

# Impact

Published by the Institute on Community Integration (UCEDD) & Research and Training Center on Community Living

**Feature Issue on Supporting New Career Paths for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

Volume 25 · Number 1 · Winter/Spring 2012

## **From the Editors**

*In the United States we are in the midst of a national conversation about employment. That conversation includes discussion of employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their changing role in the American workforce. Historically, people with disabilities have often participated in very narrowly defined types of employment. There have frequently been low expectations about what they can contribute as workers. But, today self-advocates and their allies are leading a transformation in thinking about how people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can do productive, valued work in their communities. This issue of Impact has been prepared to provide a snapshot of some of the strategies and personal stories that embody that transformation. Written primarily for vocational service providers, employers, secondary and postsecondary educators, and families of individuals with disabilities, this issue explores some of the innovative thinking and resources that are providing expanded employment options for people with disabilities, including employment in some of the promising areas for job growth nationally. And it offers some of the success stories of people taking new paths. It is our hope that this issue will spark even more conversations, and more creative thinking, among its readers about opportunities for supporting new career paths for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our country.*

## **What's Inside**

*Overview Articles  
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**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
+ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**



*Douglas and Stephanie are self-advocates who are training other self-advocates in how to pursue integrated employment. They are part of the Explore-Prepare-Act project for job seekers with intellectual disabilities in Massachusetts. See story on page 10. Photo courtesy of Quinn Barbour/Institute for Community Inclusion.*

## **People with Disabilities in America's Workforce: Time for Fresh Thinking**

*by Derek Nord*

The American economy is undergoing dramatic changes that will alter the employment landscape for generations to come. New and emerging fields are taking root and the need for skilled workers in these fields is growing. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects dramatic growth during the current decade in many industries and occupations in which people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have not typically been represented, including information technology, health care, scientific, and green jobs (2010). As the business community and the labor force respond to the changing economy, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be not only part of the economic conversation, they also must be active participants in filling the increased need for skilled workers.

As of January 2012 only 20% of people with disabilities were either working a paid job or seeking employment in the national labor force, compared to 69% of the general population (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). People with intellectual and developmental disabilities face some of the largest hurdles to entering the workforce and as a result experience the highest unemployment rate (Butterworth, Hall, Smith, Migliore, Winsor, Timmons, & Domin, 2011). When people with intellectual and developmental disabilities do obtain jobs, they are

*[Nord, continued on page 26]*

## Helping Our Loved Ones Prosper: Supporting Social Networking to Build Careers

by Katherine Carol

Connections. In the 21st century, we live in an extraordinarily interconnected world. So why do so many people with disabilities find themselves disconnected?

Today, connections mean opportunity, the ability to influence, and the ability to form community, all of which lead to a more meaningful life. Connections help to build a powerful economic future for all of us. It is through our connections that we get past online job postings, Human Resources departments, and other gatekeepers or barriers to employment. Connections and the richness of our relationships can provide us with social capital, and it is social capital that so often determines future opportunities, including employment options.

Families build social networks from the time a child is diagnosed with a disability. What mother or father hasn't brought together a team of doctors, negotiated with insurance companies, navigated benefits systems, and worked



*Mikelle's (center) portfolio of friends includes Chelsea (left), Ian, and her mother, who are among the many helping her build social capital and her careers as a jewelry maker, small business owner, public speaker, and author.*

***Parents and siblings can play a valuable role in assisting their family member with a disability in building a strong portfolio of social capital that will pay off dearly in the future in building a prosperous life.***

with school systems to tailor educational resources to meet their child's needs? Well, with waiting lists for employment services of nearly 100 years in some communities, funding cuts, and less focus on employment and more on health care management, we are seeing more and more families taking charge and helping

their members with disabilities plan their future as adults. In today's climate, building social capital, and using it to support our loved ones in shaping their lives after high school, has to start with families. Think of families as providers leading the way and working with other agencies as collaborators.

However, are families leading the charge towards prosperity or towards poverty? Traditionally, most planning for people with disabilities has been focused on *poverty* planning.

When my daughter, Mikelle, was a transitioning student, I would sit up late at night in my favorite chair, sipping a hot cup of green tea, worrying about her future. I didn't see myself working so hard to navigate the local school system and attend therapy appointments just to have her end up poor and alone. All this effort had to take her towards the best life possible. And it has.

Mikelle, who experiences cerebral palsy, is now 28 years old. She has successfully transitioned into home ownership, has a small business, and is

accumulating a great deal of social capital in her community. How did she get here? Through prosperity planning.

Prosperity planning involves building social capital. We have found that if families start with the five steps described in the remainder of this article, they are well on their way to a more connected and more prosperous future for their loved one.

### **Create a Prosperous Vision**

Relationships matter, especially in uncertain times. As you save and plan for the future financially, consider helping your family member increase their portfolio of friends, too. The goal is for them to develop enough social capital to result in strong community connections. These connections will prove valuable in moving forward with person-centered planning or, in our case, *Take Action N' Go* teams. Case in point: Last year, 16 people gathered in my home for Mikelle's person-centered planning meeting, and there wasn't a provider



in sight. Facilitating the meeting were her brother, Kasey, and her friend and adopted big brother, Ian. Mikelle met Ian at our local Starbucks where he was working as a barista. Their connection was coffee and community. Together, they ignited the interest of others and soon Mikelle's community expanded. Many of the people at the meeting had been in her life for years.

Her vision and goals as she described them in the meeting were specific:

- Get an iPad.
- Sell more bracelets through her small business, FashionAble by Mikelle ([www.FashionAblebyMikelle.com](http://www.FashionAblebyMikelle.com)).
- Do more presentations for our consulting company, Tango Consulting.
- Meet a hot new man who would become her boyfriend.

With all her social capital focused on a specific vision and goals, she accomplished those four goals in four months, hot man included!

Her iPad was purchased by Chelsea, a close friend and former barista who worked with Ian. Chelsea had recently experienced a personal tragedy when her mother was killed by a drunk driver just a few months prior to our meeting. Chelsea knew technology was vital for anyone's future and her purchase was meant to both inspire others and pay tribute to her mother. These days you will find Mikelle on Facebook connecting with friends, learning about resources, and promoting her book and business. Consider it an online electronic portfolio.

Mikelle's goals to sell more of the bracelets, and do more presentations, were reached simultaneously. While at a Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council meeting (where I am a council member), she was asked to present at a conference in North Carolina. During a meeting break, Mikelle mentioned her bracelet business to one of the council members who was on the planning committee for a national conference on transition; two phone calls later, Mikelle became the keynote speaker.

She gave a wonderful presentation, *How Not to be Roadkill on the Road to Transition*, and sold out her bracelets in three hours at the poster session. The same thing happened at the national conference of APSE in Seattle where we both presented on 21st century rehabilitation strategies with a representative from Apple computers and the Washington Initiative on Supported Employment.

The hot boyfriend was serendipitous. Mikelle receives acupuncture for conditions related to her cerebral palsy. Acupuncture is not covered by Medicaid. Through one of my contacts I learned of The Chanda Plan, which provides grants to people with disabilities seeking alternative health care strategies. Mikelle was asked to be part of their fundraising video. It was at the annual fundraiser attended by 400 people that a certain handsome man saw my beautiful daughter's face on the big screen and said, "Wow!" They met circling the silent auction tables and had date set before the night was over.

Other contacts Mikelle has made through The Chanda Plan have led to her appointment by Denver's mayor to the Denver Mayor's Commission for People with Disabilities, where she is building even more powerful social capital and, yes, selling more bracelets.

### **Expect and Believe**

*Expect* returns on your investment in social capital, and *believe* you can defy the odds and help your loved one create a prosperous life. Take time to sit down with your loved one at your favorite coffee shop and watch how people connect, interact. Notice their customs and language. Discuss how your loved one can connect and build social capital in the same way to help build a prosperous future for themselves. When Mikelle and I connected with Ian and Chelsea, it was through the language of the "bean." Mikelle's brother, Kasey, had been a barista too, so we took our conversations with him about work and parlayed it into a connecting point with both Ian and Chelsea. It wasn't long before

Mikelle was invited to store parties where folks were buying up her bracelets left and right. Soon, Mikelle became a community connector herself, helping others develop new friendships.

### **Focus on Competencies**

Too often, individuals with disabilities and their families focus on the disabilities rather than the abilities. Mikelle and I have met families from all over the country at the presentations we make for our business, Tango Consulting. Frequently, I ask parents or individuals with disabilities to tell us a little about



*Mikelle (center) surrounded by and celebrating with some of the friends in her growing social network.*

themselves. Unfortunately, many start out with a string of labels describing what is wrong with them rather than what is right with them. I know labels get funding, but once you fill out the paperwork, let those labels go. Labels can act like a chain holding you and your family back from a brighter future.

To illustrate this point, our first interaction with Chelsea and Ian focused on a simple photo album Mikelle could bring with her. She would flip that thing open and show-off all the cool things she was doing – pictures of her summer jobs, hanging out with friends, and yes, dancing with some really hot boys (she has an ability to attract good-looking guys into her life). Do you think her social capital went up when people saw her doing cool things? You bet it did. People began to see past the wheelchair. They began to listen to her communication

*[Carol, continued on page 25]*

## Customizing Job Development: Un-Occupying the Workshop, One Person at a Time

by Cary Griffin, Bob Niemiec and Megan Zeilinger

A young woman with disabilities graduates high school with few employment prospects that excite her. She and her support team struggle to see beyond the few jobs typically available to individuals who've received special education services in K-12 schools. But then she gets connected with an employment specialist versed in the job creation strategies central to Customized Employment (CE). Together they explore her Vocational Themes™, the large umbrella topics that represent an accumulation of many jobs, environments, skills/task sets, and interests. Within a couple weeks she is working in the fashion field for a small modeling company, using

success were the adherence to traditional Supported/Competitive Employment comparative methods for finding employment that include:

- Looking for “open” jobs (approaching only employers who are hiring).
- Looking for entry-level, often repetitive jobs in retail box stores and fast food restaurants where little job development creativity is required.

The days of easy placements are more or less over, because many of the folks with disabilities seeking work today bring substantial complexity to the situation and require more thoughtful, more individualized, and more economically compelling approaches.

Customized Employment is a set of techniques that makes Supported Employment more rigorous by using an economic development approach to job creation. It requires active tactics to create opportunity, rather than the passivity of luck and the willingness of companies to “give someone a try.” Its foundation is the Discovery process.

### Discovering Personal Genius™

Discovery, or as we call it, Discovering Personal Genius™, is a process of revealing what already exists. Discovery stages job development efforts by exploring who the job seeker is, what they know, and where they best fit. The process typically begins in the individual's home and includes listening sessions with friends and family where professionals maintain near silence except when prompting additional conversation. We recommend a simple, “Tell me about your daughter,” when doing the initial home visit with a family. This discussion is not an interrogation. There are aspects of people's lives we wish to know, including tasks they perform and skills they have, but there's no checklist or script. The conversation

finds its own way, with gentle guidance from the facilitator or team leader, and is not interrupted until all that needs to be said has been spoken. Some rules for conducting Discovery include:

- Start with the person's home and include friends and family. Explore the rooms of the home for clues about interests, skills and tasks performed. Have the individual demonstrate their skills, showcase their interests, and note their competency levels (remember that most of us started working without knowing how to do our first jobs; employers taught us based on some hunch that we could learn or contribute). Explore the surrounding neighborhood for employment or work experience opportunities, transportation resources, and places to learn new skills.
- Plan activities that demonstrate the skills and tasks the individual performs, wants to learn, and has an interest in. Assisting a make-up artist with a makeover in a store at the mall is an activity; watching someone get a makeover is not. Baking a cake at home is an activity; eating cake is not.
- Seek to establish at least three overarching Vocational Themes™ for each person. These are not job descriptions, such as “wants to be a dog groomer.” Instead, they are broad: think “Animals.” This leads to a richer series of activities in relevant environments. Someone interested in dog grooming may simply be grasping at the one job someone has told them they might be able to do. By exploring the broader field of Animals, using both informational interviews and short work experiences, a world of possible tasks and environments is revealed for the individual.
- Develop a solid vocational profile statement capturing the essence of

*There are unlimited ways to make a living in the world, therefore, “thinking in job descriptions” or job openings is limiting.*

her emerging sewing skills and learning about the proper application of make-up. Before the CE approach was offered, she faced a fairly traditional list of jobs ranging from cleaning bathrooms, to busing tables, to opening boxes for a large retailer. Today, she is around others who have a passion for fashion and who willingly teach her new skills, naturally advancing her career.

