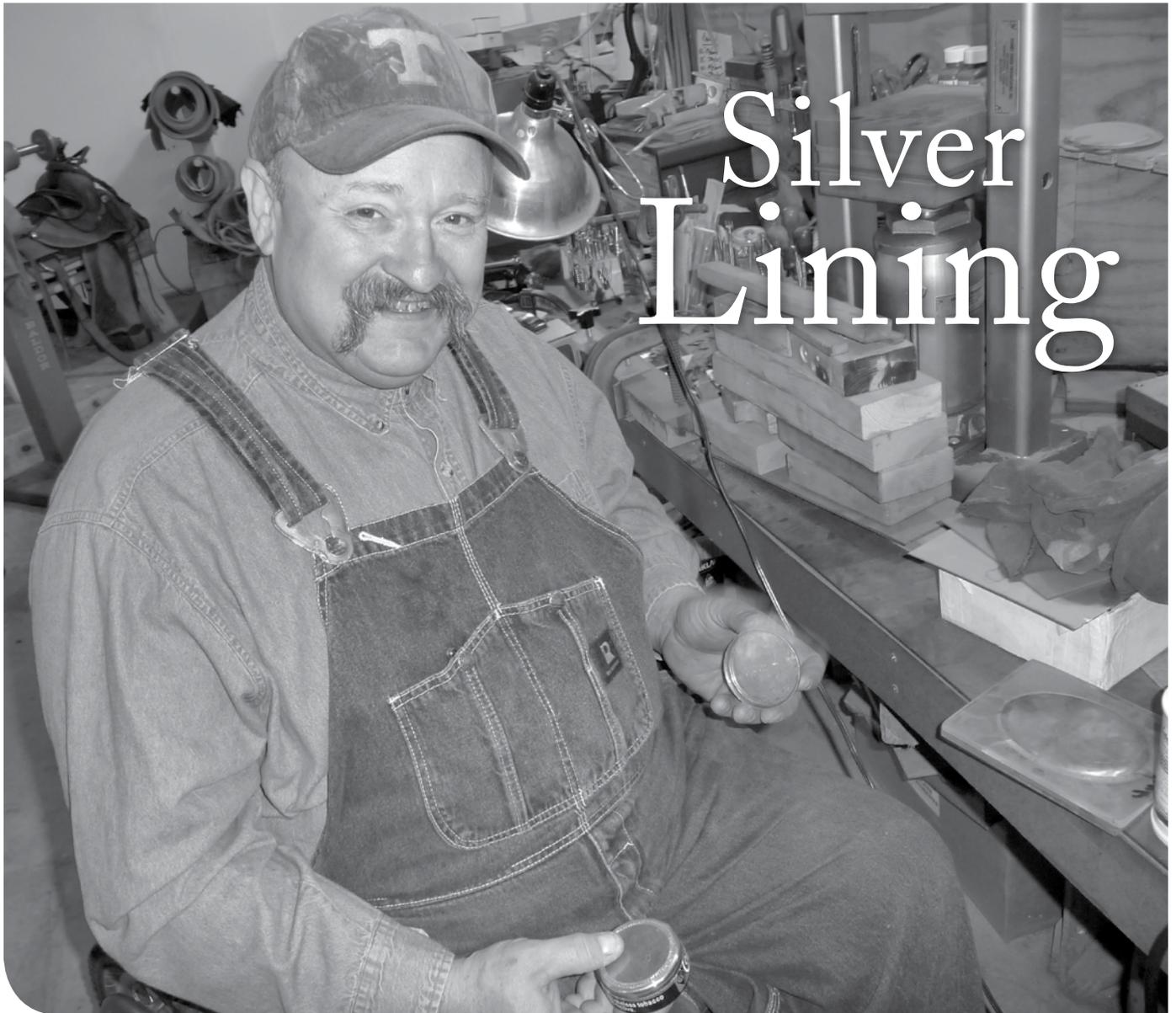


BREAKING GROUND

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON EMPLOYMENT



Silver Lining



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Cover photo by Ned Andrew Solomon



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first 2012 issue of the Council's *Breaking Ground* magazine! We are unveiling a new logo and updated look!

We find that current times call for fresh thinking, new ideas and efficiencies—and that's a good thing!

I hope you enjoy the terrific articles about employment in this special issue and the new look as well. As always, let us know what you think.

Best wishes,

Wanda Willis, *Executive Director*

CONTACT INFORMATION



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Benton County Artist Sees SILVER LINING

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

“I grew up in Arizona,” said Charlie Jo Shemwell. “Growing up out West, I gravitated towards the cowboy way of life.”

As a young boy, Mr. Shemwell got started in the “cowboy life” with the Arizona Junior Rodeo Association. His first professional rodeo competition was at 15, when he rode a horse called Pawnee Bill, named after Buffalo Bill’s sideman. “Of course, Pawnee Bill made short order of me real quick,” recalled Mr. Shemwell. “But one of my cherished photographs is of that ride. So I can always venture back into the past when I look at that, and think, I shoulda been somewhere else that day!”

He continued pursuing rodeo events in high school and college. While attending junior college near two Native American reservations, Mr. Shemwell was exposed to, and became enamored with, the work of Native American silversmiths. “I was intrigued by it,” Mr. Shemwell said. “At the time, I was doing leatherwork, making belts for kids at school. It started out as a hobby, but I guess the kids liked it, because they started ordering belts for dads for Christmas. Back then I could sell a belt for thirty-five, forty dollars. That was a lot of money.”

Although he enjoyed his silversmithing hobby for a while, purchasing inexpensive tools and making some of his own, like his Native American mentors had done for generations, the equipment to expand what he was doing became too costly. Ultimately, Mr. Shemwell had to sell his silver and copper tools to help pay for tuition at college, but kept his leather supplies, since that always provided some “quick money” for him.

Finally, the time of hobbies and rodeos was coming to an end. “Of course, after you get out of college you’re supposed to go into the ‘real life’ and do ‘real’ work,” said Mr. Shemwell. “I went into law enforcement.”

After a lengthy and dedicated stint in that “arena”, Mr. Shemwell was beckoned to Tennessee to care for the property and estate left by his father, who had recently passed away. At the time, Mr. Shemwell was the only sibling who wasn’t married, and his children were adults and out of the house. That move to Benton



Charlie Jo Shemwell in his studio. Photos by Ned Andrew Solomon

County, and leaving his job in law enforcement behind, would change his life and career forever.

In January, 1999, a tornado made its deadly approach to his family’s home. “I was in the house,” said Mr. Shemwell. “I’d been working all day cutting timber for firewood. I was really tired, got into the house, took a shower, fixed myself a sandwich and fell asleep on the couch. I woke up about 9 o’clock, saw on the news that a tornado was coming; I figured it up in my head that it would hit where we were about four in the morning. So I went downstairs, fixed a room in the basement. Came back upstairs, finished my sandwich, fell back asleep again on the couch, which I shouldna done. The next thing I heard was the cracking of the trees. Big oak trees snapping like twigs.”

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Then he heard the roar, which many people describe as a train sound. The tornado hit the house and, because of the pressure it generated, Mr. Shemwell blacked out. “Now I know that being in a tornado is equivalent to being about three or four hundred feet under water,” Mr. Shemwell said. “I was thrown up into the stairwell, and that’s the last thing I remember.”

Somehow, Charlie Jo Shemwell wound up in the basement, wrapped around a meat saw. As painful and physically devastating as that landing was, the saw saved his life.

He had planned to move down to Texas after selling the home and get back into law enforcement. After the tornado hit the property, nobody was willing to pay what it was worth.

