

One-Stop Workforce Centers Aid Young People with Disabilities

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) is a broad overhaul of the U.S. job-training system. It strives to streamline dozens of individual training programs giving everyone easier access to services, especially groups who face serious barriers in seeking and gaining employment, such as youth and adults with disabilities.

The centerpiece of the WIA is a system of one-stop workforce centers designed to provide job training, education, and employment services at a single neighborhood location. A key idea behind WIA is that every individual, including people with disabilities, has the right to access basic or "core" services that include:

- skill assessment services;
- information on employment and training opportunities; and
- unemployment services, such as job search and placement assistance and up-to-date information on job vacancies.

All adults age 18 and older are eligible for core services. The One-Stop delivery system is designed to serve the employment needs of jobseekers and employers alike.

One of the goals of WIA is to provide all jobseekers easy access to services that will help them find jobs and advance their careers, while also meeting em-

ployer workforce needs. WIA brings together many different federally funded employment and training programs into a more simplified, "user friendly" system for jobseekers. People with disabilities will potentially benefit from this overall push for higher quality and easier access to services.

What Kinds of Services are Available for Young People?

Youth activities are provided to what are called Transition-Age youth. These are low-income youth, ages 14-21, who fit one or more of the following challenges to successful employment:

- high school dropout;
- someone with basic literacy skill needs;
- homeless, runaway, or foster child;
- pregnant mother or a parent;
- offender;
- someone who needs help in completing an educational program or securing and holding a job.

At least 30 percent of the funds for youth programs must be spent on out-of-school youth. Five percent of funds for youth activities can be used for youth who are not low-income but meet a specific category, such as individuals with disabilities (including learning disabilities). For

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On the Personal Front: A Tale of Two Dogs

by Nancy Gorman

In the fall of 1998 I realized that the time had come to find a new, younger service dog. Beatrice, my service dog of ten years, had been struck by a car. Although her injuries were not serious, the experience caused her to age rapidly. She was having trouble doing everything I needed her to do. First I contacted the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and they helped me by putting me in contact with the National Education for Dog Assistance Services (NEADS). I filled out the paper work and in a few months received a call to go for an interview. After talking with three staff members of NEADS, I was given literature about their program and sent home. I also learned that it would cost me \$6,000 and that I would need to raise the money myself. I felt quite overwhelmed.

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READING

Winter 2000/2001

Time to Get Back to Work

The laws protecting and enhancing the rights of people with disabilities in America have always had their detractors and have always been under subtle or overt attack on both the state and federal level. In recent years we have been fortunate to have a President, Republican or Democrat, who was prepared to use the Executive Office to defend those laws. Having friends in high places can be comforting. However, it can also lead to a little complacency.

When you awake and discover that you no longer have those friends in positions of power, it becomes necessary to realize that you, together with those who share your concerns, must carry the fight for the rights of, and opportunities for, people with disabilities.

Just since the first of the year we have seen the Americans with Disabilities Act under fire from the Supreme Court, the abrupt termination of the effort to protect workers from disabling injuries, and the appointment of officials hostile to reasonable accommodation. Already, in less than three months, this new atmosphere can be seen invading the state courts in an attempt to gut or overturn local protections for people with disabilities who want to work.

The purpose of this article is not to discuss any particular issue. Rather it is to bring your attention to the fact that every one of us needs to get back to work to protect those rights we may have begun to take for granted. You, or your friends, have the right to live as independently as possible, to have the maximum opportunity for work and education, to medical care and rehabilitation services, and to participate fully in community life. While there is always some friction about the specifics, recent national administrations agreed with those principals and recognized the disability community as an important constituency. That is no longer true. The candidate who stated during his campaign that people with disabilities should be cared for by the churches and synagogues, now occupies the executive office. He and his appointees will not be looking out for us until and unless we make them do so. It will take a concerted effort just to maintain the rights we have won from the assault by business interests and conservative ideology.