Today, this story is still a rarity. At Griffin-Hammis Associates we recently surveyed almost 300 rehabilitation personnel with job development duties. The findings underscored the diverse reasons Supported Employment outcomes stalled about a decade ago (Griffin, 2011; Butterworth, et al., 2010). Chief among the practices contributing to lackluster

the person, their predominant skills, and the three themes of relevance.

- Make Discovery a project. Assign a start and end date, allocate resources and time, and assign staff. Customized Employment is not about getting a dream job; it sees a job as the beginning of the rehabilitation process, not the end. Therefore, starting with a job that matches existing or quickly learned skills, in a place that matches the individual's profile, is the starting point, around co-workers who share a similar theme(s) because they are more likely to connect with the person and teach them what they know and find interesting.

### Job Development

Searching for work begins as Discovery ends. The CE approach requires us to:

- Negotiate job tasks that mutually benefit the employee and the employer. Approach specific places of employment that match the theme(s) and that have task needs matching the job seeker's talents.
- Understand that employers are always hiring. They are hiring people who fit their company's culture, who contribute valued labor and attributes, and who generate their paychecks through profits.
- Avoid traditional Human Resources/competitive hiring processes. If completing applications and interviewing are anything more than formalities, it is probably not customized. Customized Employment circumvents these comparative processes that screen out people with disabilities; it is instead based on unique job creation negotiation.
- For each Vocational Theme™ construct a non-duplicative list of 20 places where the theme makes sense. List 20 specific places of employment in the community, accessible to the person, where people with similar skills and interests work. While there is nothing magical about the number 20, locating just a few places is too

easy, and creativity in job development comes after the most obvious employers are listed.

- Use informational interviews to gather advice for the individual's employment plan. By asking for advice from someone successful who shares similar theme(s), and getting a tour of their workplace, potential tasks are revealed, and if a match seems possible, job development may be introduced.
- Curtail retail. Many retail jobs have been stripped of their complexity. The existence of complexity in work tasks means more stable work, an abundance of natural supports through stable co-workers, the opportunity to advance by learning to use equipment or technology, and higher earnings potential due to advancement. Opening boxes in a storeroom is not likely to build skills upon which a career will rest. Seek out smaller artisanal businesses related to the individual's theme(s), where they can learn more trade-related occupations, even if it means starting at the bottom. Most senior machinists began their careers emptying the trash in a machine shop, and gradually were taught by co-workers, attended classes, and slowly gained experience. Many bakers learned their craft by scrubbing cake pans, surrounded by master bakers who mentored them over time.
- Seek out small businesses. There are only 17,000 businesses in the United States with over 500 employees. There are approximately 37 million small businesses, most with fewer than a handful of employees, the majority of which have no job descriptions or Human Resources departments.
- Identify people with shared interests. The opportunity to meet with a business manager or owner who shares the interests of the job seeker makes job creation easier. Naturally, shared interests are not generally reason enough to hire; there must also be the potential for learning the requisite skills of the job. However, the identification and recognition of shared

interests is the foundation of most lasting human relationships. Hiring is personal, especially in smaller companies.

- Remember, there are unlimited ways to make a living in the world, therefore, "thinking in job descriptions" or job openings is limiting. Few of us know many of the ways that people make a living. Our experiences are quite limited and when we think in terms of "what can Jon do?" our creativity is dramatically impeded. Instead, CE challenges us to engage communities by digging through less traveled and unexpected places to reveal the almost limitless commerce that engages our country.

### Conclusion

Thinking differently and breaking the routine is difficult for us all. The process of CE provides a chartered course fostering new opportunities. Creativity is not even a prerequisite. Simply following the steps will reveal the abundance of economic opportunity in even the smallest of communities. Go where the Vocational Themes™ make sense, focus on tasks and skills, and negotiate for mutual benefit.

### References

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## Creative Job Development: Are You Unbundling?

by Sheila Fesko

Picture this: A job developer, Sonia, is having an energy audit done on her home. She strikes up a conversation with the auditor. He describes the training he had for the work, and tells her how he uses data and conducts tests to help customers reduce energy consumption. The auditor says he likes interacting with customers. But some other tasks, like collecting data from appliance labels and measuring rooms, is time-consuming and keeps him from the more technical elements of his job. Trying to cover all of these elements himself results in each audit taking half a day, and there is a backlog of people wanting an audit.

One of the job seekers Sonia works with is Carmen, a young woman with an intellectual disability. She works best with a consistent routine, likes to write

Sonia begins the process of creating a new job by unbundling tasks from the energy auditor's responsibilities. Here's what she does, and how you can apply these steps in your own work:

- Becomes acquainted with work-site needs.
- Creates a task list.
- Negotiates employment proposal.

### Get Acquainted with Work-Site Needs

The first step in becoming acquainted with the employer's needs is to conduct an informational interview. Ask the employer key questions that will lead to more knowledge of the business and its operations. Employers are generally quite willing to meet when there is a sincere desire to learn about their business. The purpose of the informational interview is *not* to market a specific job seeker, but to get to know the employer's needs and problem areas.

The second step is to ask for a tour. A work-site tour is a good way to clarify operational procedures, identify specific tasks, and pinpoint opportunities where customizing a position would benefit that employer. During the tour, identify possible challenges or areas of operation that are particularly troublesome. Things to consider include:

- Rush times
- Tasks performed on a sporadic basis
- Bottlenecks/logjams/overflowing inboxes
- Inefficient use of key staff
- Activities that pull staff away from the critical (i.e., moneymaking) responsibilities

Through these observations and discussions, you can begin to think about specific tasks that match a job seeker's interests or capabilities.

### Create a Task List

Based on the interview or tour, you can start to identify tasks that might be reassigned, created, or restructured for the job seeker. This task list can help you negotiate with the employer on what tasks they need completed and how the job seeker can address those needs.

The goal of the task list is to identify specific employer needs and to pinpoint how reassigning those tasks can improve efficiency. Tasks should be specific to the workplace. Instead of simply listing "photocopying," the list should refer to "photocopying invoices to be sent out for payment."

Based on the task list, there are several ways to negotiate a job description:

- *Job carving.* With this approach, you modify an existing job description. The carved job description contains one or more, but not all, of the tasks from the original job description.
- *Job creation.* A newly created job description is negotiated based on unmet workplace needs.
- *Job sharing.* Two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each person's strengths.

### Negotiate the Employment Proposal

After the task list is complete, it's time to think about negotiation. Remember, negotiations can only be effective when the employer sees what's in it for them.

Effective negotiation occurs when the job seeker and the employer jointly agree to the answers to these questions:

- What tasks can the job seeker do?
- What hours will the job seeker work?
- How much work does the employer want the job seeker to get done each day?
- How much will the job seeker be paid?
- What accommodations and support will be necessary?
- How will all this help the business?

*It seems like there could be a job match here, but the job doesn't exist quite yet. Sonia begins the process of creating a new job by unbundling tasks from the energy auditor's responsibilities.*

and draw, and can copy information from printed material. Carmen does not have verbal communication skills, but has worked well with a partner at an auto supply store.

You can guess where this is going, right? By keeping her eyes and ears open, Sonia recognizes the problem the auditor is experiencing, and she thinks about Carmen's skills and interests. It seems like there could be a job match there, but the job doesn't exist quite yet.

## Conclusion

So how did things turn out for Carmen, the job seeker? Sonia worked with the auditor and the energy company to negotiate the job. She suggested tasks that Carmen could take off the auditor's hands, and pointed out some tools to help her do this. For example, Carmen can use a digital measuring tape with an electronic read-out. With this, she can easily copy room measurements. She can also use a checklist to document

appliance data. Carmen has been on the job for four months and is very happy. The auditor reports saving time at each site. He is now able to complete three audits a day, and customers are being served more quickly. So the latest customer satisfaction surveys show improved ratings. And it all started with a job developer keeping her eyes open, recognizing an unexpected opportunity, and getting creative with unbundling.

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## Resources for Supporting New Career Paths

The following resources from around the country provide a variety of perspectives and tools that may be useful in exploring and supporting new career paths for people with disabilities:

- **Choose Work (<http://choosework.net>).** This Web site from the Social Security Administration helps Social Security beneficiaries and employment service providers explore options for work through the Ticket to Work program and Work Incentives. It answers common questions about how work and income affect benefits, what happens to health insurance coverage if a person goes to work, and where to find more information in each state. It also includes videos of individual success stories and a calendar of free training events.
- **Green Jobs: A Resource Guide for Individuals with Disabilities (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/GreenResourceGuide.pdf>).** This 13-page guide is for people with disabilities and their advocates and it responds to a number of common questions about conducting a job search in the emerging area of green jobs, including what is meant by "green jobs," what resources are available to help people with disabilities search for green job opportunities, how to locate green job training and education in local communities, and how to request reasonable accommodations. It's published by the NTAR Leadership Center at Rutgers University.
- **Alliance for Full Participation (AFP) ([www.allianceforfullparticipation.org](http://www.allianceforfullparticipation.org)).** In November AFP held a national summit titled "Real Jobs—It's Everyone's Business." The event marked the mid-point in a campaign to double integrated employment for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities by the year 2015. On the AFP Web site are a highlight video, handouts, and Power Points from the summit. In addition, the site has information about the Campaign for Real Jobs and stories of inspiring people with disabilities who have found great successes both in their careers and in their communities.
- **Real People, Real Jobs: Stories from the Front Line (<http://www.realworkstories.org>).** This Web site highlights employment successes of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are working in paid jobs in their communities. Through the use of innovative, front-line employment support practices, they are earning money, forming networks, and contributing to their communities. Stories are organized by a dozen themes including career planning, on the job supports, funding strategies, job matching, job negotiation, job creation, networking, and interagency collaboration. Operated by the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.
- **Preparing for an International Career: Pathways for People with Disabilities (<http://www.miusa.org/publications/books/pic>).** This booklet encourages young adults with disabilities who have international interests to explore careers in the international affairs, exchange, and development fields. It highlights different types of international occupations, job prospects, tips to prepare for an international career, and insights from role models with disabilities who are in international fields. Published by Mobility International USA.
- **Latinos with Disabilities in the United States: Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Employment (<http://www.projectovision.net/documents/pvreport.pdf>).** This report provides an overview of the situation of Latinos with disabilities in the United States, particularly in regard to employment and the social service delivery system, and suggests actions to empower them to increase their self-sufficiency and improve their participation in society. Published by the World Institute on Disability (WID), and available on the Web site of WID's Proyecto Visión, a National Technical Assistance Center established to increase employment opportunities for Latinos with disabilities.