Still, not making any money, limitations or not, was not an option. “I was a new paraplegic,” Mr. Shemwell said. “I hadn’t been in the wheelchair six months when this was on my mind. And I was thinking, ‘I have to have a career change now.’ I didn’t know anything else other than law enforcement and rodeo. I can’t rodeo now—and no law enforcement agency would take me because I’m in a wheelchair.

“I had no other resources I could think of,” continued Mr. Shemwell. “And I thought, ‘Wait a minute, maybe I’m gonna have to take those hobbies that I grew up with as a kid. I made money with them then, why can’t I do it now?’”

As luck would have it, Debbie Bradley, who was working at the local Vocational Rehabilitation office, knew of Mr. Shemwell’s artistic talents and asked him if he wanted to file for a grant. “I have known Charlie Jo Shemwell since 1999,” said Ms. Bradley, now Division of Rehabilitation Services manager/supervisor for Benton County. “The tornado claimed a great deal of mobility from him and, ultimately, left him a wheelchair user. But he was not one to sit idly by while the world continued to revolve.”

Mr. Shemwell submitted a grant application and, about six months later, got a call that it had been received and was in the process of being reviewed. Several months later, they called him back in and asked a few questions, were satisfied with the answers and congratulated him on getting a Small Business Grant. “They said, ‘Just let us know how it’s going from time to time,’ and I’ve done that through Ms. Bradley,” Mr. Shemwell said.

The Vocational Rehabilitation grant money—a one-time infusion of cash—was instrumental in Mr. Shemwell’s ability to take his hobby to a professional level. “What I needed were certain tools to get into the actual manufacturing,” said Mr. Shemwell. “Although it’s all done by hand—everything is drawn on paper and then cut out per piece—I still needed those extra tools to take me over the edge.”

That was 10 years ago. His company, Cowboy Silversmithing, became an official business just last year. “While the agency purchased his initial stock and needed tools, he began brainstorming and making some initial items—belt buckles, spurs, etc.,” said Ms. Bradley. “He designed and got his Web site up and going. He marketed his products as best as he could and grabbed every opportunity that came by to showcase ‘Cowboy Silversmithing’.”



Mr. Shemwell does all his work in the silversmith studio on his property. “About a year ago I had enough clientele that I could actually say I was making minimum wage. I do enough to take care of my bills for the silversmithing, but I’m looking for that next infusion. And it’s out there. It may not be today or tomorrow, but it’ll come.”

All the workbenches are adjusted to Mr. Shemwell’s wheelchair access height. There’s a forming table, a metal bandsaw, and drawing, fire and pounding, spur making, saddle repair and shaping stations, which Shemwell rotates around “like a racetrack.” Many of his tools, like before, are handmade.

In his studio, Mr. Shemwell’s capable hands produce gorgeous, one-of-a-kind customized buttons, spurs, belts, belt buckles, conchos, rings and bracelets. His latest endeavor is designing burial boxes for cremation remains.

Mr. Shemwell has established a regular set of clients and, as it turns out—because many things in life come full circle—law enforcement motorcycle clubs are some of his biggest customers.

“It has been a great pleasure to get to know Charlie Jo,” said Ms. Bradley. “To share his dream and to see him successfully achieve it.”

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute.

Inviting Persons *with* Diverse Abilities *to the* TABLE

BY MARK LLOYD

Special Culinary Challenge (SCC), located in Hendersonville, is a not-for-profit company focusing its efforts on potential participants with disabilities, 18 years of age and older, who have a passion for the culinary arts. Our company mission is to provide culinary training to these individuals, in the hope that they will be inspired to develop careers in this ever-growing industry, while being exposed to networking opportunities with professional mentors in the field. Culinary competitions will showcase each participant's talent, as well as promote self-esteem and numerous personal skills, including working independently, responsibility, organization, problem-solving, planning, public speaking, social competence and teamwork.

Culinary competitions will showcase each participant's talent, as well as promote self-esteem and numerous personal skills

Throughout my career, I have worked beside many different levels of professional talent, but I have, unfortunately, yet to come across a professional program developed and designed to train adults with disabilities to hold professional positions within our industry. That's why it's my personal goal to develop SCC into a unique concept: targeting people who have a passion for the field of culinary arts, while focusing on their abilities, not disabilities.

We hope to combine that enthusiasm with the passion Executive Chefs have for teaching. In this program, professional chefs will serve as mentors for the participating adults with disabilities, training them in basic cooking skills and preparing them for culinary competitions. I believe the personal training program that has been developed will allow the Chefs an opportunity to demonstrate the professional qualities and dedication needed to turn an enthusiastic interest into a career.

Each chef mentor will work with a team of two students. This team will choose what meal course—appetizer, entrée or dessert—they would like to create. The competition phase will begin with an orientation for the teams and their mentors in which the rules of the competition will be explained to all parties. SCC will then give the list of mandatory ingredients for all meal courses to both the participants and the chefs. The chef will design a competition plate and recipe for his students to learn and practice for competition day.



Photo by Tim Halterman

While these “chefs in training” are practicing their dishes, the mentor will teach them proper food and knife handling, cooking techniques and other vital basic skills they would need to know to work in a professional kitchen. In addition, SCC will schedule seminars and bring in local professionals from different areas of the food and beverage industry to conduct more extensive training. The amount of time allotted for training will be 12 weeks, with the teams meeting once a week to master their competition plates.

Beyond learning culinary skills, participants will be developing important basic life skills. How many young adults—with or without disabilities—are capable of working safely, effectively and efficiently in a kitchen, or are able to make a meal for other people, or even themselves? It is also highly possible that participants will exit the training program having interacted and networked, positively, with professionals in the field, creating opportunities for letters of recommendation, references and enhanced résumés.

My dream is for SCC to expand not only across the State of Tennessee, but throughout the entire country. I'd like to see area culinary challenges develop into state, regional and even national level competitions. A long-term goal is establishing a culinary arts school where the focus will be on the fundamentals of the industry, so individuals with disabilities who attend can have access to professional training that would ultimately give them an advantage for potential culinary positions in existing professional establishments.

SCC is in need of help from the community. We are a non-profit that is completely operated by volunteers. We are in our first year of development and are seeking all levels of volunteers to assist us in our mission to make this unique concept a reality. If you feel that you have the energy, desire and willingness to help our mission grow—and appreciate the culinary arts as I do—I would love to hear from you. Feel free to contact me at mark_lloyd@sbcglobal.net or by phone at 615-364-4257.

Mark Lloyd is executive chef, Eurest Dining at Dollar General Headquarters in Goodlettsville.

Preparing NEXT STEPS Students *for* EMPLOYMENT

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

Two years ago, if you were a student with an intellectual disability and wanted to go to college, you had to look beyond the borders of Tennessee. Now, Tennessee lays claim to two university programs for students with intellectual disabilities—Next Steps at Vanderbilt and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville FUTURE Program. A main component of both programs is to broaden career options for their students.

Amy Gonzalez is a program coordinator for Next Steps at Vanderbilt. She works with the students on job development, helping them define their strengths and identify their career interests. She also networks with employers in the Metro Nashville area to advance employment opportunities for the students and ultimately for individuals with disabilities in general. Ms. Gonzalez is optimistic about the employment climate in Nashville.

“I speak with a lot of potential employers and have been impressed by how willing they are to meet with me and to be introduced to our students,” she said. “I do see a general kind of hesitance. The employer may be concerned about the disability and about how the individual will be able to work around that. However, once I provide a one-page profile and a list of abilities, and a little insight into the disability, I see body language loosen up and the individual relax a little. Much of this is due to focusing the conversation on abilities rather than disabilities.”