So much of the effect of law is in the enforcement and interpretation that hostile officials can reverse progress in the dark of a single night without any debate or public vote. We must awaken to the fact that our friends in high places are mostly gone and only we can prevent the overthrow of the progress of a generation.

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Disability Awareness

The Center for Living and Working, Inc. in Worcester is offering an awareness-raising program for Massachusetts schools through the program called "Let Them Ask," in which individuals share their experiences of living with a disability and students are both allowed and encouraged to ask questions.

Let Them Ask was developed to teach students and faculty what disability is, how to approach and speak to people with disabilities, and that they are no different from others. The program is designed to be appropriate for students of all ages from first grade to college. Presentations run between 40 minutes and one hour. Typically, three people with various disabilities will share their experiences and demonstrate how people with disabilities lead normal lives. They will entertain the students' questions and participate in an open and free discussion.

Many students do not know a person living with disability well enough to feel free to ask questions. This increases the distance and misunderstanding between the disability and non-disability community. The program allows this gap to be closed in a safe and structured, yet open and friendly setting.

Let Them Ask is available in any school in Massachusetts. for more information or to arrange to have Let Them Ask at your school, contact:
Center for Living and Working, Inc.
"Let Them Ask"
67 Millbrook Street
Worcester, MA 01606
(508) 363-1226, Ext 114
On the web at www.letthemask.org.

ATM's for the Blind: A Lesson in Advocacy

by Cecile Villars

I'm sure there are many who, like me, were dismayed when the new generation of automatic teller machines (ATM) appeared on the scene. Around Boston these were introduced by the Baybank chain. At first I was irritated at this barrier to blind clients like myself. Upon further consideration, I grew worried, sensing that this was a harbinger of other computerized "advances" that were increasingly skewed to a sighted world.

In answer to my inquiry, my local branch gave me the name and address of the person in charge of Disability Services. I wrote a letter pointing out that the few lines of Braille posted on the sill of each ATM were not nearly sufficient to enable a blind customer to use these new machines. Within days I received a letter thanking me for my interest. Enclosed with it were instructions in Braille and on audio tape. The tape included the noises made by the ATM during an actual transaction.

I was pleased and impressed, both by the quick response and the bank's attitude, its anticipation of my needs and the work that had been done in advance to meet these. This sort of willingness and cooperation is to be encouraged, I thought. Wanting to support the bank's efforts, I went over the material I'd been sent and wrote back with a list of the few mistakes or discrepancies I came across. Again, I was promptly thanked and invited to let them know if there was anything more they could do.

When, a year later, Baybank was merged with Bank Boston in

one of the many consolidations we are seeing throughout the corporate landscape, the ATM's remained unchanged.

However, when that bank in turn was acquired by Fleet Bank it was quite a different story. All of a sudden we found ourselves part of the fourth largest banking system in the nation, one positioning itself as a global contender. Around the city there were outcries against what many saw as the bank's pulling up stakes and abandoning its commitment to local neighborhoods. The papers ran articles about customer dissatisfaction over new banking policies charging fees for what had formerly been standard services. Electronic banking, whether by ATM, phone or computer link, was being pushed. None of this augured well for people with disabilities.

The transition took place in late spring. A letter informed us that the new bank cards had to be initialized by a certain date in May. My mother and I (I live with my parents) reported to our local branch bank the week before the deadline to straighten out some other issues. Following that, we went to the ATM to activate our cards. That was when I learned that the touch screens had been altered. They now had a new feature, a selection of languages in which one wanted to conduct one's transactions. My mother pressed the screen for me. I then entered my number and proceeded through the sequence of keystrokes I'd always used in the past to withdraw forty dollars. The

machine gave me twenty. Thinking I might have gone through the keystrokes too quickly, I did it again. This time the machine dispensed eighty dollars. Clearly the software had been changed. Everything had been reprogrammed.

