and themselves.

For example, when I go with clients to the doctor, they see the doctor as a person who will solve all of their issues, not just a specialist or provider. Doctors don't understand why folks talk so much and ask so many questions. I try to help both the client and doctor to understand the cultural differences [the other's point of view].

#### Who helped you to achieve success?

I grew up in Russia. My father, Alexey Kisliakov, became an orphan during WWII. Later, he was an airplane pilot and taught many others to fly. In 30 years of his career he never had an accident. He led from the front exemplifying the qualities of dedication, duty, and hard work. He is a very wise man, and taught me how to be a professional.

When I came to the U.S., I went to A-B Tech, and Ms. Carol Hutchinson was my teacher. She helped me assimilate into American culture through education. At that time, I was pursuing accounting. One day I said to her, "Ms. Hutchinson, I don't know if I am doing right or not. Should I keep going with my education?" She said, "You should definitely keep going. You are among the few at the top of the class!" She was the first instructor that encouraged me to strive for excellence.

Other people who helped me are our team leader in our interpreting unit, Ms. Deya Toruno-Ramos, [and] my coworkers, Ms. Carina Garcia along with Ms. Esther Rodriguez and former interpreter Mr. Robin Chapman. We have a very accepting environment in our unit.

The majority of people in our unit came from different countries—this allows us to accommodate different customs and traditions and fosters the environment of acceptance and respect. I don't have to prove myself every day. They help me believe that I can achieve everything I set my mind on.



*Olga Allen works as a foreign language interpreter in the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Department.*

#### Can you describe a time when a mentor helped you make an important professional decision?

Several years ago I was asked to do a professional development workshop on the community of people in Buncombe County from the former Eastern Bloc countries. I was nervous to do it. My team leader, Deya Toruno-Ramos, as well as my supervisor, Mr. Shook, gave me an opportunity to come out of my shell by telling me I should not be afraid of failure. I think their exact words to me were, "You need to try. You can do it!" All of sudden, I decided not to follow the same routine and allow myself to be creative.

#### Who helped you to improve your professional and personal well-being?

This quote answers many questions. It is by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and reads: "Own only what you can always carry with you; know languages, know countries, know people. Let your memory be your travel bag."

People are always asking me for advice on how to adjust to American society. I tell them it is all about education. Education is the key to everything.

### Teams are Good for Business

According to Scott E. Page, author of *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, some of the most striking divergences can be seen in the areas of problem-solving, conflict resolution, and creativity. Diverse groups have been shown consistently to out-perform their homogenous counterparts in these three skill sets.

Although researchers are still working to better understand the "why" and "how" of these results, most agree with the preliminary theory that diverse groups perform better because they bring a wide variety of perspectives, experiences, and attitudes to the table. When combined, the diverse staff generates a unique team dynamic that is more wide-ranging in its scope, breadth, and depth, and thus better equipped to tackle complex problems and challenges.

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**– FIND A MENTOR –  
BE A MENTOR TO OTHERS**