The one-page profile Ms. Gonzalez referred to is adapted from a tool created by The Learning Community for Person-Centered Practices Initiative. In one page, it outlines the abilities of each student and how to best support the individual in an employment setting. It is only one of the tools used to assist the Next Steps

students as they transition from the postsecondary setting to the workforce. Students also transition with a job coach and task analysis, a traditional résumé and an e-portfolio. The e-portfolio contains the résumé and the one-page profile, but it also has photographs and videos of the student completing tasks at his or her internship, and videos of their supervisors sharing what it was like to work with them.

“The e-portfolios are an incredibly helpful resource,” said Tammy Day, program director for Next Steps. “Some of our students may have some difficulty with the interview process for one reason or another, so for a potential employer to see footage of them working or listening to a former supervisor’s impressions of them can greatly increase the students’ chances for successful placement in an employment setting.”

As the very first cohort of Next Steps students transition from Vanderbilt—they graduated December 7, 2011—they are armed with all of these resources. Each student now embarks upon an exciting employment-related opportunity. *Breaking Ground* readers were introduced to the students when they began the Next Steps program [see *Breaking Ground*, Number 54, April 2010, page 3]. Below are their exciting “next steps” in employment.

HALLIE BEARDEN is an Environmental Volunteer with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). She is using the office skills she learned through the Business Systems Technology program at the Tennessee Technology Center-Nashville, where she earned a supplemental certificate, and through her internship at Tennessee Disability Pathfinder. She is providing much needed office support with tasks that include filing, labeling and shredding. Though the

position is currently on a volunteer basis, the office is keeping track of her current hours since they can count toward training hours if a suitable paid position opens up. Ms. Bearden reports that she enjoys her work at the USDA and that the “time flies by”.

SEAN FAULKNER has begun a part-time paid position at The Arc of Davidson County. He performs office tasks like scanning. When Mr. Faulkner began thinking with Next Steps staff about what he wanted to do after the program, he was not interested in office work. However, during his internship at Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, where he did data entry, he began to see how adept he is at office duties. His internships at the Vanderbilt Bookstore and at Vanderbilt Recycling helped him to narrow down his interests and to hone his skills.

JEANNE GAVIGAN has her “dream job” at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC). Her passion for the theatre was nurtured and translated into job experience through her internship with the Vanderbilt Theatre and her role as prop master for a 2011 SENSE Theatre Camp production. Her internship with the Peabody Library also helped her develop transferable skills that are aiding her in her work at TPAC.

EDWARD NESBITT has become an AmeriCorps member. His first placement is through the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Coalition for Healthy Aging at Vanderbilt. Mr. Nesbitt is using the office skills he learned through the Business Systems Technology program at the Tennessee Technology Center-Nashville, where he earned a supplemental certificate. The office experience he gained through internships at the Development and Alumni Relations Office and the Family Resource Center at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt was a key component in his being selected from the pool of applicants. Through the Coalition for Healthy Aging placement, Mr. Nesbitt also assists in exercise classes for senior citizens.

ELIZABETH STORY is working for the Susan Gray School (SGS) at Peabody College, Vanderbilt. Although Ms. Story began working at SGS prior to beginning Next Steps, she now enjoys increased pay and responsibilities. Ms. Story took full advantage of her academic courses, which included *Arts Education for Young Children*; *Society, School, and Teacher*; and *Exploring Literature for Young Children*. These classes added greatly to her understanding of working with young children at SGS.

ANDREW VAN CLEAVE began working with the Adventure Science Center (ASC) in January. His main duty is assisting the ASC in preparing for group visits. His internship at the *Vanderbilt Hustler* student newspaper, the Vanderbilt Police Department and Health Plus showcased his commitment and his attention to detail. Mr. Van Cleave also completed training in the Collision Repair program at the Tennessee Technology Center-Nashville.

While the internships and classes directly contributed to the employment skills the students gained, they also benefited from a rich social and university life. Work and social experiences enabled these students to become confident and self-assured young adults whom any employer would be lucky to hire.

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination, and coordinator of the Disabilities, Religion, & Spirituality Program at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.



Photo by Tammy Day



Photo by Jacqueline West



Photo by Jacqueline West

The POWER of WORK

BY COMMISSIONER JIM HENRY,
DEPARTMENT OF INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES



Photo courtesy of the State of Tennessee

The ability to shape your own destiny is what sets America apart. To be able to pursue the American Dream while performing your chosen vocation is a privilege that many people take for granted. The Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and our community partners support approximately 8,000 Tennesseans with intellectual disabilities to live, work, and be part of their communities.

However, for the majority of people we support, the opportunity to be part of the workforce still proves elusive. This is not for a lack of talent, but the challenge is found in communication.

There are three central myths: 1) That people with intellectual disabilities cannot learn; 2) That people with disabilities expect to be hired even if they do not possess the necessary qualifications and experience for the job; and 3) People with disabilities do not want to work.

Most people are familiar with the term “mental retardation.” Unfortunately, one of the reasons for its familiarity is that it has been used quite frequently as a term of derision. Fortunately, in recognition of this history, there is a movement to replace the term with “intellectual disability”.

One of the common myths about an intellectual disability is that it completely prohibits someone from learning. Nothing could be further from the truth. Starting a new job is often cited as one of life’s most stressful times. In addition to learning new job duties, individuals are learning how the place works—from the copy

machine to how to communicate with co-workers.

People with intellectual disabilities hold a wide variety of jobs—from filing to prepping surgical suites, bagging groceries, or being an administrative assistant. While this may be surprising to some, when you stop and consider that we all look for jobs that use our skills and abilities, it makes sense.

The second myth is that hiring people with disabilities means considering applicants who do not meet the job’s qualification and skill requirements. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. It may mean hiring someone who gets the job done in a slightly different way, but not at the expense of the quality and timely outcome an employer expects. For example, someone may use a checklist to serve as a reminder or use pictures rather than text to understand a new task.

To those who might be skeptics, I pose this question: Would you apply for a job that you could not do? Of course not. An immense part of why we work is the satisfaction of a job well done.

The third myth is that people with disabilities do not want to work. Annually, DIDD and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities conducted an employment survey of the people supported by DIDD. As of March 30, 2011, the survey reported that nearly 1,300 people are working and that an additional 786 want to go to work. If you are a person with a disability, a friend, a family member, or an employer, I invite you to help us bridge the gap between people with disabilities and employment.

In conclusion, America has a rich history of innovation. It is 2011, a device that is the size of a credit card which can help us navigate through traffic, video conferences with colleagues across the continent and streaming the latest country hit. Twenty years ago, all of these activities seemed implausible. America has never been short on ingenuity when it comes to technology and we cannot afford a shortage of ingenuity when it comes to utilizing the talents and gifts of people with disabilities.

EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has created a series of national and local resource sheets on the topic of employment. The six in the series include:

Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

Transitioning to Employment

Jobseeker Resources

Resources for Employers

Resources for Employment Professionals

Resources About Employment

A sampling from each is included below. To download a free copy of each Employment Resource Sheet, visit: kc.vanderbilt.edu. Information sheets will be found in the "Resources" section under "Printable Resources and Materials".