When I asked a bank employee for the instructions for using the machine without having to touch the screen, she didn't know what I was talking about. A week later she phoned me to say that the machines could only be operated by touching the screen. "When you come into the bank, we will have to help you."

I asked where to write to the bank to correct the problem and was given an address in Rhode Island. It sounded suspiciously like a mail stop for a large department comprised of anonymous employees. I envisioned my letter being conveniently lost in the flood of other mail from irate customers.

Nevertheless, I wrote the letter. Admittedly, its tone was not friendly. I related my experiences with what I deemed effective sarcasm seeking to embarrass the bank by its egregious oversight. My message had been something along the lines of "This used to work just fine until you came along and spent millions of dollars screwing things up."

I expected them to rectify the error immediately. After all, it was so obviously a blunder, such a public relations disaster, that they could not have failed to correct it as soon as it was brought to their attention. Just to give them an added incentive, I let them know, by a discreet "cc: The Boston Globe" at the bottom of my letter, that the paper was being apprised of this issue and was sure to follow it

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A Tale of Two Dogs

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Looking back I realize that I was feeling resistant from the beginning. Beatrice had come to me through a private donation and I had worked with a trainer for ten days in my own home. Bea and I bonded immediately. She seemed to know that she was home and would have a permanent place in my heart. In my memory it had been an easy adjustment for both of us. But when I finally got to NEADS in Boylston to meet my new dog and begin the two weeks of training, it was an experience fraught with challenges.

First off, Daisy Mae seemed really small. She was a scrawny, short haired, two-year-old Golden Retriever. When I first saw her I longed for the bigger, thicker haired, healthy looking dog that went to my classmate Liza. Liza's dog reminded me of Beatrice. I felt as if I had to earn Daisy's approval and at the same time win the approval of the trainer. The dormitory style living and being away from home was hard for me. I am a loner, not a joiner. And my mind kept wandering to Beatrice who had been placed in a kennel where they said I could visit her if I had spare time, but I was still missing her all day long. For many years Bea had been the one constant in my life.

The training began. First we engaged in exercises with the dogs. Daisy and I practiced turning on and off lights, closing doors, and pushing elevator buttons. At first I was frustrated when we did not get things right. When the trainer criticized our performance or made us do things again and again, I

resented it. By the beginning of the second week I was afraid that I might be asked to leave because of my stubborn streak and poor performance. I called on friends and family for reassurance but no one took seriously that my skills as a dog owner might be in question. I knew in my heart that something had to change. I was suffering a bit from the princess syndrome; part of me wanted to call my father and just ask him to buy me a dog.

I took out my calendar and realized that I had four days left. On that second Monday, I adopted a new attitude. I saw that I had to do it the NEADS way. Whenever I was asked to do something over, instead of feeling bad, I asked for feedback. As I worked with the staff it became easier and less stressful. On Tuesday we were instructed to prepare for a trip to the grocery store. The staff would be looking for "dog/client bonding," and how successfully we kept our dogs away from the shelves of food and droppings on the floor. I did not handle this task well. On Wednesday, we went to the local mall. I was very nervous that Daisy and I would screw up. We were being carefully monitored. The trainers would walk past us and pretend to be strangers offering the dog food and we would have to respond appropriately and firmly. I held my breath. Surprisingly, everything went well.

Next came hide and seek. I was directed to call out to Daisy and she was supposed to come search for me. All kind of thoughts went through my mind. "Would she know my voice well enough? Had we bonded enough yet?" I was afraid that when it came our turn, she would just ignore me. Daisy not only came in response to my call, she placed first

among all the dogs in this activity. I went to bed that night with a new feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. The next morning I was greeted with a big "congratulations" and a smack on the back from the trainer. He seemed to revel in our achievement. The rest of the day I dug in for more exercises of fetch, hold, come, stay, go, - fetch, hold, come, stay, go.