## Supported Self-Employment as a Career Option for Individuals with Disabilities

by Corey Smith and Russell Sickles

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be self-employed as the general population, 14.7 percent compared to 8 percent (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2012). A recent article in the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* observes:

Over the last two decades, self-employment has become more prevalent among individuals with disabilities due in part to the (a) shift in the U.S. economy from industrial manufacturing to a high-technology, information and service-oriented economy, and (b) philosophy and movement of consumer choice and self-determination in employment for individuals with disabilities (Yamamoto, Unruh & Bullis, 2011, 118).

In recent years, Via and Job Squad, Inc., community rehabilitation programs in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, have, under the tutelage of Cary Griffin of Griffin-Hammis Associates, learned a great deal about self-employment as a career option for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have learned that Customized Employment (CE) recognizes self-employment as a possible outcome for all employment seekers. And we have been supporting a growing list of self-employment business ideas for the people that we have served, including soda and candy vending machines, t-shirts, online tropical fish sales, polka disc jockey service, clothing manufacturing, art, and Notary Public.

When first meeting job seekers, we describe wage employment, self-employment, or both as possible job outcomes. The point of our work is to assist individuals to explore and maximize their interests, skills, and talents for use in income-producing activity. We start by engaging in Discovery, a structured process that seeks to answer questions such as “Who is this person?”, “What are their Personal Geniuses™?”, and “What

are the ideal conditions of employment.” These questions cannot be answered without engaging the local community, so we explore neighborhoods, relationships, and activities. From there, the individual and those supporting them in their job seeking can develop a clearer picture of what kinds of work are a good fit for the person as they live their life in the context of their local community.

For some of the individuals with whom we’ve worked, self-employment has been the path they chose. Three of those individuals are Mike, Clint, and Neal, and in the rest of this article we share a little of their stories.

### Making Music: Mike’s Story

In the mid 1970s, Mike graduated from high school with some pretty non-traditional career ideas. When he met with a traditional vocational evaluator he said that his work interests were polka, darkroom photography, television cameras, and taking apart electrical devices around the house. Already labeled as a person with both an intellectual disability and mental health issues, Mike was considered too disabled to work in a competitive job. He then spent the next 30 years working in a sheltered workshop. When we began working with Mike we used CE strategies to help him attain work in the community. We discovered he still had the same work interests, and we spent a considerable amount of time learning about the polka, darkroom (*not* digital!!) photography, television, and small electronics industries. We discovered Mike had skills in all these areas, but it kept coming back to polka. We also learned that his father was in his 90s and needed support from Mike on an intermittent schedule, which made regular wage employment problematic.

We were able help Mike get a very part-time gig doing a polka show on the



After 30 years in a sheltered workshop, Mike started his own DJ business.

radio, but were never able to help him develop enough advertising to make any money. We tried to talk him into taking a job in digital photography, in which he had no interest. We discovered that Mike had an affinity for older people who were interested in polka music. One of our staff has a sister-in-law working in the nursing home industry who was struggling to find entertainment on-site for her residents. Since Mike loves polka, is great with electronic equipment, and is a bit of an entertainer, we helped him play polka music with DJ equipment in a few local nursing homes. He did very well and was well received. In the end, we used some grant resources to help him develop a business plan; he also received job coaching support from a creative vocational rehabilitation counselor, received a small business loan from a revolving loan fund, and got follow-along job coach funding



from the county disability service office. “Polka Mike” was in business!

Mike has now grown his musical offering from polka to also include big band, swing, country, and even rock ‘n roll. With the expansion of Mike’s musical offerings has come expansion of his bottom line, as well.

### ***A Rural Home-Based Service: Clint’s Story***

Over the past year we were fortunate enough to meet Clint, a young man graduating from high school and needing help with career development. Clint has both an intellectual and physical disability and lives in a rural area where traditional wage employment options are hard to come by. He has a support dog and requires some personal supports throughout the day. When we first met, we learned he had a history of working as a greeter for a local big box store on weekends and has highly developed customer service skills. Through the Discovery process we learned that he had over 300 people at his high school graduation party and is considered the “honorary mayor” of his hometown, that he has a very supportive family, and that because of his rural home setting and limited



*Clint (left) created a home-based Notary Public business.*

transportation options perhaps a home-based business should be considered.

One of the business ideas that came up was that of a Notary Public business out of his home. With support from his employment specialist and mother, he researched and passed the certifications needed to be a Notary Public. We were

concerned about having enough customers, so we surveyed the people who came to his party and asked if they would use Clint for their notary work. Just about everybody said “yes.” Since Clint had some history of making money, he is now a dual recipient from the Social Security Administration so we helped him submit a Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) to help with his business start-up costs. Traditional vocational rehabilitation self-employment policy proved to not fit Clint’s business model, so we asked his Vocational Rehabilitation counselor to fund some needed job coaching. Vocational Rehabilitation was very supportive of Clint’s business, helping improve the business plan, the PASS plan, and funding job coaching. Clint is also on schedule to receive follow-along job coaching from the county disability services.

### ***From Hobby to Business: Neal’s Story***

Neal has run a hobby lawn care and general labor business for most of his adult life, helping neighbors by mowing their lawns, assisting with preparation for moves and garage sales, and shoveling snow. Growing up on a farm prepared him well for jobs involving hard work and persistence. He also is pretty good with a table saw and sander!

By spending a bit of time with Neal and his support, we learned about his work with his neighbors. One described Neal as the very first person she met upon moving to her new home. After introducing himself, Neal offered to help move her belongings into her new home. She also said that Neal shoveled her walkway during a big snowstorm this past December – he asked her if she wanted him to shovel because he “didn’t have anything else to do.” Another neighbor has worked on several projects with Neal and has paid him to mow the lawns of his daughter, niece, and nephew. Additionally, one of Neal’s support staff is a partner in a local lawn care business.

We started the Discovery process with Neal, asking the questions to reveal more about who he is and possible employment options. We spoke with those who



*Neal decided to think bigger about work and now has a thriving lawn care and general labor business.*

spent the most time with him, including his customers and others who knew him well. And, after a series of conversations, Neal decided to take his hobby business and, by using existing supports and relationships, turn it into a “proper” business. In his first season, Neal served over a dozen different customers and he is now looking to expand his business.

### ***Conclusion***

Embracing self-employment as a potential employment outcome for all job seekers will create additional work opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Being open to this option presents possibilities for career paths that are as diverse as the individuals with whom we work, and the communities in which they live.

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## Explore-Prepare-Act: Self-Advocates Helping Each Other Achieve Employment Goals

by Cindy Sareault Thomas and Amelia Robbins-Cureau

Everyone, regardless of disability or service systems, has the right to find meaningful and gainful employment. That's the core principle underlying the *Explore-Prepare-Act: Finding the Job You Want* peer-to-peer training. *Explore-Prepare-Act* has been developed by, and for, individuals with intellectual disabilities living in Massachusetts to help them more effectively advocate for themselves to achieve their employment goals. It focuses on increasing the expectations individuals have for themselves, and on

*Explore-Prepare-Act has been developed by, and for, individuals with intellectual disabilities to help them more effectively advocate for themselves to achieve their employment goals.*

familiarizing them with the steps they can take, with or without support, to obtain employment now that the focus of service systems is moving from sheltered to integrated employment.

### How It Began

The *Explore-Prepare-Act* peer-to-peer training curriculum was developed in 2011 in response to self-advocates who expressed frustration with employment services they were receiving and talked passionately about the challenges of moving out of sheltered workshops. They talked about the limited expectations that individuals sometimes have for themselves, as well as the limits often placed on them by family members

and/or service providers. In response to this input, a work group was convened that included self-advocates and representatives from Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston. This group initially envisioned the development of materials and resources that could be used to support self-advocates who were seeking employment services and supports. Over time the decision was made to develop a video and related curriculum entitled, *Explore-Prepare-Act: Finding the Job You Want*. With support from Work Without Limits, a Massachusetts Employment Initiative funded through the Massachusetts Infrastructure and Comprehensive Employment Opportunities grant, the workgroup evolved into a project steering committee and a curriculum development team was formed and staffed primarily by self-advocates. In 2011, the video and curriculum were finalized and 14 self-advocates were hired as trainers along with five mentors.

### What it Includes

The *Explore-Prepare-Act* curriculum is a two and one-half hour training divided into five modules: Introduction, Explore, Prepare, Act, and Wrap-up. Each module addresses an important step in finding employment, using presentations, interactive discussion, hands-on activities and multimedia presentations with clips from the *Explore-Prepare-Act* video (see [www.exploreprepareact.org](http://www.exploreprepareact.org)).

In Part 1, *Introduction*, trainers involve the audience in an interactive warm-up activity, show an introductory video clip of people with disabilities working in a variety of competitive jobs, and discuss the importance and meaning of employment. Part 2, *Explore*, helps participants learn how they might explore their own

interests and skills and learn about jobs in their community. In Part 3, *Prepare*, trainers use video, discussion, and picture representations to teach participants about resumé development, professional attire, and social skills. Part 4, *Act*, teaches self-advocates to pursue the kinds of jobs they want, and to communicate their strengths and goals effectively. And Part 5, *Wrap-up*, includes a review of the job search components, *Explore-Prepare-Act*, and a written evaluation activity.

### The Role of Trainers and Mentors

The trainers for *Explore-Prepare-Act* are self-advocates with intellectual disabilities recruited from across the state of Massachusetts who have had experience working in integrated employment. Out of over 70 applicants, 14 individuals were chosen to become trainers. They come from various backgrounds and



Douglas, Stephanie and the 12 other *Explore-Prepare-Act* peer trainers have reached over 120 individuals with intellectual disabilities through the project's training sessions.

have a wide range of employment histories. In addition, a mentor was hired for each team to support trainers to learn the material, enhance their training skills, and assist with training logistics and transportation.

All trainers and mentors participated in a series of train-the-trainer sessions over an eight-week period in 2011. In the





Andre's role as an *Explore-Prepare-Act* peer trainer has helped change lives, including his own.

sessions they learned the fundamentals of training as well as the curriculum, adapted materials to meet their needs, and made suggestions to the project team for improvements to the curriculum. The train-the-trainer series included five days of statewide training meetings led by members of the project steering committee. Each day was structured to include: (1) Welcome and warm-up, (2) employment topic discussion, (3) team-building activity, (4) demonstration of one training module by the project team, and (5) an introduction to the next module in the training curriculum. Training teams practiced using new curriculum material between sessions. Each day of train-the-trainer activities promoted a sense of cohesion among regional training teams, as well as the statewide group as a whole.

Once fully trained, the regional *Explore-Prepare-Act* training teams comprised of two or three trainers connected with local self-advocacy groups and service providers in order to recruit groups of 10-15 interested job seekers with intellectual disabilities to participate

in a pilot training. Mentors assisted in logistical coordination, preparation of training materials and transportation; however, a cornerstone of this project is the idea that the mentors do not provide training, and intervene during training sessions only at the request of the trainers. As of early 2012, the pilot training is complete, and training sessions for self-advocates seeking employment are now being offered statewide.

### **Self-Advocate Response**

To date over 120 individuals with intellectual disabilities have participated in the *Explore-Prepare-Act* training. Evaluation comments indicate that participants like the peer-to-peer approach, sharing personal stories, asking questions, the opportunity to learn about how to find a job, and the video clips and exercises. Many have indicated that the training is easy to understand, while some have said that they could use more support to help them fully participate. Most have indicated that they learned more about finding a job, the training made them think differently about their job goals, and they would use the steps they learned in their own job search.