TRANSITIONING TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

THINK COLLEGE is a resource available for students, families and professionals. The Web site includes a national database of postsecondary programs available to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, policy briefs, newsletters and more. Think College is an initiative of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts. www.thinkcollege.net

Healthy and Ready for College! When students with intellectual disabilities are getting ready to go to college, who will provide health care is just one of many issues that families and students may need to discuss. This brief focuses on health care transitions and provides strategies that can be used in college and afterward to help young people stay healthy and ready for the future. www.thinkcollege.net/images/stories/Insight8.pdf

TRANSITIONING TO EMPLOYMENT

ON THE JOB: STORIES FROM YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES features youth with developmental disabilities who began working in competitive-wage, community-based jobs early (between the ages of 16-18) and who used natural supports, as well as some paid supports at first, to be successful. The stories include the community, employer, school and family factors that led to the youths' success on the job. www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/YS.pdf

411 ON DISABILITY DISCLOSURE: A WORKBOOK FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES is designed for youth and the adults working with them to learn about disability disclosure. It helps young people make informed decisions about whether or not to disclose their disability and to understand what impact that decision may have on their education, employment and social lives. www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure

JOBSEEKER RESOURCES

MY NEXT MOVE is an on-line tool that provides job seekers with information on occupations, local job openings and training opportunities. Users can search for jobs with a "bright outlook" in growing industries, jobs that are part of the "green" economy, and jobs with Registered Apprenticeship programs. www.mynextmove.org/

"MY SKILLS MY FUTURE" helps job seekers match their current skills to new careers and find out what training is needed to transition from one job to another. This resource includes information about occupational skills that can be transferred from one job to another, a side-by-side comparison chart of likely skill gaps from one occupation to another, and links to training programs that could help address skills needs. Job listings will also be available from the site. www.myskillsmyfuture.org/

RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT 101 FOR YOUR BUSINESS provides information about disabilities in the workplace. It describes how to increase the hiring pool, keep valuable employees, earn tax advantages and lower employer health care costs. It is available to order from the ED Pubs Web site. www.edpubs.gov/

EMPLOYER ASSISTANCE AND RESOURCE NETWORK

(EARN) is a resource for employers seeking to recruit, hire and retain qualified employees with disabilities. <http://askearn.org/index.cfm>

RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

JOB ACCOMMODATION NETWORK (JAN) is a source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment 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. askjan.org/index.html

SEDL'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE MODELS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

conducts research and knowledge translation designed to improve the quality and responsiveness in vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). autism.sedl.org

RESOURCES ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

REAL PEOPLE, REAL JOBS is a collection of regional stories of people with developmental disabilities in community employment and the strategies that were used to help them find and keep these jobs. www.realworkstories.org

DISABILITY DATA IN NATIONAL SURVEYS is a report from the Mathematical Policy Research Center for Studying Disability Policy that presents the findings from a review of the disability-related information and other key features of 40 existing national surveys sponsored by the federal government. www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/disability/Data_National_Surveys.pdf

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination, and coordinator of the Disabilities, Religion, & Spirituality Program at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.



A Resource for the Employment of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

BY ROBERT B. NICHOLAS, PhD

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) Ticket to Work program provides recipients of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) with the opportunity for economic self-sufficiency by offering a range of vocational rehabilitation and support services to obtain employment. Given that people eligible for services from the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) are generally eligible for SSI, Ticket to Work is a potential resource to facilitate employment for people either served by DIDD or on the department's waiting list.

ELEMENTS OF THE TICKET TO WORK PROGRAM

The Ticket to Work program was established through the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 and implemented in 2002. It is available in all 50 states and participation by recipients is voluntary. Each SSDI and SSI recipient is eligible to receive a symbolic "ticket" that can be used to access employment services through a State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (SVRA) or an approved provider agency called an Employer Network (EN). Once a recipient decides to use the ticket, he or she may contact any EN or their respective SVRA to seek supports for employment.

The provider has the option to choose to accept the ticket or not. If the provider chooses to accept the ticket, it is then "assigned" to the provider and they can receive payment under the Ticket to Work program. At any point in the employment process, the recipient may "reassign" the ticket to another provider.

Once a recipient assigns their ticket to a provider, the provider works with the person to develop an Individual Work Plan (IWP). The IWP is based on the individual's needs and designed to help the Ticket Holder obtain and retain a job. The EN then provides the person with the employment-related services and supports outlined in the IWP. These supports are provided free of charge to the Ticket Holder. As an incentive to Ticket Holders, SSA suspends Continuing Disability Reviews while the person is actively pursuing the goals in the IWP.

An EN or SVRA is not reimbursed by SSA for the types or amount of services provided to a Ticket Holder, but receives payments based on achievement of milestones or outcomes. There are two reimbursement options. One is called the Outcome Payment System. Under this system, the agency receives \$411 per month for each month that a Ticket Holder on SSI earns above Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) and receives no cash benefit for a maximum of 60 months. In 2011, SGA for a person on SSI was \$1,000 per month.

The other payment system is called the Milestone/Outcome Payment System. Under this system, a provider may receive milestone payments totaling \$9,094 for months a Ticket Holder on SSI is working but continues to receive a cash benefit, followed by \$221 per month for up to 60 months that the person earns SGA and receives no cash benefit. Accordingly, an EN could receive up to \$24,660 under the Outcome Payment system or

\$22,354 under the Milestone/Outcome system for supporting a Ticket Holder on SSI to be employed at the SGA level or above.

The Partnership Plus option for Ticket Holders and ENs was added to the Ticket to Work program in 2008, allowing a Ticket Holder to receive services both from an SVRA and an EN. The Ticket Holder initially assigns his or her Ticket to an SVRA and receives SVRA funded services leading to job placement. Subsequently, the SVRA is reimbursed for these services through the Ticket Holder's achievement of milestones or outcomes.

Once the SVRA case is closed, the Ticket is reassigned to an EN that provides on-going supports for job retention and receives the remainder of the milestone and outcome payments. Partnership Plus provides expanded choices for Ticket Holders and more immediate reimbursement for assessment and job placement services for an EN that is also a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provider.

Another key element of the Ticket to Work program is the ability of an EN to serve as an "Administrative" EN for a Ticket Holder served by a provider agency that is not an EN. It takes a significant amount of effort for a provider agency to apply for and maintain status as an EN. For small agencies or agencies that annually support only a small number of people with disabilities to be employed, the administrative burdens may outweigh potential revenues from the Ticket to Work program. These agencies, however, are able to establish partnerships with ENs to access revenues from the Ticket program for supporting Ticket Holders to be employed.

The Ticket Holder assigns their Ticket to the Administrative EN and the provider agency processes standard documentation through the Administrative EN to SSA. The Administrative EN receives the reimbursement and forwards it to the provider agency, minus an administrative fee. This arrangement again adds to Ticket Holder choices regarding a service provider and makes it possible for a provider agency that is not an EN to access to Ticket to Work revenue.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Design and implementation problems with the Ticket to Work program have limited the participation of both provider agencies and beneficiaries to date. Despite the challenges presented by the program, funds available from Ticket to Work have the potential to expand opportunities for employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.

The most important opportunity presented by the Ticket program is the development of strategies to use Ticket to Work funding to support people on the DIDD waiting list to be employed. People on the waiting list generally need both VR supports from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) for assessment, job acquisition and stabilization, and long-term supports from DIDD for job retention. DRS only provides upfront services to a person who will need supports for job retention, if a source for those supports is identified. As a result, the absence of DIDD funding for job retention

supports is a fundamental barrier to people on the waiting list being employed. Ticket Milestone and Outcome payments can fund needed job retention supports for up to six-and-a-half years. Accordingly, accessing Ticket to Work payments to fund job retention supports could create the opportunity for employment for at least a portion of people on the DIDD waiting list.