When the last day of training came, I had mixed emotions. I was the first one packed and I did not attend the graduation ceremony. I was thrilled to be returning to the city and vowed I'd never return to the training campus. Looking back, I am so glad that I have Daisy. She was worth the psychological and emotional stress of the training. I have come to adore her and learned not to compare her to Beatrice. I have learned that each dog has her own qualities and personality. Daisy is quiet but smart. She is a thinker and wants to do the right thing for me.

Since I first started working on this piece, Beatrice has passed away. She was put to sleep last October. Today Daisy is my constant companion. She has grown into her role as my service dog. She has earned my respect and my love. "Come, Daisy. Hold. Fetch. Stay, Daisy. Stay."

Nancy Gorman is a life-long wheelchair user who lives in Boston and tutors homeless women, children, and adults. She holds degrees from UMass and UCLA.

NEADS is located at P.O. Box 213, West Boylston, MA 01583. You may contact them for additional information, by phone at 978-422-9064 (v&tty), or by e-mail at info@neads.org.

Workforce Centers

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youth with disabilities, only their own income, not their family's, is considered in determining whether they meet income criteria. Youth who meet the income eligibility criteria for receiving cash payments under any federal, state, or local public assistance program (such as SSI benefits from Social Security) are eligible for youth services.

The state's workforce plan must address how the state will meet the needs of youth with disabilities. Each local workforce investment area must have a youth council to coordinate youth programs and activities that link them to local labor market needs. WIA requires assessments, preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities or unsubsidized employment (as appropriate), links between academic and occupational training, and links to the job market and employers.

Required support services include tutoring, study skills training, instruction leading to high school completion (including dropout prevention), alternative school services, adult mentoring, paid and unpaid work experiences (including internships and job shadowing), occupational skills training, leadership development opportunities, follow-up services for not less than 12 months as appropriate, and comprehensive guidance and counseling.

Whether a young person is eligible for services or not, one-stop workforce centers can serve as information and referral sources. There is no rule which keeps any youth under 18 from using the core services of the one-stop

centers. The WIA encourages youth to make use of these services early in their development and to use the system as an entry point for obtaining education, training, and job search services.

As a resource for the transition process, one-stop workforce centers can:

- Assist students with job searches by providing job listings, helping with resume development, teaching interview skills.
- Provide information and access to experimental employment activities. Many students, including those with and without disabilities, gain early work experiences through internships, apprenticeships, mentor programs, cooperative education programs, and summer work programs.
- Provide instruction on conducting a job search. One-stop centers have considerable expertise on conducting job searches both locally and nationally.

As with all programs, everything may not go as smoothly as the law provides. Perhaps the one-stop center in your area is accessible to people with disabilities in general but not accessible for your specific disability. Accessibility goes beyond physical access issues such as ramps, Braille, interpreters, adapted computer keyboards, appropriate accessories, and software. Also, the services and programs provided to the general public need to be accessible to you. By law, this is the responsibility of the workforce center.

What is Your Youth Responsible For?

Participants must:

- Be willing and able to advocate for themselves or have an advocate who can support them in obtaining the rights and ser-

vices needed. An advocate could be a parent, friend, rehabilitation counselor, teacher, or a professional from an Independent Living Center or a Parent Training Center in your area.

- Talk honestly about their work goals. The better a participant can define and express her or his goals, the more efficient and accurate the one-stop center can be in meeting those needs.
- Be responsible for the work they need to do. If a class requires homework it must be done and tasks should be completed in a timely manner; these are also important aspects of keeping a job.
- Ask for assistance from the one-stop center staff when they need it.
- Have all their forms and documents ready, including high school transcript, addresses of past employers, and reference letters.

Who is Eligible?

All adults 18 and older are eligible for core services, including job search and placement assistance, labor market information, initial assessment of skills and needs, information about available services, and some follow-up services to retain jobs. Intensive services for unemployed people who aren't able to find jobs through core services alone will also be available. These include more comprehensive assessments, individual employment plans, group or individual counseling, case management, and short-term pre-vocational services.