In addition to the positive responses from participants, the self-advocates who are the trainers have identified ways in which they've benefited from being part of *Explore-Prepare-Act*. Trainer Andre William says, "All I have ever wanted to do was to help people change their lives. Doing *Explore-Prepare-Act* helps me do this. For me, being a trainer has been life changing. I was very reserved and shy, and being a trainer has helped me become more talkative. Now I can help people understand that they can get a job that they want." Another trainer, Annmarie Devane, says, "I love doing this job! The people we are meeting with like the training. We teach them and they teach us. We are all learning from each other. I like being an example for others and helping them see that if I can get a job so can they." And trainer Donna Jay points out the importance of the training, saying, "People who go to

workshops need to know what other opportunities they can have. We shouldn't be shy because everyone can go to work. Everyone can make money."

### **What Comes Next**

While *Explore-Prepare-Act* has been well received both in Massachusetts, where it's being implemented, and nationally through two recent conference presentations, the project partners have identified the need for an evaluation strategy to assess the efficacy of this model. Ultimately, does participation in the training influence the action steps participants take to address their own employment goals? As a first step to encourage participants to act on what they have learned a "Dear Friend/Family" letter has been developed and will be added to the training packets given to participants. The letter provides an overview of the training and requests that the recipient either assist the participant in obtaining a job or help them access the support they may need to reach their employment goals. It is hoped that this will be a conversation-starter that will facilitate important discussions about employment between participants and their families, friends and/or support staff. Project partners are also currently looking at follow-up approaches that can be easily implemented in order to determine the impact training has on participants. Additionally, an evaluation is being developed to assess the impact that being employed as trainers has had on the *Explore-Prepare-Act* trainers themselves.

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## Enough with the Employer Awareness Already!

by Richard Luecking

As a result of ongoing advocacy, evolving employment methodology, policy, and even legislation, there is increasing expectation that employment for people with disabilities is both desirable and expected. In fact, a key principle of any sincere employment initiative is the presumption of employability for all people with disabilities. While an advocacy focus is commendable, it has its limitations, especially when it comes to communicating with employers about this issue. As a result, this article will examine some of the attempts to promote

*Although employers are more enlightened about disability than they were before the Americans with Disabilities Act, their motivations for hiring are still grounded, as we should expect, in what's in it for them.*

employer awareness about hiring people with disabilities – and what can be done to more successfully engage employers.

### Employer Awareness Initiatives

The *Hire the Handicapped* marketing slogans of the 1960s and 1970s suggested that charity, rather than job seeker competence, would be a chief reason that employers might want to hire people with disabilities. They also put job development professionals in a supplicant position, petitioning employers to consider applicants with disabilities without offering much in return.

Although this approach has been widely discredited in recent decades, it

is still common to see current appeals to employers that include only slightly more sophisticated messages and continue to “sell” disability or categories of disabilities. Many disability employment marketing campaigns still suggest a vague mutual benefit that exists when employers hire people with disabilities. Or they promote the opportunity for employers to gain from an “untapped resource” represented by people with disabilities. These approaches imply that if only employers were more aware, they would readily consider hiring people with disabilities.

There are two main problems with these messages. First, they do not necessarily put people with disabilities in a favorable light. “Untapped” suggests unwanted, or at best, difficult to find. And promoting “hiring people with disabilities” can be inadvertent stereotyping. Second, these messages do not take employer perspectives into consideration. After all, successful employment initiatives do not occur without knowledge and appreciation of what employers need and how they operate. Similarly, efforts to create employer awareness cannot be successful without regard for or understanding of the real operational demands of employers.

### What Employers Want

After years of supported employment experience and research we understand that employers are mostly interested in three things: making money, saving money, and/or operating more efficiently. Although employers are more enlightened about disability than they were before the Americans with Disabilities Act, their motivations for hiring are still grounded, as we should expect, in what's in it for them. What do they want? When in doubt, ask them!

There is an old marketing adage that says: “It is better to find out what your customers need and want and then

match it to what you have, than it is to get them to buy what you are selling.” In the context of promoting employment of people with disabilities, this means that finding out what they want and then giving it to them best serve interactions with employers. What do they want?

*The competence of the job seeker, and of employment specialists assisting the job seeker, to meet employer needs is a better “sell” than any charitable motivation.*

Surveys of employers tell us they want two things: partners who can help them address a particular workforce or operational need of the company, and competent help from disability employment services. How can we give this to them?

### Demand-Side Engagement

Preparing a supply of workers, or trying to get employers' attention about a segment of potential workers, will only be as effective as the effort to create an understanding of employer demand. There are two time-tested ways to do this:

- It is important for professionals who are promoting and facilitating employment of people with disabilities to get their “face in the place.” In other words, job developers, employment specialists, rehabilitation professionals, and other involved parties need to spend time visiting and getting to know employers. One way to do this is to conduct informational interviews. These are easy and effective ways to show interest in potential employers, as well as to identify

potential workforce needs. Such interviews are conducted during visits to companies where the objective is not to “find a job that people with disabilities can do.” Rather, they are ways to learn about employer needs, such as what kinds of people they are looking to hire or whether there are bottlenecks in the flow of work or other operational concerns that can be fixed by the strategic hiring of people who can perform specific tasks.

- Employers are impressed when people offer ways to help them – in other words, when people provide them with good service. For example, one employer stated in an informational interview that there was difficulty getting documents processed across company departments. A savvy employment specialist negotiated the hiring of an individual whose responsibility was to deliver the documents from department to department. The result was a more efficient way to get the work done and a good job for a job seeker who happened to have a disability. This was a mutually satisfying outcome. Such demand-side knowledge and competence goes a lot further in engaging employers than platitudes about hiring from an “untapped resource.”

### **The Bottom Line**

The competence of both the job seeker, and of employment specialists assisting the job seeker, to meet employer needs is a better “sell” to employers than any charitable motivation. Therefore, a more focused message to employers should include reference to the competence of individual prospective job candidates, the quality of the assistance the employer might receive from those assisting the job seeker, and the service-oriented attention to employer needs that is available. When this is the case, the presence of a disability neither deters nor promotes employer hiring decisions. Rather, it is assistance with the operational or bottom line needs of the employer that drives hiring.

Promoting employer awareness about hiring people with disabilities is not an altogether ill-advised activity. However, it is not enough to change employer hiring behavior – and it’s not enough to increase the long-standing low employment rates of people with disabilities. Consequently, the contemporary practice of “selling” employers on hiring people with disabilities needs to give way to more customer-oriented approaches that identify and meet specific employer needs through the careful matching of individual job seekers to workplace tasks and employer demands. Only then will the presumption of employability become less of a lofty concept and more of a commonly held expectation.

*Richard Luecking is President of TransCen, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Rockville, Maryland, dedicated to improving employment success of people with disabilities. He is a past executive board member of APSE and currently serves on the APSE Foundation Board. This article is adapted from a presentation by the author at the 2010 APSE Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.*

*Reprinted with permission from “Enough with the Employer Awareness Already! What Else Needs to Happen to Improve Access to Employment?” published November 2010 in APSE Connections. Retrieved from <http://transcen.org/images/stories/TransCen/publications/PDFs/apseconxxnov10.pdf>*

## **Resources Created for People with Disabilities**

*These employment-related resources from around the country have been created for use by people with disabilities and others:*

- **Partners in Employment (<http://www.partnersinpolymaking.com/employment>).** *This free, online self-study course is designed to help people with developmental disabilities find meaningful jobs and jumpstart their careers. In this six-hour self-study course participants create a resumé or portfolio of their strengths, skills, and interests; learn how to network and identify potential employers; prepare for an interview; and understand the hiring process. The course also includes specific information on finding competitive, meaningful employment in the emerging “digital economy.” Operated by the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.*
- **The Riot (<http://www.theriotrocks.org/the-riot-newsletter/recent-issues>).** *The July and October 2011 issues of this newsletter by and for self-advocates focus on jobs and moving from sheltered workshops to integrated employment in the community. Throughout both issues self-advocates share their perspectives on and tips for finding “real jobs for real pay,” as well as steps that self-advocacy groups can take to promote real jobs for people with disabilities.*
- **National Organization of Nurses with Disabilities (<http://www.nond.org/>).** *This open membership, cross-disability, professional organization works to promote equity for people with disabilities and chronic health conditions in nursing professions. Its Web site includes extensive information for individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses who are entering, or are already in, nursing professions, as well as for health care employers.*
- **Internships: The On-Ramp to Employment. A Guide for Students with Disabilities to Getting and Making the Most of an Internship (<http://nclld-youth.info/Downloads/intern-guide-final.pdf>).** *By Andraea N. LaVant. This publication from the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth is written for young adults with disabilities and talks about how to get an internship as part of the career exploration and preparation process.*

## Exploring Jobs in Renewable Energy: The Camps to Careers Program

by Eriann Faris

During the summer of 2011, southwest Minnesota young people with disabilities had the opportunity to join with other young adults to explore career opportunities in the fast-growing renewable energy industry. Through two three-day summer career exploration camps that are offered as part of an innovative program called Minnesota Camps to Careers, they gathered at Minnesota West Community and Technical College on both the Canby and Granite Falls campuses to try on careers in two critical segments of the renewable energy industry: wind power and biofuels.

### Renewable Energy Camp Overview

Camp participants received hands-on experience, classroom instruction and professional career development guidance, including help obtaining internships to acquire real job experience and on-the-job training to build networks within the renewable energy industry, and help improving job readiness when seeking permanent employment.

The renewable energy sector includes careers in engineering, installation and repair, production, and construction, offering median wages ranging from \$26,000 to \$84,000 a year. "These are exciting, stimulating and high-wage careers and there's a lot of opportunity for young people who are interested in launching themselves into an expanding industry sector," says Cheryl Glaeser, Program Officer with the Southwest Initiative Foundation, one of the partner organizations in Camps to Careers. "Minnesota's ethanol industry was projected to generate \$3 billion in 2010, supporting over 8,000 jobs. The wind industry is also expanding, supporting nearly 3,000 jobs as Minnesota ranks fourth in nation for installed capacity."

The Camps to Careers program began as Minnesota Manufacturing Camp in



Brett Fleahman is on track to a career in renewable energy thanks to Camps to Careers and educators like Brad Boulyt.

2007 after a Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) study revealed that manufacturers were experiencing a skilled labor shortage. With there being a high unemployment rate for persons with disabilities, it seemed to be a win-win situation to assist youth who have the skills and interest in manufacturing along a career pathway leading to great jobs with excellent pay. Since 2007, the program has expanded into other demand-driven career sectors across the state including health care, information technology, and business, and thus the name was also changed to Camps to Careers. There are currently nine regions that have teams of school and community organization personnel who come together to plan step-by-step career development opportunities for a wide array of youth, including youth with disabilities. Since 2007, DEED has supported 53 Camps to Careers programs that have served over 600 youth.

### Brett's Camp Experience

Brett Fleahman is one young man with a disability who participated in the 2011 Southwest Minnesota Renewable Energy Camps to Careers program. When asked about his experience with the program and his career goals, he shared the following thoughts:

Q: How did you get interested in the area of renewable energy?

A: I am a participant of the local Upward Bound program with Southwest Minnesota State University and Marshall Public High School in Marshall, Minnesota, and we had some discussion and activities that focused on career exploration. At one point renewable energy was mentioned, and it peaked my interest.

Q: Is there a particular area of renewable energy that's of special interest to you?

A: Wind energy.



Q: In what ways do you think renewable energy is important in our country?

A: It helps save energy and can be used long term.

Q: What kinds of things did you do in the Camps to Careers Renewable Energy program?

A: We learned the vocabulary associated with a wind turbine, the dynamics of a wind turbine, and then we were able to build our own wind turbine. We were able to design our own blades and race when we completed our wind turbines to see whose manufactured the most energy. As for the biofuels camp, we too learned the vocabulary associated with biofuels and did a lot of experiments where we turned food into energy.