A second opportunity from the Ticket to Work program is to enhance funding to provider agencies that support people served by DIDD to be employed. Since Ticket to Work reimbursement is based on outcomes, it is not considered to be “double dipping” to receive both Ticket payments and DIDD reimbursement for the same person. Accordingly, DIDD provider agencies could increase their revenues by accessing Ticket revenue for each new DIDD funded person meeting Ticket earnings thresholds whom they support to be employed.

Accessing Ticket to Work funding to benefit people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the agencies that serve them will require confronting a number of challenges resulting from the structure of the program. The first is that under both Ticket reimbursement options, the person must leave the SSI rolls in order for the service provider to receive most of the Ticket payments. For many recipients and their families, the prospect of losing the SSI benefit creates fear and risk. However, earnings from a job paying above the SGA level significantly exceed the income each month from the SSI benefit. Further, Social Security Work Incentives, such as continued eligibility for Medicaid under Section 1619(b) and expedited return to the rolls if a person loses their job, mitigate much of the risk.

The second challenge is the Ticket requirement that the person work at the SGA level. The 2011 DIDD Employment Data Update reports that the average person funded by DIDD for employment supports earns \$6.60 per hour and works an average of 12.3 hours per week. This indicates that the preponderance of people supported by DIDD to be employed to date have earnings well below the SGA level and would not be eligible for Ticket to Work reimbursement.

However, emerging employer-driven initiatives to hire people with disabilities, such as Walgreens and Project SEARCH, have shown rich examples of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities working in fulltime jobs at \$10 to \$15 per hour with full benefits packages. These examples raise the bar for the employment possibilities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and should be the point of reference for new goals in the service delivery system. It is particularly important for people on the DIDD waiting list to earn as much income as possible to help cover their living and support costs.

The Ticket program also presents challenges for provider agencies. The first is that the process for becoming an EN requires completing a lengthy application, providing extensive agency documents and criminal background checks for key staff. For many disability service agencies, the effort may not seem cost effective. However, an agency can access Ticket reimbursement through a partnership with an administrative EN. The establishment of such partnerships throughout Tennessee will expand service options for Ticket Holders and expand the number of agencies that can access Ticket to Work payments.

The second challenge for provider agencies is that Ticket payments are only issued after the Ticket Holder is employed.

As a result, agencies incur considerable costs before reimbursement is received. This challenge can be mitigated through the establishment of partnerships with VR under the Partnership Plus option. Assuming the provider agency or EN has a Letter of Understanding with DRS, the provider agency can receive reimbursement from DRS for upfront costs for a Ticket Holder under its regular performance based process. DRS is reimbursed subsequently by Ticket to Work for Phase 1 of the Milestone/Outcome payment system. As early as nine months after the person is employed, the EN can begin to receive Milestone or Outcome payments to support job retention. Accordingly, the establishment of partnerships between ENs and DRS throughout Tennessee can help agencies address cash flow issues that are inherent in the Ticket program.

TENNESSEE'S TICKET TO WORK INITIATIVE

DIDD has recently established the Tennessee Ticket to Work Initiative to expand access to Ticket to Work funding for jobseekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A focus of the initiative is to create employment opportunities for people on the DIDD waiting list. The initiative will expand the number of programs in the State that can access Ticket funding and educate people on the waiting list about new opportunities for employment. DIDD will collaborate with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DLWD), DRS and other state agency partners in implementing the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI). Funded through a \$2.9 million federal grant to DLWD, the DEI will expand the capacity of Tennessee's workforce system to serve jobseekers with disabilities.

Five of Tennessee's 13 Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs) will receive funding from the grant for planning, enhancing local partnerships and developing service delivery resources. One of the requirements for the grantee LWIAs is to become a Ticket to Work EN. The DEI will inherently expand resources for the employment of people with disabilities, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, the new ENs established at the five grantee LWIAs will be what DIDD describes as a “cornerstone” for facilitating access to Ticket to Work funds for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For people on the DIDD waiting list and their families, this means new opportunities for employment and expanded provider options for employment services.

CONCLUSION

Ticket to Work funding can serve as a resource for providing employment opportunities for people served by DIDD or on the DIDD waiting list. Accessing Ticket funds, however, necessitates effective interagency partnerships at the State and local level. The collaboration between the Ticket to Work Initiative and the DEI presents a rich opportunity to develop other partnerships in Tennessee to make Ticket to Work a resource for jobseekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Note: For more information on Ticket to Work, visit www.yourtickettowork.com

Robert B. Nicholas, PhD is a Senior Visiting Fellow for Disability Research at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. He serves as a consultant on employment to the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

FIONA HAWKS' JOB TIPS

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON
WITH FIONA HAWKS

Fiona Hawks took vocational classes for two years in high school to learn computer skills and how to do secretarial work. In 11th grade, as a job component, she worked for pay three hours a day in the office of a local high school. In 12th grade, she worked part-time for a local real estate company, was assisted for a short while by a job coach, and wound up being hired by the same company after graduating. She was employed there full-time with benefits for two years until her family moved to Tennessee.

Today, Ms. Hawks is 32 years old, lives in her own apartment in Williamson County and drives back and forth—in her own “dream” Volkswagen Beetle—to her job as a clerk in the accounting department at Middle Tennessee Electric Membership Corporation. She also enjoys an active social life with co-workers and other friends in the community.

There are many reasons for Ms. Hawks' success, including parents who had very high expectations for her, her own high expectations for herself and, as anyone who meets her can attest, her welcoming smile and engaging personality. But perhaps most of all, Ms. Hawks takes her work life very seriously and exhibits a professionalism and a great deal of personal responsibility, as exemplified by her tips below.

ON GETTING JOB INTERVIEWS

“Get up early during the week as if going to work. Check the classified ads in the newspaper. Register with staff agencies. Practice skills to stay sharp. Network with neighbors and friends. Apply for SSI to help with expenses. Get regular exercise and relax on the weekends.”



PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

“Find out what the company does before you show up. Write down some questions to ask about the job. Dress smartly and look your best! Ladies—carry a small purse. Get good directions and be on time. Bring your portfolio and extra copies of your résumé. Get business cards from the people you see. Be enthusiastic! Don't be afraid to say, “I really want this job!”

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

“Always write thank you letters. If you get rejected, never be rude! Don't be discouraged—you may get lots of rejections. Never give up!”

KEEPING A JOB

“Get your job coach to come with you on the first day, and as needed afterwards. Learn the names of your supervisors and co-workers. If you don't understand something, ask! Be friendly and polite. If you finish a task, ask for more work. Read the company rules and regulations. Go to bed early. Expect to be tired after a day at work!”

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute at the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

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Toward a More INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

BY LYNNETTE HENDERSON

The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) was awarded \$2,916,400 from the Disability Employment Initiative in the Fall of 2011 to improve education, training and employment opportunities and outcomes for adults (18 and up) who are unemployed, underemployed or receiving Social Security disability benefits. The grant is designed to implement exemplary employment services in the public workforce system for individuals with disabilities.

"During these difficult economic times, it is important to ensure that all workers, including those with disabilities—who as a group face employment barriers even during times of prosperity—are able to benefit from the Labor Department's employment and retraining services," said Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis. "These federal grants will help to provide services and support to individuals with disabilities in seven additional states, and put them on the path to permanent and secure jobs."

The U.S. Department of Labor granted \$21,166,560 to seven states (other states included California, Hawaii, Ohio, South Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin) in a program jointly funded and administered by the department's Employment and Training Administration and its Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). This round of funding is the second under the Disability Employment Initiative, which now supports 16 state projects. The states with continuing grants under the initiative are Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, New York and Virginia.

