

BARBARA STONE



Barbara "Smokie" Stone – VR client, Region 1 (Blue Ridge Unit)

Barbara "Smokie" Stone worked for over 20 years as a truck driver and a driving instructor before she was forced to quit her job in 2005 after being diagnosed with lumbar spinal stenosis, a form of degenerative arthritis of the vertebrae in the lower back. Ms. Stone also has a hearing loss. A 10th grade education, lack of computer skills and medical restrictions on the amount of physical activity allowed at work limited her career options.

In 2008, at the age of 62 and two years after she was forced to quit her job as a long haul trucker, Ms. Stone sought the assistance of vocational rehabilitation services at the Blue Ridge VR Unit where she was served by CRC Kathleen Joule. Also assisting her through the VR process were RJRS Mary Stover and RES Deborah Thurman.

A plan was developed to help Ms. Stone obtain her G.E.D., become computer literate, participate in Job Readiness Training, obtain hearing aids, and receive job development services.

Ms. Stone was interested in working with troubled children or women in crisis. The VR team encouraged Ms. Stone to regularly attend Job Club

meetings, first at Goodwill Industries sponsored Job Club in Elijay and then at a new Job Club at the Blue Ridge office. Ms. Stone completed a battery of assessment tools administered by RJRS Stover who also helped her with developing a resume. RES Thurman helped Ms. Stone polish her interview skills by assisting her with mock interviews which were a part of the job club.

Ms. Stone was an extremely hard working and motivated individual who acted on all recommendations made by the VR team. She was a consistent participant in Job Club meetings and was able to build the confidence to completely change her occupation and fulfill her dream of working with children. She was invited to give motivational speeches at the Job Club. She attended adult education classes at Appalachian Tech College – Fannin Learning Center and obtained her GED in 5 weeks at the age of 63. She was one of four students to speak at the graduation ceremony in July 2009 where she told the audience that if she could do it, anyone can – if they are persistent. Ms. Stone said that earning her G.E.D was the biggest achievement of her life and that she could not have done it without the encouragement of her VR team. She states that "the Blue Ridge VR team worked very hard to help me and the least I could do was to do my part." She further added that "They are superb human beings and it is very obvious that every one in the Blue Ridge office loves their jobs. They do not show up to work to just clock in their hours; they truly want to help people who walk through their doors."

CRC Joule referred Ms. Stone to a senior employment agency and she was placed at North GA Christian Academy where she works with 3 and 4 year old kids as a teacher's aide.

In a very short time, Ms. Stone proved to be a very valuable employee and her employer is extremely happy with her. Her value to the school is exemplified by the following incident: Ms. Stone had fallen ill and had to miss a week of work due to a sinus infection. The Director of the school set up the medical appointment provided her with the money for the visit to the clinic and gave her a \$100 gift certificate for groceries as she had no sick time to cover her off week.

Ms. Stone is one of the featured VR clients for the OASIS orientation video. She is an inspiration to all of us.