Q: Did the Camps to Careers program help you get an idea of some specific kinds of jobs that might be a good fit for you? If so, what are they?

A: Yes, the Camps to Careers program helped me to realize wind energy would be a good fit for me. I was able to realize that the information I learned at Camps to Careers has already put me several steps ahead the other freshman who will be enrolled into the Wind Energy program at Minnesota West Community and Technical College on the Canby campus. For example, I knew the vocabulary and dynamics associated with a wind turbine. That is exciting to realize that postsecondary education is an option for me. If I could complete the tasks the college instructor was requesting during the Camps to Careers program, then I could go to college and be successful. Plus I was more familiar with a wind turbine than those first year students at Minnesota West Community Technical College Wind Energy program.

Q: What have you done since the camp to pursue your interest in renewable energy?

A: I have decided I will attend the Wind Energy program at Minnesota West Community and Technical College in Canby.

Q: Through your experience with Camps to Careers, and exploring renewable energy as a career path, have you learned any lessons that might help other students with disabilities who are thinking about what kinds of work they'd like to do as adults?

A: Yes, keep your hopes up and move forward. Anything is possible.

### Future Career Camps

In June, 2012, another Camps to Careers program will be held in southwest Minnesota. This year the industry focus will be on dental assisting and health care careers and cover a variety of skill and education levels, with median wages in these growing industries ranging from \$41,695 to \$166,400. On June 19, the Minnesota West Community and Technical College Canby campus will host youth with and without disabilities to learn more about dental assisting. Dental assistants help dentists with patient care, office tasks, and lab duties. The increasing trend for people to keep their natural teeth will fuel the demand for dental services. Demand will also

increase due to a higher emphasis placed on dental care in younger generations.

On June 21, the Minnesota West Community and Technical College Luverne campus will host youth with and without disabilities to learn more about allied health care. Health care is a growing industry in southwest Minnesota and a good long-term career prospect. Careers the students will learn about include radiologic technology, surgical technology, medical assisting, medical laboratory technician, phlebotomy, massage therapy, and so much more.

*Eriann Faris is Youth Program Coordinator with the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, Marshall, one of the Camps to Career partner organizations. For more information about the Southwest Minnesota Camps to Careers program contact her at [efaris@swmnpic.org](mailto:efaris@swmnpic.org) or 800/818-9295. Information is also available at [www.swmncareers.org](http://www.swmncareers.org). More information about the statewide Camps to Careers program is available from Alyssa Klein, Project Manager, Pathways to Employment, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development at [Alyssa.Klein@state.mn.us](mailto:Alyssa.Klein@state.mn.us). Or visit <http://www.campstocareers.org>.*

## Resources for Supporting Youth

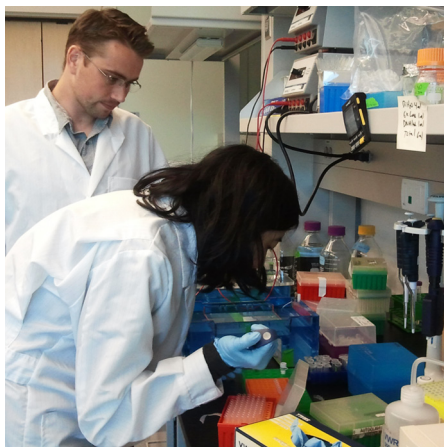
*These resources can help adults prepare youth with disabilities for careers after high school:*

- **Finding Jobs for Students with Intellectual Disability: Where Do You Start?** ([www.ThinkCollege.net/trainings-past](http://www.ThinkCollege.net/trainings-past)). *The audio content from this March 2012 Webinar is available for free downloading. It gives participants a process they can use to create opportunities for students by getting their foot in the door of the right businesses. Sponsored by Think College, based at the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.*
- **Soft Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success** (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>). *This free curriculum focuses on teaching "soft" or workforce readiness skills to youth with and without disabilities ages 14-21. Created for youth development professionals as an introduction to workplace interpersonal and professional skills, it has hands-on, engaging activities in six areas: communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism. Developed by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.*
- **Paving the Way to Work: A Guide to Career-Focused Mentoring for Youth with Disabilities** (<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/paving-the-way-to-work#download>). *This free guide was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) specifically to help professionals address the mentoring needs of youth with disabilities during their transition from school to work.*

## Preparing Young Adults with Disabilities for STEM Careers: The Pacific Alliance Model

by Kiriko Takahashi, Kelly D. Roberts, Steven E. Brown, Hye-Jin Park, and Robert Stodden

Employment opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields in the U.S. are growing at a rapid rate. Between 1950 and 2000 the STEM workforce grew 669% while the workforce as a whole only grew 130% (Lowell & Regets, 2006, as cited in Varma & Frehill, 2010). The U.S. Bureau of Labor (2007) projects job growth of 22% for STEM occupations as a whole between 2004 and 2014. However, there is a gap between the large number of STEM job opportunities and the low number of individuals who are attaining their college degrees in these fields even though postsecondary education is critical for many STEM occupations.



With support from the Alliance, Leina has moved from “just getting by” early in college, to planning for grad school.

When considering students with disabilities, their participation in postsecondary education is lower than their representation in the U.S. population, and significantly lower in comparison to their peers without disabilities. For students with disabilities who are enrolled in postsecondary education, only 11% of those students in undergraduate programs are pursuing STEM degrees (Burrelli, 2007). This number drops to 7% in graduate programs in STEM, with only 1% earning a doctorate degree in STEM (Commission on Professionals in

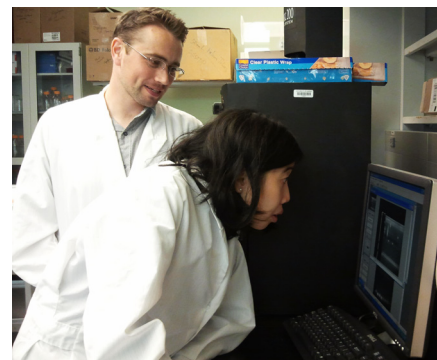
Science and Technology, 2007) and only 4.8% entering the science and engineering workforce (Burrelli & Falkenheim, 2011). This low number indicates a need to encourage and support students with disabilities to enter and complete postsecondary education in STEM so they can compete in this growing job market.

### Supporting the STEM Pipeline

The Pacific Alliance for Supporting Individuals with Disabilities in STEM Fields Partnership, based at the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, is a five-year project funded by the National Science Foundation to increase the number of students with disabilities exploring, transitioning into, and succeeding in STEM education and careers. Pacific Alliance project staff work with students with disabilities who are juniors and seniors in high school, undergraduate students in two-year and four-year institutions, and graduate students. These students are either already in the STEM pipeline, not yet in the STEM pipeline, or undecided about STEM. Staff provide diverse and individualized types of support to address disability-related barriers, self-empowerment/exploration barriers, academic barriers, and employment barriers.

### Communities of Practice in Action

To promote the STEM pipeline and support students with disabilities who are in it, Pacific Alliance has developed four Communities of Practice on local college campuses. Communities of Practice are teams of people who share a common concern or interest around a specific topic. They work together to identify goals, set priorities, cultivate resources, and access services and accommodations associated with the secondary and postsecondary education success and



The mentoring and support Leina is receiving in her lab internship is helping her career preparation go more smoothly.

employment of students with disabilities in STEM fields. Each Community of Practice is key in guiding and implementing the following promising practices:

- **Mentoring.** Peer-to-peer and mentor-protégé relationships provide students with career, psychosocial, and academic support. Mentoring is tailored to student needs, disability type(s), culture, and/or gender. Mentors are trained and mentoring is provided in person, via the Internet, and by phone.
- **Accommodations.** Students are guided to connect with disability agencies and resources on campus and within the community that offer accommodations to address inaccessibility of facilities, curriculum materials, equipment, and electronic resources.
- **Interest Embedded STEM Building.** Students take part in diverse STEM learning opportunities including monthly group meetings, engaging social experiences such as team-building activities, summer and winter institutes focused on learning about different STEM disciplines, and field trips to STEM-based companies.
- **Assistive Technology (AT).** Through workshops, students are exposed to both low and high tech AT and supported to identify AT that will promote their independence, self-efficacy, and



academic skills building while increasing inclusion in the STEM environment.

- *College Preparation.* High school participants are encouraged to prepare for college. Pacific Alliance staff organize information sessions and go through college application and financial aid forms together. College mentors also speak to the participants about their experiences. In addition, participants learn about the self-advocacy skills and the types of documentation needed for postsecondary education environment.
- *Internships and Research Experiences.* Students with disabilities greatly benefit from professional internships and research experiences in addition to their coursework. Through Pacific Alliance, connections are made to existing college programs and collaborating employers with the assistance of Communities of Practice members and mentors. Information on internships is posted monthly on the Pacific Alliance Web site.
- *Self-Advocacy.* Self-advocacy is a critical skill for successful transition to, and participation and retention in, postsecondary education and careers. Participants receive specific guidance to determine and advocate for their support needs, and self-advocacy skill lessons are often provided in conjunction with mentoring and college and career preparation supports.

In addition to implementing the promising practices described above, Community of Practice members provide input for staff and stakeholders, assist in student recruitment and monitor retention, and conduct capacity-building activities such as training and workshops.

### Leina's Story

The following is the story of one young woman, Leina, who is participating in the Pacific Alliance project. It illustrates how project staff and the Communities of Practice support participants to succeed in STEM fields.

Leina is a college student with Asperger's syndrome. She was recruited for the project as a student already in the STEM pipeline. Through Pacific Alliance she is receiving mentoring and has been placed in a STEM internship. She tells her story here, describing her challenges as a student with a disability pursuing a STEM education and career, and how support provided by Pacific Alliance staff and Communities of Practice members has been helpful:

I just graduated with a degree in biochemistry. I was working in the neurobiology area on stem cells with rat models looking at tissue cell death and migration. I have Asperger's syndrome, which pretty much means I have social deficits. I had only gotten diagnosed in my senior year in high school, so when I went to college, it was definitely a challenge. People expect you to be more mature and I wasn't, so that was definitely a challenge. In the first place, I didn't deal with being in college very well. I was just getting by. It was hard to make the grades and to be at the level where other students were. I did not receive accommodations until my sophomore year in college. I got extended time on tests and not much of anything else. The school didn't have the resources to provide me with other accommodations. I did struggle with a lot of the courses. Also, because of my Asperger's, the professor that I did research with didn't know if I truly wanted to work in his lab. He thought I had a lack of motivation.

I'm not experiencing challenges now at the internship. I hope the people that I'm working with know that I want to be there and don't have doubts like in the past. It is helpful to have a Community of Practice member at the lab because I realized that getting support is important. Trying to do it alone is very hard.

People should look at schools and look at what types of services are available. They should look to make sure there are people who can support you. People with Asperger's especially need to be told what to do because

we are not often self-starters like others who come to college. Mentoring through the Pacific Alliance has been helpful. Mentors can help in providing directions and what to do. It helps. My mentor, who is a graduate student with a similar interest in neuroscience, has encouraged me to apply to post-baccalaureate programs to work as a lab tech and gain more skills in the research area before applying to a graduate program.

### Conclusion

This article has provided a glimpse of how the Pacific Alliance project supports students with disabilities in the STEM pipeline. The key outcomes of the project include its impacts on students' interests, academic and career aspirations, and persistence and success in STEM fields. Leina's story is one of many success stories that have occurred over the course of the project. We intend to continue to positively impact many more students who, through our support, will be able to enter the STEM workforce.