Tennessee's grant application described our State's situation: "The employment rate for Tennesseans with disabilities is almost one-third the national rate, a statistic that must be improved. Through this grant Tennessee plans to continue to increase partnerships and collaboration among the disability-specific and generic employment systems, increase economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities, enhance the use of universal design for the organization of employment services, and increase the use of customized and flexible work options for individuals with disabilities."

Tennessee previously participated in a grant that put Disability Program Navigators in place in each of the 13 Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs); The Disability Program Navigators

provided a bridge between career center staff, private and public partners, and job seekers with disabilities. After specific funding for the initiative ceased, the Navigators were retained and continue to be the local point-of-contact for questions regarding customers with disabilities to ensure program staff meet their obligations not to discriminate on the basis of disability. This 2011 initiative builds upon that previous Disability Program Navigator Initiative.

This project will focus on comparing the results of five participating LWIAs: (LWIA 1: Johnson City, LWIA 3: Knox County, LWIA 8: Clarksville, LWIA 10: Columbia, LWIA 13: Memphis), with four other LWIAs which do not receive supports from this grant. Each participating LWIA will be responsible for tailoring a basic set of services to the needs of their local population of adults with disabilities as well as their potential employers. This will enable the TDLWD to document improvement in outcomes for and services to people with disabilities under this improved model. Demonstrating the efficacy of these changes will guide future systemic changes by the TDLWD.

Each participating LWIA will be responsible for meeting local needs by managing four basic strategic service delivery components with their associated objectives.

1. Integrated Resource Teams will facilitate the blending and braiding of funds and leveraging of resources to better serve the jobseeker with disabilities.
 - a. The recruitment or designation of a staff member to act as Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) in each of the participating Workforce Investment Boards (LWIAs) to implement this proposal's strategies.
2. Customized Employment efforts to provide reasonable accommodations and support necessary for individuals with disabilities to perform the functions of a job that is individually developed for the participant and the employer.
 - a. Each LWIA will develop an aggressive Customized Employment effort to identify and match participants to employers in the community to increase flexible work options.

b. Employers will be educated on accommodations for employees who have disabilities and relevant tax credits, etc. Employers will be supported in their compliance with all statutes regarding service to people with disabilities, including Section 108 of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

3. Asset Strategies that will include a series of approaches that have the potential to expand opportunities for community participation that has a positive impact on the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

a. Each LWIA will participate or apply for enrollment as an Employment Network (EN). An EN is an organizational entity (state or local, public or private) that enters into a contract with the Social Security Administration (SSA) with the intention of coordinating and delivering employment services, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, or other support services under the Ticket to Work Program. These services are provided by the EN to SSA beneficiaries who have assigned their Tickets to the EN which has accepted the Ticket. An EN may be either a single entity or a partnership of organizations combining their resources into a single entity. An EN may provide services necessary to prepare and place beneficiaries in employment, either directly or by entering into contracts with other providers of such service.

b. TDLWD will work closely with the SSA's Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA) Benefits to Work program. Community Work Incentive Coordinators will be important members of the integrated resource teams to expand services to beneficiaries (http://tndisability.org/coalition_programs/benefits_work).

4. Partnerships and Collaborations designed to enhance cooperative efforts with organizations such as the Tennessee Department of Mental Health, Tennessee Department of Human Services, VR, the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network Partners, including the Vanderbilt University Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, the University of Tennessee, and Tennessee's Customized Employment Project.

a. Each LWIA will establish Integrated Resource Teams (IRT) to enable and advance the blending and braiding of funds and collaboration with local and state partners to deliver the necessary array of education, human services, and job training experiences needed by the participants to increase partnerships and collaboration among disability-specific systems.

"Access to high-quality employment and training services is vital to moving youth and adults with disabilities into the workforce and preparing them for good jobs in high-growth, high-demand industries," said ODEP assistant secretary Kathy Martinez.

At a December 14th meeting of more than 80 professionals in the field of employment, DIDD Commissioner Jim Henry declared, "Tennesseans with disabilities won the lottery with this grant!" Though the grant began in 2011, planning is ongoing

and implementation will begin during the Spring of 2012. Let's examine what it may mean for you.

If you are an employment professional, particularly in the five LWIAs that were funded, consider the following actions.

1. Reach out to your Local Workforce Investment Area, visit with its Career Center personnel and offer to collaborate as a partner on their Integrated Resource Team.
2. Watch for more information about how to partner with the LWIAs as an Employment Network to finance your support services to individuals with disabilities who are working.
3. Learn more about customized employment so that you can identify the marketable skills of the individuals with disabilities with whom you work.
4. Contact Lynnette.Henderson@vanderbilt.edu with your e-mail address to be added to an employment-related e-newsletter for monthly updates.

If you are an employment professional, who is NOT served by one of the five LWIAs that were funded, consider these actions.

1. Reach out to your Local Workforce Investment Area, visit with its Career Center personnel and offer to collaborate. They know where the jobs are!
2. Learn more about customized employment so that you can be identifying the marketable skills of the individuals with disabilities with whom you work.
3. Contact Lynnette.Henderson@vanderbilt.edu with your e-mail address to be added to an employment-related e-newsletter for monthly updates.

If you are a person with a disability who would like to have a job, or a better job, consider these actions.

1. Participate in Person-Centered Planning to clarify your employment goals.
2. Learn more about your Ticket to Work. Ask someone you trust or visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/receivingbenefits.html>.
3. Visit your local Career Center. Help them get to know you. See what programs they can offer to document or improve your skills.
4. Consult with a Benefits-to-Work counselor to determine how you can improve your income and keep your necessary supports. Call 1-888-839-5333.
5. Contact Lynnette.Henderson@vanderbilt.edu with your e-mail address to be added to an employment-related e-newsletter for monthly updates.

If you are a family member or educator who would like to learn more about employment for people with disabilities, please contact Lynnette.Henderson@vanderbilt.edu to be added to an employment-related e-newsletter for monthly updates.

Lynnette Henderson, PhD, is associate director of Community Services at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

“VIEWS OF EMPLOYMENT”

– *Patty Cassidy’s Presentation at the Annual Council Retreat*

BY EMMA SHOUSE



During the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities’ annual Fall planning retreat in October, the topic of employment for people with disabilities was the primary focus for most of our guest speakers. Patty Cassidy, of Griffin-Hammis Associates, LLC, spoke about national trends related to employment of people with developmental disabilities, best

practices for creating employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and various success stories of individuals working in jobs through supported and customized employment.

Terry Long, who is on the Council as a representative of the Department of Education’s Division of Special Education, felt the information presented about national employment trends for people with disabilities was valuable. “In her presentation on employment for persons with developmental disabilities, Patty Cassidy cited facts from the Institute for Community Inclusion’s National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes 2010. Ms. Cassidy’s presentation pointed out that even though there has been a steady increase in the number of people served by state agencies serving adults with developmental disabilities over the last two decades, the percentage of those adults served in integrated employment has not kept pace.”

The data also show an increase in facility-based and non-work service options, despite growing societal acceptance of progressive ideas about employment and people with developmental disabilities, and an emphasis on consumer choice and self-determination.

Ms. Long discussed how this information relates to the Department of Education’s policies about preparing students with disabilities for the transition from high school to future employment. “The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Tennessee Department of Education have continued to emphasize the need for school personnel and IEP [Individualized Education Plan] teams to ramp up their transition program planning, transition services and efforts at teaching students self-determination skills. Intermediate, middle and high schools must continue to teach students basic work readiness skills and must work with large and small businesses in their communities to prepare students with skills related to those potential jobs or, using job carving, for specific parts of those jobs to insure that the student is ready for post-secondary work and/or further education or job training.”