How Can Your Daughter or Son Access the Workforce Centers?

The one-stop system operates through a network of centers in each state. States are required to have at least one comprehensive

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A Lesson in Advocacy

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up. The bank would have to remedy things to forestall more adverse coverage in the press.

I then wrote a letter to the newspaper's editor drawing attention to Fleet's thoughtlessness toward people with blindness, and enclosed a copy of the letter I'd sent to Fleet. My letter to the editor ran in the paper in late July, alongside another one criticizing the manufacture of such ATM machines that discriminated against the blind. Pleased with my efforts, I waited for results.

For months nothing happened. No articles appeared in the *Globe* to announce that Fleet was reaching out to its blind customers. What did appear was another letter to the editor complaining about another aspect of the bank's ATMs, getting confusing printouts when requesting to see one's account balances.

That letter got results. In my next bank statement was an enclosure announcing that at a Fleet ATM one could now know one's finances "at a glance." Ouch! The wording gave no consideration to the non-sighted. My letters had had no impact.

I wrote another letter. Recalling a friend's previous advice to "go straight to the top," this time I wrote to the bank's president. I had requested the name and address from one of the branches where I often used the ATM and, after some conferring in an inside office, I was given a card with the information handwritten on the back. That in itself bothered me. My mother and I had had to explain why I wanted the president's address,

and it still needed to meet with an underling's approval.

I was careful to keep my letter to one page. As before, it was ironic, sarcastic, aimed at shaming the man at the top into doing something. Before sending it, I ran it past some writing friends. I had remembered their criticism of the first letter: "Get to the point. How is a blind person expected to use this thing?" I began my letter to the president that way.

But my friends had more pointed, useful criticism: tone down the anger. You want to get this person on your side. Why not simply say something like, "I am a blind customer who has been frustrated in trying to use your ATM's.?"

Perhaps the most useful advice came when another asked me what I hoped to accomplish by this letter. I had thought that was obvious: change the machines. Fix the software so that all the steps, even selecting the language, can be performed using the number keys. Make those instructions available. To that my friend replied, "Well why don't you say that? Tell them that they could fix the problem by doing the following three things, and then list them. The person receiving this letter doesn't want to read through your complaints and then have to figure out what to do. You'll help your cause by volunteering suggestions."

It was excellent advice. I saw right away how I'd been going about it all wrong. I had been delivering tirades about the bank's incompetence. Instead I needed to make an ally of the person who received my letter. I needed to facilitate his compliance, show him the solution. Show him how simple it is, that it's not a problem. All he needed

to do is hand my letter to someone and say, "Carry out these suggestions."

Two weeks after mailing off my letter I received a thick envelope in the post. Inside was a cordial letter from a Mr. Kevin Carroll, Vice President of Self/ATM Banking, thanking me for my recent missive and hoping that what he was sending me would be of help. The letter and his business card were paper clipped to a fat book of Braille instructions. Also in the package were a cassette tape and a compact disc. I have read through the first twenty or so pages of the instructions, and compared them to the cassette. They are identical word for word. On the whole it is a comprehensive and far superior set of directions than the guide first put out by Baybank. Anyone who wants the guides can request them by calling toll-free: (800) 841-4000.

Fleet Responds

At a press conference at the Perkins School for the Blind on February 28, 2001, Fleet announced a comprehensive plan to ensure that persons with vision impairments can conveniently access banking services. The plan includes installation of, what they call, the first "talking ATMs" in New England together with improved accessibility of their web site, **www.fleet.com**. More than 16 talking ATMs are now in service. Eventually they plan to have 1,420 of these ATMs from Maine to Pennsylvania within two years.

Visit the web site or call (800) 841-4000 for more information about accessible offerings from Fleet.