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## A New Way of Doing Conservation Work: The Utah Conservation Corps Inclusive Crews

by Kate Stephens

In 2005, Andy Zimmer, a crew leader with the Utah Conservation Corps (UCC), was in a bike accident that resulted in quadriplegia. After rehabilitation, he wanted to return to the conservation corps and complete his term of service. At that time, there were no opportunities for him to serve in a field-based conservation corps...anywhere. Although Andy was no longer able to swing an axe, he had many other strengths and abilities. Andy motivated me to start thinking outside the box.

Prior to working for the UCC, I founded a non-profit that provides adaptive outdoor recreation opportunities for people of all abilities. Although I had experience with adaptive programs and getting people with disabilities outside, I had not yet found a way to include people with disabilities in the UCC, a program that requires its members to be tough, rugged, and physically strong. I knew what the "crew experience" meant to our members, and I wanted to give crew members with disabilities that same experience. Living in a tent, spending every day outside, working on conservation projects, and being part of a close-knit team...this is what the crew experience is all about. This is the life that Andy had come to love and wanted to return to. He also wanted share this experience with other people with disabilities.

Thanks to the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, The Corps Network, the Utah Commission on Volunteers, the Utah State University Center for Persons with Disabilities, and many others, this dream became a reality in the summer of 2007. Andy returned to the UCC and served as a crew leader of our first inclusive crew. In many ways, his position was similar to what he had done two years prior. The UCC simply broadened what we were already doing and created new projects that were more physically accessible and required fewer physical skills to get the job done.



The 2011 UCC inclusive work crew in the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest with crew leader Andy Zimmer (front center).

The UCC inclusive crew model enables crew members with physical disabilities to engage in conservation service projects alongside their counterparts without disabilities through the use of adaptive equipment and accessible programming. Fifty percent of the crew self-identifies as having a physical disability. Disabilities among UCC members have included quadriplegia, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, blindness, deafness, and multiple sclerosis. Upon completion of their service, all crew members participating in these inclusive crews during the past several years have reported that the program increased their awareness and understanding of disability issues and opened their minds to new educational and career possibilities.

Inclusive crew projects are carefully developed to include crew members with disabilities in a significant and meaningful way. We did not want to create a situation where crew members with disabilities were sitting on the sidelines while those without disabilities

completed project tasks. Instead, crew members with disabilities are actively involved in all phases of projects, adding a valuable perspective.

The UCC inclusive crews have so far focused on two main project areas: (1) accessibility surveys and transition plans for the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service, and (2) development of an accessible community garden. Accessibility surveys are a critical first step in the development of transition plans, which are plans for bringing facilities and programs that are not accessible into compliance with accessibility standards. During the survey, each portion of a structure is compared to accessibility standards or guidelines, and compliance and deficiencies are recorded. Every Forest Service unit in the nation is required by law to have transition plans in place; however, many do not. The UCC inclusive crew has demonstrated itself to be an effective partner in addressing this federal mandate and making developed areas on federal lands accessible to users of all abilities.

In 2009, the UCC inclusive crew assisted the U.S. Forest Service in the development of a new national accessibility information database that will provide the public with information on accessible campsites, facilities, and services. The accessibility information gathered and entered into the database by inclusive crews automatically feeds Forest Service District Web portals that are accessed by the public. Conservation Corps throughout the country will now be able to enter accessibility information into this new database in a consistent manner, making the inclusive crew program model easily replicable by other corps.

Inclusive crews not only survey what is out there, they are also a part of the solution to removing barriers. All UCC crews are trained in trail maintenance

and construction and can remove some barriers while the crew is on site. For example, sections of trail can be widened, rocks can be removed, and vegetation can be pruned.

The accessible community garden, designed and constructed by the UCC inclusive crew, is another project that's been undertaken. It is fully accessible to all community members. The UCC partnered with the Cache Valley Community Garden project to turn this dream into a reality. The garden includes raised beds, table top planters, hardened pathways, and adapted gardening tools.

Involving people with disabilities, such as Andy, in positions of leadership is also a program priority. Andy and Quintin, who is blind, have served as excellent crew leaders and role models.

By placing people with disabilities in positions of leadership, outdated, limiting stereotypes are shattered and attitudes evolve and change.

The UCC inclusive crews are hopefully the start of a new movement within the corps world. In 2010, an inclusion toolkit was made available to corps throughout the country. This toolkit and a video about the UCC disability inclusion program can be found on the Utah Conservation Corps Web site at <http://www.usu.edu/ucc/html/about/inclusive>. In Utah, plans are in process to have inclusive crews doing accessibility surveys for the U.S. Forest Service again in 2013.

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## Resources for Employers, Job Seekers, and Service Providers

The following resources offer practical tools, consultation, and networking opportunities that support inclusion of people with disabilities in workplaces:

- **The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) (<http://askjan.org>).** This organization provides free, expert, confidential guidance on workplace accommodations, disability employment, and Americans with Disabilities Act issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace. In addition to individual consultation and guidance for employers, employees/job seekers, and service providers, it offers a wide array of practical accommodation-related resources on its Web site. Among them is the SOAR (Searchable Online Accommodation Resource) system that lets users explore accommodation ideas for people with disabilities in work/education settings, with tips organized by type of disability or chronic illness (see <http://askjan.org/soar/disabilities.html>).

- **Strategies for Including People with Disabilities in the Green Jobs Talent Pipeline: Roundtable Proceedings ([www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/GreenProceedings.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/GreenProceedings.pdf)).** This report summarizes the discussion at a 2009 roundtable focusing on how to ensure that people with disabilities are included in the emerging energy efficiency and renewable energy workforce. Participants included experts from workforce development, education, green jobs, disability employment, economic development, labor unions, disability advocacy organizations, and policymakers. The event was sponsored by the NTAR Leadership Center at Rutgers University and the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy.
- **US Business Leadership Network (<http://usbln.org>).** This national, non-profit, business-to-business network promotes workplaces, marketplaces, and supply chains where people with disabilities are included. Its affiliates are business organizations headed by a lead employer who exemplifies best practices and shares experiences with other members-employers within the state or region. Businesses

join BLN affiliates to learn how to expand their diversity recruiting efforts to include people with disabilities as a business case to recruit talent and better serve customers. Among its Web resources is the free booklet, "Leading Practices on Disability Inclusion" ([http://usbln.org/pdf-docs/Leading\\_Practices\\_on\\_Disability\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://usbln.org/pdf-docs/Leading_Practices_on_Disability_Inclusion.pdf)) jointly published with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

- **Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN) (<http://www.askearn.org>).** This service of the National Employer Technical Assistance Center offers resources to help employers hire and retain people with disabilities. The Web site includes information for employers that addresses areas such as workplace access and productivity, talent management, and workplace culture. It also offers resources for job seekers with disabilities to help them find work, and for vocational service providers to assist with connecting job seekers with disabilities to employers. And available online is the "Business Case for Hiring People with Disabilities" (<http://www.askearn.org/BusinessCase/index.asp>).



## A New Generation of Career Mentoring for Young Adults with Disabilities: E-Connect

by Sharon Mulé

Among American youth, those with disabilities have the highest unemployment rates, lowest rates of participation in postsecondary training and education, and highest likelihood of remaining dependent on public assistance programs after high school. The E-Connect e-mentoring program, developed at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI), is working to change these outcomes.

E-Connect combines technology and the time-tested practice of mentoring in a program that pairs high school students with disabilities with volunteer mentors from the local business community. It utilizes e-mail and school-supervised face-to-face meetings

*E-Connect combines technology and the time-tested practice of mentoring in a program that pairs high school students with disabilities with volunteer mentors from the local business community.*

between mentors and mentees to offer students the opportunity to learn about skills necessary for employment and be exposed to career options and fields that may be unfamiliar to them. The program is school-based. Each week over the course of a semester, mentors spend a short period of time corresponding with students via e-mail. Teachers guide and monitor the process, integrating the mentoring experience into class activities, including career exploration and awareness. Teachers post weekly questions about work and careers provided

by the E-Connect curriculum, and the mentors and students discuss them via e-mail. Students and mentors can also discuss other topics in their e-mails, such as areas of common interest. Twice each semester mentors and mentees meet face-to-face at structured, school-sponsored visits, one at the business and one at the school.

E-Connect was launched by ICI in 2007, with implementation funded by Pathways to Employment, a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and Minnesota State Council on Disability. It has been implemented in 28 Minnesota schools with over 350 students and mentors from over 85 businesses. Participating businesses represent a variety of fields, including healthcare, manufacturing, information technology, the automotive industry, banking, and retail sales. They have included Medtronic, Mayo Clinic, Cummins Manufacturing, Navy Island, Inc., Alle-Minnesota Power Company, Tapemark Corporation, and U.S. Bank.

Stories about how E-Connect benefits participating students and mentors abound. In the remainder of this article are two such stories.

### **E-Connect at Medtronic**

In her fourth year as an E-Connect mentor, Jennifer Johnson, a Human Resources Consultant at Medtronic in Minneapolis, sees a strong value for business in the e-mentoring program and finds it personally rewarding. "Knowing that in a very short period of time I can help set someone on the right course" is one of the rewards she has experienced through participation in E-Connect. This past year, she worked with Chelsea, a senior at Irondale High School, in Mounds View, Minnesota. With encouragement

from Jennifer to explore postsecondary education, Chelsea began a conversation with her family about careers and postsecondary education, quickly settling on a career in the medical field. She is now enrolled in the Certified Nurse Assistant Program through Special Intermediate School District 916 and Century College in White Bear Lake. This program has assisted her in determining that the field of phlebotomy is what she wants to pursue following graduation. "I have a learning disability and I realized that I *can* go to college; I just need to learn in a way that works for me," says Chelsea.



*Chelsea (right) was encouraged by her mentor, Jennifer, to explore college. She's now enrolled in a CNA program.*

Recapping the experience, Beth Quest, special education teacher at Irondale, says, "This experience changed Chelsea's life. She is a young lady who may have not considered postsecondary education if it hadn't been for her e-mentor." For Chelsea the mentoring experience also provided support for personal challenges. She notes, "I was going through a tough time, and Jennifer helped me see that I shouldn't let things get me down and that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel."

Patty Brill is a project coordinator at Medtronic and the employer liaison for E-Connect with Irondale. She sees many benefits for business involvement in the e-mentoring program. E-Connect closely aligns with the Medtronic mission of



*E-Connect has benefited not only Ben (center) but also his mentor Hans (right) and Navy Island, Inc. co-owner Chad.*

helping individuals live fuller and better lives. It also offers an opportunity for community involvement, fosters awareness of disabilities and the potential of individuals with disabilities, and gives employees the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a young person. Patty says of the experience, "It's easy to get people to volunteer. E-mentors feel like they get more back than they give."

### ***E-Connect at Navy Island, Inc.***

Navy Island, Inc., in West St. Paul, Minnesota, is an award-winning manufacturer of wood veneer products. Navy Island staff have mentored E-Connect students for three years.

The Branch Out Transition Program in West St. Paul offers students with disabilities ages 18-21 a place to continue academic learning while working on skills for adult life. Navy Island offers Branch Out students an inside look into the manufacturing process as well as robotics. Since Navy Island is located only a block away from Branch Out, students and mentors visit each other more frequently than at some other E-Connect sites, and mentors participate in many school activities.

When asked about the value of E-Connect for Branch Out students, teacher Pat Pendleton says, "This program continues to provide our students with new opportunities to connect to the business world and learn about the

world of work. The e-mentors are a rich source of information on employment, but are also valued for the guidance and support they give our young adults."