Ms. Cassidy also discussed the differences in philosophies between traditional approaches to employment for people with disabilities and customized employment. Customized employment is not asking what job or business would be best for a certain individual, but spending time with that person to discover the jobseeker’s strengths, skills, needs and interests. Customized employment must involve a negotiation between employers and

the job seeker about the needs of that particular business and the abilities and conditions of employment of the individual. According to Ms. Cassidy, customized employment must also include the following features:

- It begins with the premise that everyone can work;
- It’s rooted in the “discovery” process of finding out meaningful information about an individual;
- Employment development is determined by the individual, not job openings or market demand; and
- Employment services must be individualized and crafted to fit each individual’s particular needs.

Types of customized employment can include job carving, job creation, resource ownership, starting a “business within a business” and self-employment/microenterprises. Griffin-Hammis Associates feels that many practices utilized by employment services professionals ultimately are not very useful in helping individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities secure a competitive and integrated job that they want to do. For example, this presentation suggested that activities such as vocational evaluations, résumé writing workshops, filling out applications and interview skills training typically are not as valuable as simply getting to know a client in meaningful ways to discover what type of job will be a successful fit for them. Ms. Cassidy emphasized that the more people employment professionals can involve in the discovery process, the more likely it is that a diverse set of ideas about potential jobs will arise.

Council member Renée Lopez commented, “The common sense approach that Patty Cassidy describes emphasizes the importance of truly getting to know the individual, not just completing standardized forms. As she relayed the information and gave examples, I found myself reflecting on how we sometimes get caught up in all the forms and overlook the person. I took away a renewed sense for why it is that I do my work.”

Ms. Cassidy ended her presentation by challenging advocates and employment professionals to take real action in moving towards supported employment and customized employment methods. “We have years of demonstration and practice to show supported employment and customized employment methods work and positively impact the employment success of people with developmental disabilities,” she said. “Yet we continue to spend time, energy and resources on pilot or demonstration projects to introduce these not really new service models to a few. Together we can solve the urgency that people with disabilities and their families face when seeking employment opportunity, creativity and support. It’s time to work together to make supported and customized employment available to everyone who needs and wants it, right now.”

To learn more about Griffin-Hammis Associates, visit www.griffinhammis.com.

Emma Shouse is assistant director of development with the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

News From Pathfinder

BY NANCY W. MUSE

In this economy, it will come as no surprise to learn that employment is among the top five service requests Pathfinder receives. Yet employment resources have held this position throughout Pathfinder's existence. This edition of Pathfinder News addresses resources related to employment and changes in our database that reflect identified needs in the community.

Research on employment of individuals with disabilities strongly supports entering the workforce as early as possible. Planning for future employment during the teen years, while still in school, is very important for finding meaningful work in later life.

Services related to employment can be found in two categories in the Pathfinder database: Employment Resources and Vocational Training. Adult Day Services may also be a relevant category, although families often will call seeking day services when it is possible for an individual to work at a paying job or as a volunteer.

"Employment Resources" refers to programs that do one or more of the following:

- Provide employment opportunities for people who are searching for jobs;
- Assist people who are willing and able to work by helping them prepare for, find, secure and retain suitable employment;
- Provide work site evaluation or modification support; and

- Seek to develop employment opportunities in various fields for people who need a position.

The following organizations from our database fall under the category of Employment Resources.

BENEFITS TO WORK

University of Tennessee's Connections for Disability and Employment

The Tennessee Career Center system

Tennessee AgrAbility Project

Vocational Rehabilitation (appears in Vocational Training as well)

Tennessee Community Services Agency (serves selected areas)

Other organizations found in this category are the **Tennessee Human Rights Commission**, which enforces **Tennessee Fair Employment Practices**; **Caring, Inc.**; **The Centers for Independent Living**; and the **Tennessee Small Business Development Center**.

The **Vocational Training** keyword refers to programs that offer apprenticeships, training through business practice firms, classroom training, internships, on-the-job training, work experience or other opportunities that prepare people for specific types of employment. The training may feature formal instruction in an institutional classroom setting, hands-on experience at a job site under varying arrangements or a combination of the two.

On the Pathfinder Web site, Vocational Training includes such organizations as **Access Americorps**, **Goodwill Industries, Inc.**, **Tennessee Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired**, **Vocational Rehabilitation**, **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center**, **Opportunity East - Lions Volunteer Blind Industries**, **STAR Center** (Special Technology Access Resource Center), **The AIM Center, Inc.** (mental health), **Vital Center for the Blind**, **Progressive Residential Services** (intellectual disability, seniors, mental health), **The Arc**, **BrightStone** and **Frontier Industries**.

Nancy W. Muse is information & referral services coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

• Tennessee Disability Pathfinder
• English & Español
• (615) 322-8529
• (800) 640-4636

• TTY/TDD users:
• please dial 711 for free relay service

• www.familypathfinder.org
• tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**.

Employment Profile: MERRY JENSEN

BY CARRIE HOBBS GUIDEN



Merry Jensen

When Merry Jensen secured her first job at age 16, there were no special education services in schools, let alone “transition” services to help prepare individuals with intellectual disabilities to make that shift from student life to adult life. Supported employment services did not exist. These may seem like insurmountable barriers for some people, but not for Ms.

Jensen. You see, Ms. Jensen’s family expected her to work. There was never any question about it. And that is exactly what she did and continues to do today—work.

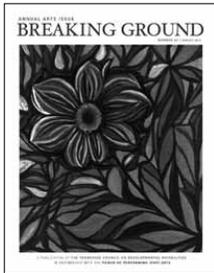
Her first job was at Goodwill in her home state of Wisconsin. As she gained work skills, she got a job in the housekeeping department at St. Luke’s Hospital. She kept that position for 15 years until she relocated to Memphis, in 1998, to live with her sister. By this time, supported employment services had been developed and Ms. Jensen utilized Vocational Rehabilitation to secure employment in her new community. She worked at various businesses, such as daycare centers and retail stores, while continuing to learn new skills. She worked at Starbuck’s for a period of time, but with the downturn in the economy, Ms. Jensen’s

hours decreased significantly. She wanted a job with more hours.

In 2009, Ms. Jensen found that job. With the assistance of Vocational Rehabilitation services, she was hired to work in the Veterans Administration hospital canteen. She is a federal employee, makes a competitive wage and works Monday through Thursday from 9:30 am to 3:00 pm. Her numerous responsibilities include stocking condiments, napkins and straws; clearing tables; and keeping the general area clean and neat. Ms. Jensen is very well liked by her co-workers and if you ask her about her job she will share all sorts of stories with you. Asked once what she liked most about her job, she answered, “I get paid vacation and holidays.”

Ms. Jensen’s success in the workplace has increased her confidence and independence in other areas of her life. She handled the move from Wisconsin to Tennessee with grace and dignity, adjusting well to a new community, a new living arrangement, making new friends and securing employment. Ms. Jensen now lives in her own home with support, sits on the Board of Directors for The Arc Tennessee and is active on several of its Board committees. She is a role model to all who know her and has far surpassed even the high expectations her family had of her all those years ago.

Carrie Hobbs Guiden is executive director of The Arc Tennessee.



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**ALL ENTRIES MUST BE
SUBMITTED BY JUNE 15, 2012**

The Knoxville Area Employment Consortium's 2011 DISABILITY MENTORING DAY Activities are a Huge Success!

BY ROBERT B. NICHOLAS, PhD

The Knoxville Area Employment Consortium (KAEC) is comprised of organizations and agencies in the Knoxville area with a shared commitment to fostering employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The KAEC networks with local employers in a variety of ways to highlight the value of jobseekers with disabilities in meeting employer workforce needs. As a benefit to employers, KAEC provides a single point of contact for access to assistance and services from KAEC members for recruitment, training and job retention of qualified employees with disabilities.