Workforce Centers

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center physically located in each local service delivery area. Service areas are designated by the governor and based on factors such as population, the local labor market, and the need to provide services within a reasonable travel distance for individuals. Any city or county with a population of 500,000 or more is automatically approved as a local workforce investment area.

WIA aims to establish a system that not only gives jobseekers easy access to services to help them find a job and advance their careers, but also meets employer needs. It brings together many different federally funded employment and training programs under one roof. People with disabilities will benefit from this overall push for higher quality and easy access to services.

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Q and A

Q: Due to my disability, I don't always get my food all the way to my mouth. I like to dress well and have ruined many a dress. I am tired of ordering lobster so I can wear a "Lobster Bib" and protect my dress. Do you know of any attractive bibs for me? *Jane - Middletown, VT.*

A: There is a company called AbleApparel which offers, at least, four creative solutions from velcro attached bandanas to gold and silver lame bibs which might interest you. For can visit them on-line at **www.ableapparel.com** or call for a catalog at (888) 688-ABLE (2253).

Q: My mother and father are older and don't always remember their bills these days. Recently they nearly had their phone disconnected, which would be dangerous for them. Is there any way to have the phone company notify me of problems? *Mary - Woburn, MA.*

A: Under the regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy (DTE) the phone provider may not discontinue service (without DTE approval) to households in which all the adults are 65 years of age or older. However, such households must identify themselves to the company. The

customer may also designate a third party to receive copies of all past-due bills and other notices. The proper forms are available from all Verizon business offices.

Q: I have a conversion van but, like most people, I don't always want to drive long distances when I travel for pleasure. Do you know how I can find wheelchair accessible vans to rent in various locations across the United States? *Tim - Reno, NV.*

A: There are a growing number of van rental outfits and many more of the large car rental agencies are renting adapted vehicles. For experience and expertise in the provision of wheelchair vans, however, you should know about *Wheelchair Getaways*. They have thirty offices in 23 states. They rent everything you are likely to need, sell used vans, and will even arrange pickup and delivery. You can call them at (800) 642-2042 or visit their web site: **www.wheelchairgetaways.com**.

Q: Can you recommend an information resource for a kid with disability? *Rose - NYC, NY.*

A: *Exceptional Parent* magazine's web site at **www.eparent.com**. They have a great on-line resource directory.

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Recommended Reading

InsideMS

A quarterly publication of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, **InsideMS**, is a magazine with a wide range of articles covering medical aspects, living skills, personal experiences and advocacy for families living with MS. Its many pages of advertisements for products and services of particular interest to this audience are also a useful source of information. **InsideMS** is sent to contributors to the MS Society. You may also request the addition of your name to the mailing list if you have MS, even if you are not able to contribute. You may call (800) 344-4867 or e-mail mailinglist@nmss.org.

Quest

Quest is a magazine published by the Muscular Dystrophy Association six times a year.

With the challenge of covering 40 neuromuscular diseases, **Quest** necessarily has a broad reach. It contains articles of specific and general interest, resources, personal accounts, and relevant advertising. It attempts to treat its readers as a community of shared interest and mutual support. Subscriptions are available for \$14 per year. Those persons with one of the neuromuscular diseases in MDA's program, and who are registered with their local MDA office, receive **Quest** without charge. To subscribe write to MDA, 3300 E. Sunrise Drive, Tucson, AZ 85718-3208. For additional information or to find your local office of MDA, you may call (800) 572-1717 or look on the net at www.mdausa.org.

Justice-for-All

For those of you who are active

advocates for people with disabilities, who want to be on top of all the national political and legal developments, and like to do their reading via the computer; there is no better resource than **Justice-for-All**. It might best be described as an e-mail news service for disability activists. Every time something of consequence happens, or is about to happen, in relation to disability law or disability rights, subscribers will hear immediately from Justin Dart, Frederick Fay or other leading advocates. There is no charge to be a subscriber to this service. However, you should be prepared to get a LOT of information.

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