The relationship between Ben, a Branch Out student, and his e-mentor Hans Mourtizen, who works in sales and product management at Navy Island, is a perfect example of this mentoring relationship. Ben's family came originally from Denmark so it was a perfect match when Hans, who was born in Denmark, became Ben's e-mentor. In their e-mails and visits, Hans and Ben discuss topics such as apartment hunting and postsecondary education, as well as share stories of their common heritage. Ben has benefited from the guidance that Hans has given him on employment as well as the encouragement he has provided on working through the challenges of postsecondary education. Hans thinks that the richness of the mentoring experience comes from expanded opportunities for longer e-mentoring and opportunities to meet face-to-face.

Through the E-Connect relationship, Navy Island has now offered employment to Branch Out students. Paid through collaboration between Navy Island, West St. Paul Schools, and Midway Training Services, three students are employed at Navy Island working on special projects. One of the students, Leon, who is in his last year at Branch Out, says, "Working at Navy Island has given me the opportunity to learn how

to 'mud' a room. This is a new skill for me. It's hands on experience which I can replicate in other areas of my life."

For the Navy Island mentors the opportunity to be a mentoring business fits with the company's broader mission of having an impact on the community. Of the experience of mentoring, company co-owner Chad Stone says, "The challenge to connect with a young adult with disabilities is to find some common interest. The young adult I mentored had significant challenges relating with others in the community. I found a common interest with him when I brought in the goat and chicken from my hobby farm. His love of animals was the connector for us. The days go fast in this business, at the end of the day I wonder if I did anything really important. When I look back on the e-mentoring experience I know I have done something important."

### ***Conclusion***

By combining mentoring with e-mail technology, E-Connect gives young adults with disabilities access to mentoring relationships that not only help expand their career horizons, but also give them opportunities to practice electronic communication skills, which are essential to success today, as they think about their futures. Interest in E-Connect as a model for connecting students to business continues to grow, and e-mentoring partnerships around the state continue to help students with disabilities prepare for employment and education after high school.

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## Finding New Career Options Through Telework

by Derek Nord and Vicki Gaylord

One of the creative approaches to work in the U.S. that is receiving increasing attention is *telework*. Telework is "...a work arrangement that allows an employee to perform work, during any part of regular, paid hours, at an approved alternative worksite..." (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012). *Telecommuting* is a form of telework that involves doing a job from home full or part-time. (The WorkPlace, 2012). A person who telecommutes may have their own home-based business, or work for a business or organization that offers its employees telecommuting as an option, or they may work as an independent contractor (The WorkPlace, 2012).

While telework, and specifically telecommuting, are not for everyone, they

*A person who telecommutes may have their own home-based business, or work for a business or organization that offers its employees telecommuting as an option, or they may work as an independent contractor.*

do offer advantages for some people, including some individuals with disabilities. For instance, working from a home office can reduce time spent traveling to and from the workplace, and offer an alternative in locations where transportation isn't always readily available. It can allow people who manage complex medical conditions to work in an environment that they control and have already set-up to meet their individual needs. It can also allow people to work

on a more flexible schedule that fits with other parts of their lives. For those who live with chronic fatigue or pain it can provide a way to work that allows for breaks as needed. And it can be a way for some people with disabilities to create their own businesses.

What makes telecommuting possible is technology. Depending on the type of work, telecommuting can require that a person have equipment in their home such as a computer with necessary software, Internet connection, e-mail, reliable phones, fax capability, and assistive technology devices such as voice recognition software and headsets. In some situations the needed equipment may be employer provided; for example, if a company offers telecommuting as a flexible work option to employees in all or some of its positions, it may supply the equipment needed to work outside the office. In some situations, such as self-employment, it must be provided by the individual. In some states, assistive technology loan programs can be accessed to borrow or purchase computers and other equipment needed for employment.

As with all employment situations it is important that the work tasks and the telecommuting arrangement match with and build on an individual's interests and skills. It is typical for telecommuting arrangements to require a high level of independent and organized work. Telecommuters often need to manage time well, be self-driven to complete their work, and be computer literate. Of course, the nature of telecommuting often results in more limited in-person contact with coworkers than in a traditional job arrangement. However, with improvements in technology it is still possible to connect with others face-to-face via video conferencing.

With individualized supports and proper job customization many of the challenges related to telecommuting can be reduced and often eliminated.

Below are some of the many resources that provide information about telecommuting and telework as a more flexible, alternative work arrangement:

- **Telework Tools Web site ([www.teleworktools.org](http://www.teleworktools.org))**. This Web site provides an introduction to the world of telework for job seekers, employment and training service providers, and employers. It was made possible through funding received from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, and is useful to people with and without disabilities. Among the many resources on the site is the *Self-Assessment Questionnaire* that job seekers can use to determine whether telework is a good fit for them.
- **Work At Home/Telework as a Reasonable Accommodation (<http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/telework.html>)**. This fact sheet from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission explains the ways that employers may use existing telework programs, or allow an individual to work at home, as a reasonable accommodation.
- **Thinking Outside the Cube: Telework ([www.workwithoutlimits.org/files/toolkit/pdf/Handbook\\_ThinkingOutsideCube\\_Telework.pdf](http://www.workwithoutlimits.org/files/toolkit/pdf/Handbook_ThinkingOutsideCube_Telework.pdf))**. Published by Work Without Limits, a Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative, this handbook speaks to employers about telework as a business strategy, its benefits for employers, best practices, and helpful resources.
- **Developing and Implementing Strategies for Employing Teleworkers with Disabilities (Project STRIDE Final Report) ([www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/slp/telecommunications/pdf/stride\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/slp/telecommunications/pdf/stride_final_report.pdf))**. By J. Anderson & F. Douma (2009). This report presents the findings of Project STRIDE, which sought

to identify the circumstances and practices in which telework is most successful and the barriers that prevent more widespread use of telework for employees with disabilities. Published by the Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education, and the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

- **Virtual Exclusion and Telework: Barriers and Opportunities of Technocentric Workplace Accommodation Policy.** By P.M.A. Baker, N.W. Moon, & A.C. Ward (2006). This article in the publication *Work: Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*, 27(4), explores the relationship between telework and people with disabilities, including not only how it might open increased work opportunities, but how it may also present social and other barriers. It "...proposes a number of policy approaches for the creation of an inclusive work environment for

teleworkers with disabilities that can minimize, as much as possible, the social isolation faced by teleworkers with disabilities while maximizing their participation within the workplace community."

- **Telework Exchange Web site (www.teleworkexchange.com).** Telework Exchange is a public-private partnership focused on the value and use of telework in Federal employment. The resources on the site can be useful in a variety of settings beyond the Federal workforce, as well. Its online newsletter *The Teleworker* has timely, practical articles about different aspects of this rapidly changing work practice.
- **U.S. Companies More Open to Remote Work Arrangements (www.shrm.org/hrdisciplines/benefits/Articles/Pages/RemoteWork.aspx).** This article from the Society of Human Resource Management presents a snapshot of recent trends in telework in U.S. companies.

- **Want to Increase Hiring of People with Disabilities? Offer Telework (http://archive.teleworkexchange.com/teleworker-06-10.asp).** This article describes a presentation by Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to President Obama for Disability Policy, in which he discussed how telework can play a role in reducing unemployment for people with disabilities. Published in *The Teleworker* (June 2010), a publication of the Telework Exchange.

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## More Resources on Employment and People with Disabilities

The following online resources offer strategies, tips, and links for supporting new career paths for people with disabilities:

- **APSE (http://www.apse.org/).** Originally named the Association for Persons in Supported Employment and now called APSE, this national organization has an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It has chapters in 35 states and the District of Columbia. Through APSE HR Connect it offers consultation services to help businesses reach out to and partner with the disability community. In addition, APSE has established the Employment Support Professional Certification Council to oversee the first national certification program for employment support professionals. Job coaches, job developers, transition employment specialists, job placement personnel, and employment specialists/consultants can become Certified
- **Employment Support Professionals (CESP) by passing the national CESP examination.** In addition to information about these opportunities the Web site contains Webinars, publications, and training information.
- **AccessCAREERS (http://www.washington.edu/doi/Careers/index.html).** This program of DO-IT (University of Washington, Seattle) focuses on successful career preparation for individuals with disabilities. On its Web site are resources for students, K-12 and postsecondary educators, parents, mentors, and employers.
- **Start-Up USA (www.start-up-usa.biz).** This Web site from Virginia Commonwealth University's RTC on Workplace Supports and Job Retention, and Griffin-Hammis Associates, offers a wide range of resources to support self-employment by people with disabilities. Included are fact sheets and briefs on topics such as accessing vocational rehabilitation services to facilitate self-employment as an
- **employment outcome, Medicaid waivers and self-employment, braiding and blending funding for business start-up, and stories from successful entrepreneurs with disabilities.** Also online are free seminars on self-employment.
- **AccessSTEM (http://www.washington.edu/doi/Stem/).** This program and Web site help K-12 teachers, postsecondary educators, and employers make classroom and employment opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) accessible to individuals with disabilities, and provides a place to share promising practices. The Web site includes a Searchable Knowledge Base of frequently asked questions, case studies, and promising practices related to fully including students with disabilities in STEM activities. It is hosted by The Alliance for Students with Disabilities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics and operated by the DO-IT Program, University of Washington, Seattle.



## Putting Employment First

by Kathleen Martinez

I was born blind and grew up in a large family. My sister Peggy, who was also born blind, and I were the middle of six children. And from day one, our parents instilled in us a love of learning and an expectation of work. They fought for us



*Assistant Secretary Kathleen Martinez knows firsthand the value of high expectations for people with disabilities.*

to attend our local public school instead of a special one for the blind so that we could be a part of, rather than separate from, our community.

My parents didn't know it then, but they were subscribers to Employment First. The "first" in Employment First refers to the idea that community-based, integrated employment should be the primary expected outcome for youth and adults with significant disabilities. For Peggy and I, going to school in a community-based, integrated environment provided us with the foundation we would need to become contributing members of the workforce.

To promote Employment First, the Office of Disability Employment Policy recently launched the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program to help states align their policies and priorities to advance community-based, integrated employment. And by that,

we mean jobs in typical settings where most people do not have disabilities, and where people with disabilities earn at least minimum wage and are paid directly by the employer.

Four states – three protégé states and one mentor state – were selected to participate in this important program. Iowa, Oregon and Tennessee are the protégés and Washington State, a trail-blazer in the Employment First arena, will serve as their mentor. To assist them in developing their Employment First transition plans, the protégé states will also receive technical assistance from subject matter experts.

I am living proof of what can happen when there are high expectations, and I know there are many others out there like me who could benefit from an Employment First philosophy. In fact, last November, I had the pleasure of speaking at a briefing on Integrated Employment on Capitol Hill, where the centerpiece of the briefing was a panel that featured Brendan O'Neill, a person with a disability who has been successfully employed at Washington State's Valley Medical Center for nearly 18

years. In many less progressive places, he would have limited, if any, opportunities for employment. Instead, Brendan has been contributing to Valley Medical and enjoying the satisfaction that comes from a good day's work, and our economy has benefitted from him making money and paying taxes.

Going forward, we want more people to think – like Brendan's service provider and employer did when he was transitioning out of school – about jobs in the community. We want them to think about jobs in integrated workplaces. We want them to think about jobs that pay at least minimum wage. We want integrated and competitive community-based employment to be the norm, rather than the exception for people with significant disabilities, and Employment First as the default employment service delivery strategy.