Each year, the KAEC plans and coordinates activities in Knoxville related to Disability Mentoring Day (DMD). DMD affords people with disabilities the opportunity to experience job shadowing and mentoring at collaborating local businesses. It is part of a national DMD network coordinated by the American Association of People with Disabilities that connects 20,000 people with thousands of employers in 300 locations.

The KAEC's 2011 DMD activities were scheduled throughout October in concert with National Disability Employment Awareness month. The cornerstone activity in Knoxville was mentoring and job shadowing opportunities hosted by 24 employers at 30 job sites. Kelley Croisdale of the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), who serves as the Vice Chair of KAEC, coordinated registration and assignment of mentees to jobs of their choice. She reported that a Knoxville DMD record 91 mentees registered for mentoring experiences, with some choosing to go to more than one employer. Ms. Croisdale attributed part of the record turnout to expanded registration by Knox County School students with disabilities. She said that in addition to the success of this year's mentoring activities, one participating employer, the CVS Distribution Center, was so impressed with two of the mentees it hosted that the company hired them into full-time jobs.

KAEC's DMD activities were capped off with a Disability Employment Awareness Breakfast held at the Downtown Hilton

in Knoxville. The moderator for the breakfast was Lori Tucker, who is a news anchorwoman for WATE TV. The keynote speaker was Brett Leake, a nationally known comedian with a disability who has performed on NBC's *The Tonight Show*. He wowed the audience with his humor but interspersed poignant comments on issues related to disabilities. The breakfast also included a presentation by Cindy Mayfield of Oak Ridge National Laboratories, who talked about how valuable it was to her and her colleagues to get to know the mentees they hosted this year. The breakfast concluded with the presentation of the Rudy Sullivan Award, recognizing a person with a disability who has achieved employment success through exceptional motivation and persistence. This year's recipient was Andrew Mettler. Mr. Mettler inspired the audience with his remarks on how employment has enriched his life.

Tina Jones, from DRS Corporate Connections, who serves as the Chair of KAEC, led the effort to plan the breakfast. She said that 135 people attended the breakfast, many of whom were representatives of local employers. She said that she received several positive comments from the employers in attendance on the value of the event, and she is optimistic that it will be a catalyst to KAEC's continuing efforts to encourage local employers to meet their workforce needs with jobseekers with disabilities.

On a final note, two local Olive Garden restaurants, in appreciation for KAEC's efforts to plan and coordinate DMD, hosted luncheons for KAEC members. These luncheons provided a very pleasant setting to reflect on a hugely successful 2011 DMD.

Robert B. Nicholas, PhD is a senior visiting fellow for disability research at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. He serves as a consultant on employment to the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. He resides in Corryton, Tennessee.

TENNESSEE DISABILITY
MEGACONFERENCE

SAVE THE DATE

The 2012 Tennessee Disability MegaConference

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at the Nashville Airport Marriott

Supporting MEANINGFUL WORK *in* TENNESSEE

BY ERIK W. CARTER

Ask any young person what they most look forward to about life after high school and they are likely to mention things like getting a great job, finding a good place to live, using their talents to make a difference, making new friends and having fun in their community. Each of these aspirations can be an important part of living a rich and enviable life. Yet, these are also the very experiences that remain out of reach for far too many young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

When people with disabilities are connected to compelling work experiences in their communities, achieving the other goals they also identify as important to them becomes that much easier. In other words, a good job does much more than promote financial well-being. It also contributes to a sense of accomplishment, self-worth and independence; gives people a place to share their strengths and gifts in valued ways; leads to new friendships; and provides resources and connections that enhance community involvement. Meaningful work can make a real difference in the lives of young people with disabilities.

Like many other states, however, Tennessee has struggled to ensure that every young person with a disability has the aspirations, opportunities and supports to access meaningful work. What steps might we take toward making a real difference in the job opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our State? What are some of the actions needed to substantially change the employment landscape in Tennessee?

Raising expectations

The expectations communicated by others can shape the career aspirations young people with disabilities hold for themselves. In a recent study, my colleagues and I found that youth with significant disabilities whose parents expected them to work were five times as likely to have paid, community employment in the early years after high school. The expectations of educators and service providers also determine, in part, the employment opportunities provided to people with disabilities. Real work for real pay should become the first option in the minds of service providers, employers, community members,

families, community leaders and the public at large. Indeed, every child with a disability in Tennessee should hear the message—from a very early age and from multiple sources—that they have something of value to contribute to the workplace.

Supporting early work experiences

Perhaps the most powerful predictor of integrated employment in early adulthood is holding a paid job while still in high school. In a recent study, we also found that students with significant disabilities who held a school-sponsored, weekend or Summer job were about 2.5 times as likely to connect to a paid job after high school. No student should graduate from high school without having had authentic opportunities to develop and deepen their career interests, as well as explore the world of work first hand. To support these experiences, however, schools will need effective partnerships with families, employers and other community members.

Planning around individuals

Thoughtful, person-centered planning is essential to identifying relevant work experiences that fit well with a young person's interests, strengths and goals for their own lives. Although such individualized planning sometimes takes more time and creativity, it also can mean the difference between *finding a job* and *finding work you love*. Far too often, planning efforts focus on fitting young people into existing programs rather than leading teams to design programs around the needs of individuals.

Promoting broad awareness

Increasing access to good jobs is predicated in part on the willingness of businesses to hire people with developmental disabilities. Local employers may well wonder what it really takes to hire and support a young person with a significant disability if they have never seen it done successfully. Efforts to showcase both the ordinary and innovative ways in which Tennessee employers are supporting—and also benefiting from—the hiring of people with disabilities can go a long way toward demonstrating that meaningful employment really can happen in our State. Indeed, there are many employers who can speak vividly about the positive impact hiring someone with a disability has had on their business or organization. Creating forums to share these

compelling stories can go a long way toward raising awareness of the importance and value of inclusive workplaces.

Developing natural supports

Expanding employment outcomes also will require focusing both on improving service systems and on cultivating natural supports in local communities. Every community has a rich array of assets, resources and connections that could be drawn upon to connect young people with disabilities to career development experiences. Yet educators, service systems and families have not always felt confident identifying and drawing upon other avenues of natural support. Engaging new and broader segments of a community in expanding employment opportunities may hold the key to establishing sustainable solutions to existing policy and practice barriers.

Working together

Among the most important steps our State can take, is to work in a more coordinated, concerted and creative way. Tennessee is replete with organizations, networks, agencies and families who all care deeply about enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The more we can all work in tandem with one another to focus our collective attention, resources and energy on this dimension of people's lives, the more quickly we will see real change across our State.

This past Summer, the *Tennessee Collaborative for Meaningful Work* was launched to better connect and coordinate efforts to expand meaningful work in our State. More than 25 agencies and organizations—including the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities—committed to working together to improve employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities. And the number of new partners has grown in the months since. We invite you to join us in these efforts too. Over the next few months, the Collaborative will be establishing a new Web site, creating an e-newsletter and launching other statewide activities aimed at making some of the changes described above. We look forward to working with you on this important endeavor.

Visit <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/site/services/disabilityservices/page.aspx?id=3070> to learn more about employment in Tennessee and contact Lynnette Henderson at lynnette.henderson@vanderbilt.edu to be added to our listserv when it is launched.

Erik Carter is an associate professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University. His research and teaching focuses on supporting meaningful inclusion in schools, workplaces, congregations and communities.

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