*Kathleen Martinez is Assistant Secretary of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. Reprinted with permission from "Work in Progress – The Official Blog of the U.S. Department of Labor" (April 18, 2012). Retrieved 5/3/12 from <http://social.dol.gov/blog/putting-employment-first/>.*

### Resources from the Federal Government

*The following Web sites operated by the Federal government have a wide range of job-related information of use to employers, service providers, educators, people with disabilities, and families:*

- **Office of Disability Employment Policy Web Site (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics>).** *This Web site includes expansive lists of links to resources from around the country for people with disabilities, employers, and vocational service providers. Information is organized in topical areas such as apprenticeships, flexible work arrangements, customized employment, integrated employment, accommodations, and tax incentives for employers.*
- **Small Business Administration ([www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov)).** *This Web site offers assistance for people who want to start their own businesses, and it can be useful to people with disabilities. It includes specialized information for women (see <http://www.sba.gov/content/women-owned-businesses>) and for members of minority communities (see <http://www.sba.gov/content/minority-owned-businesses>).*
- **Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) (<https://wrp.gov/>).** *The WRP is a recruitment and referral program that connects federal and private sector employers nationwide with highly motivated college students and recent graduates with disabilities.*

[Carol, continued from page 3]

device as she shared stories of her high school adventures. We never discussed labels – we discussed accomplishments and competencies, and that is what they saw in her.

So, have that latte, look around at the people you see in the coffee shop, and get out a pen and paper and start brainstorming with your loved one about all the places they can connect with people. Think of all the people you talk to in a week: bankers, hairdressers, realtors, mechanics, coaches, drivers, clergy, as well as neighbors, classmates, and friends. Learn more about them. Most likely they know someone who can get your loved one closer to a job, internship, or other opportunity if they learn more about their competencies, vision and goals. That is how Mikelle has built social capital.

### **Become a Regular**

Connecting is not a one-time event. Relationships are built over time. After Mikelle graduated “outstanding senior” from her high school, her transition plan fell apart. Vocational Rehabilitation was going through major changes. We went through four counselors in a matter of months. Her future looked like a long waiting list with lots of time on her hands. Frustrated, we wondered “Where do young adults, business people and everyday folks hang out?” Coffee shops! As mentioned earlier, that was where we found the key to building her social capital. We also found customers for her bracelet business. Nothing helps build confidence like a stable social circle and the successes they can help our family members achieve.

### **Ask for What You Want**

People don’t read our minds. You and your loved one can ask people you know about help with an internship, a work trial, career exploration, or a job. In the early days of the career discovery process with Mikelle, we met with several young women who owned their

own fashion design businesses. We had dreams that perhaps Mikelle could even partner with some of these women or have a business within a business. Each time we met with these young designers Mikelle learned about commitment and hard work, and began to understand the sales process. This ignited her understanding that while she liked designing and making bracelets, she LOVED to sell. She also learned what worked and what didn’t work for these other businesses. And we began to understand what Mikelle’s capacity for work was and how we needed to help her design a business that really would meet her needs for accomplishment and that would accommodate her lifestyle and disability.

### **Conclusion**

Waiting lists probably won’t go away any time soon. Funding cuts may be on the horizon. What is certain is our service systems are unstable. Stability instead often comes from families for a person with a disability. Parents and siblings can play a valuable role in assisting their family member with a disability in building a strong portfolio of social capital that will pay off dearly in the future in building a prosperous life that includes satisfying work.

*Katherine Carol is a 21st Century Rehabilitation and Publishing Expert. Her books include the newly released title, “Shining Beautiful, The Brilliance of Community in Action” (2012), co-authored with her daughter, Mikelle Learned (see <http://www.TheShiningBeautifulSeries.com>). They have developed the companion Web site with tools and tips, video, and stories that share Mikelle’s journey in an ever-changing world. Katherine can be reached at [tangoresults@gmail.com](mailto:tangoresults@gmail.com), <http://www.thetangocommunity.com>, or <https://www.facebook.com/KatherineCarolTango>.*

## **Other Impact Issues from ICI**

The following issues of Impact may also be of interest to readers of this issue:

- **Impact: Feature Issue on Employment and Women with Disabilities.** Why is work important to girls and women with disabilities? And what can educators, transition teams, and families do to best prepare girls with disabilities to enter the world of work as adults? These are two of the questions explored in this Impact issue. Because having meaningful, valued work is such an important part of life, this publication encourages readers to hold an expansive vision of what’s possible for girls and women with disabilities in the employment arena, and offers strategies, resources, and inspiration to realize that vision. Available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/211/211.pdf> or in text-only version at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/211>. Print copies are available by contacting the Publications Office at 612/624-4512 or [icipub@umn.edu](mailto:icipub@umn.edu); the first print copy is free.
- **Impact: Feature Issue on Postsecondary Education and Students with Intellectual, Developmental and Other Disabilities.** Even though the majority of high school students with disabilities identify participation in postsecondary education as a goal for their adult lives, only about 3 in 10 have taken classes since completing high school. And among those with the lowest rates of participation are students with intellectual disabilities. This Impact issue explores what we know, and what we still need to know, about supporting increased participation of students with disabilities – especially those with intellectual disabilities – in postsecondary education, and why that participation is important. Available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/233/233.pdf> or in text-only version at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/233/default.html>. Print copies are also available by contacting the Publications Office at 612/624-4512 or [icipub@umn.edu](mailto:icipub@umn.edu); the first print copy is free.



[Nord, continued from page 1]

often entry level positions in the service industries with low wages and few hours (Butterworth, et al., 2011; Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 2003).

These challenges present opportunities for fresh thinking about how job seekers with disabilities can participate in the American workforce in new ways that present more options for meaningful, gainful employment. That fresh thinking calls for use of a suite of approaches and advancements that can

*These challenges present opportunities for fresh thinking about how job seekers with disabilities can participate in the American workforce in new ways.*

facilitate opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to learn about and obtain advanced skills, find and create new types of employment, and enter careers of their choosing, including careers in emerging fields. The remainder of this article discusses strategies that can support these job seekers in pursuing new types of employment in the workforce of today and tomorrow.

### **Explore Careers**

Many job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities are faced with the dilemma of choosing the type of work they want to perform with little knowledge about what is possible. Factors such as limited exposure to and experience with varied work opportunities, and stereotypes about the type of work they can perform, often channel job seekers down work paths that are unable to maximize their abilities and have limited opportunities for career

development. Job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and those who support their preparation for and participation in the world of work, must think beyond traditional job settings and explore new options. They must also identify, develop, and promote the skills, abilities, and interests they bring to the workforce.

Career exploration is great way to facilitate a deeper understanding about what is possible and what matches a job seeker's attributes. Career exploration approaches span a spectrum. For some it can be a highly involved process and include strategies such as internships and job tryouts that provide not only opportunities to learn about a field generally, but also to develop skills and perform tasks in the workforce. Initiatives have sprung up to encourage young adults with disabilities to engage in career exploration activities in the same fields as their nondisabled peers. For example, Entry Point! is a program for people with apparent and non-apparent disabilities offered through the American Association for the Advancement of Science; the program provides internship opportunities in science, engineering, mathematics, computer science, and business. The National Business and Disability Council has an internship program for young adults with disabilities who are emerging leaders and seeking governmental or non-profit career experiences in Washington, D.C. Another example is the Camps to Careers program in Minnesota that offers young adults with and without disabilities the opportunity to come together to learn in-depth about a variety of growing fields and occupations, including renewable energy and health care.

Regardless of the approach, it is important that job seekers gain exposure to a variety of types of jobs and settings. Basing a job search or career exploration solely on the needs of the business community can be limiting since it often requires job seekers to adapt and fit within an existing employment structure, such as developing the required skills and

acquiring the educational background they must have to be hired. For many this business-driven career exploration is not useful. This is why career exploration should also be conducted by using strategies to systematically understand the job seeker's personal skills, interests, and optimal work situation. This allows for an understanding about the type of career that can be built and adapted around them.

### **Create Careers**

Career development supports span a spectrum of approaches that facilitate the acquisition of employment, including *competitive employment*, *supported employment*, and *customized employment*. Each has strengths and limitations for particular individuals.

Competitive and supported employment practices use more traditional job job-seeking techniques for currently existing jobs, such as resumés, applications, and interviews. Job seekers receive support through this process and upon hiring. This approach responds directly to the business by providing a supply of job applicants to meet hiring needs.

At the other end of the support spectrum is customized employment, which derives from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2012; Federal Register, 2002). This approach is distinctly different from the traditional supported employment strategies in that customized employment is non-comparative, which means a job seeker is not in competition with other job seekers. Instead employment is negotiated between the employer and the job seeker based on the business' and job seeker's employment needs and interests. Through customized employment a job that directly matches a job seeker's known skills and meets a business need is negotiated with and created by an employer, a process known commonly as *job carving* or *restructuring*. Like the traditional employment approach, customized employment

provides businesses with a supply of employees to meet specific business needs; however, it also recognizes that if a job is not readily available, other options exist. For example, *resource ownership* and *self-employment* provide unique opportunities for job seekers to determine not only what knowledge and skills they will utilize, but also how to bring their

*There is a growing expectation that all people with significant disabilities can and should be employed in the community. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to make this happen.*

knowledge and skills to market, rather than relying on an existing business to decide (Griffin, Hammis, Geary, Crandell & Brooks-Lane, n.d.; Griffin-Hammis Associates LLC, n.d.).

While some professionals dedicate their employment support practice to one approach over another, most see the benefit of understanding and utilizing both traditional job search and customized employment strategies. By having the skills needed to effectively use both strategies the professional on the ground can adapt their approach to best meet the needs of an individual job seeker. Some, such as people with more complex disabilities, may require the more labor- and resource-intensive job customization or self-employment approaches to meet their individual needs and preferences, whereas others may prefer an existing job and employment situation and thus require traditional job search support.

### **Educate for Careers**

Education is a vital link to participating and working in a quickly-changing economy. High school and transition programs have been, and continue to be, the primary launching pad for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities entering the workforce. Today, more than ever, it is important that employment preparation and skill development in these settings provide opportunities for gaining real work experience that directly links to new career pathways. It is also important to recognize that for many Americans, postsecondary education provides an avenue to develop knowledge and skills that lead to expanded career possibilities. Unfortunately, for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, postsecondary education has long been overlooked due to the historically limited access afforded to this population. Dramatic changes are underway. The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (PL 110-315) provides great opportunity for people with disabilities. Today, across the country, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are enrolled in vocational and technical colleges, as well as two- and four-year programs, completing credentials and degrees. The Think College Web site (<http://www.thinkcollege.net>) with its database of postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities nationwide illustrates this new option for students, families, and educators to use to support participation in career preparation. Postsecondary opportunities are known to improve career possibilities, and increasing numbers of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can now pursue advanced education as a mechanism to advance their careers.

### **Make it Happen**

Today, there is a growing expectation that all people with significant disabilities can and should be employed in the community (Kiernan, 2011; Wagner,

Cameto, & Newman, 2003). There is no one-size-fits-all approach to make this happen. As we imagine how job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities fit within the new and emerging fields, we must recognize that the best jobs are those that match a person's preferences, strengths, and needs. The best approach to creating new career paths for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is one that never loses sight of the individual job seeker. The strategies discussed in this article provide a snapshot of some of the many different options and approaches available to support individuals to learn about, personally develop, and begin careers of their choosing as participants in the American workforce of the 21st century.

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## **Impact**

***Feature Issue on Supporting New Career Paths for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities***

***Volume 25 - Number 1 - Winter/Spring 2012***  
***Managing Editor: Vicki Gaylord***

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*Impact* is published by the Institute on Community Integration (UCEDD), and the Research and Training Center on Community Living and Employment (RTC), College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. This issue was supported, in part, by Grant #90DD0654 from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD), US Department of Health and Human Services to the Institute; and Grant #H133B080005 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), US Department of Education, to the RTC.

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