

On Target

Informing Indiana About
Disability Issues

June 2006 | Volume 19 Number 4 | Informing Indiana About Disability Issues

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities.

We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. *On Target* is made available in accessible formats upon request.

Suellen Jackson-Boner
Executive Director

Christine Dahlberg
Associate Director

Paul Shankland
Grants Manager

Study finds attitudes, not accessibility, block employment of people with disabilities. Accessibility in the workplace can often be made at little or no cost.

Many people presume that the low rates of employment for people with disabilities result from high costs of workplace accessibility. However, a recent study found this to be inaccurate, as many accommodations can be made for a small price. The barrier, data shows, is the attitudes of those in the workplace about hiring people with disabilities.

The study, which will continue until September 2007, released preliminary findings in February. Conducted by The Labor Department's Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the data was based on feedback from 778 employers who had contacted JAN about employing people with disabilities.

Of those surveyed, almost half said that accommodating their workplace for people with disabilities was no cost to them, and 43 percent said a one-time cost for accommodation averaged \$600.

Some no- or low-cost accommodations for people with disabilities include:

- Using bricks to add height to a long work table, making it wheelchair accessible.
- Communicating through instant messaging with someone who is deaf or hard-of-hearing.

- Allowing someone to have a flexible schedule.
- Using telephone headsets or computer software to help people with vision or range-of-motion impairments.

After making these accommodations, nearly nine out of 10 employers said they retained a valuable employee, and more than half stated they eliminated the costs of hiring and training a new employee.

Because such accommodations can be made at a low cost, why is it so hard for people with disabilities to find jobs? According to researchers at Cornell University, the employment rate for those with disabilities is below 20 percent, which has decreased since the peak of around 25 percent in the 1990s.

The study reveals that the attitudes of employers remain the biggest obstacle to people with disabilities. "The biggest barriers are still attitudinal," said Linda Richman, deputy executive director of Liberty Resources, the Philadelphia Center for Independent Living. She believes that employers think hiring a person with a disability means that "you're automatically compromising somehow on the quality or volume of work. Employers are still carrying around a lot of misconceptions about what it would really be like to work with a person with a disability every day."

For more information on the study, visit newstandardnews.net/content/index.cfm/items/2909.

IRIS offers online option for print-impaired

Streaming audio clips of newspaper articles are now available through the Web site for Indiana Reading and Information Services (IRIS).

"We are pleased to offer a third option to those who are current IRIS users, and hope to attract new listeners for whom our existing technologies – radio receivers and statewide dial-up system – may not be

a match for their needs. This new service will enable IRIS to reach many more print-impaired Hoosiers via the Web," said Richard Miles, vice president of audio services and television programming, WFYI.

Each day, readings of local and national newspapers, including The Indianapolis Star, Indianapolis Business Journal, Indianapolis Monthly, Indianapolis Woman, The Recorder, The Criterion, USA Today, Wall Street Journal and The Saturday Evening Post are made available. News on various topics and readings from children's publications are also streamed.

Any Indiana citizen who cannot read print due to blindness, low vision, physical impairments, learning disorders or illiteracy is eligible to use the service for free. To become eligible, those interested must complete a brief application process and show medical or social certification of print impairment. Once an applicant is deemed eligible, he or she is assigned a password to access the new online service, which is available at www.wfyi.org/iris.

For more information, visit www.wfyi.org or contact Amber Wortman at (317) 715-2004 (voice) or awortman@wfyi.org (e-mail).

Students' device wins national award

Three inventive Rose-Hulman students are the recipients of the Knox County ARC (KCARC) 2006 National Scholar Award for Workplace Innovation and Design. The award is from NISH, a national nonprofit agency with a mission to create employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities.

The goal of this project was to enhance the user's self-esteem and quality of life, while boosting the person's income potential. Seniors Kara Jackson (Jeffersonville, Ind.), Megan Lafferty (Bismarck, N.D.) and Megan Whitaker (Alexandria, Ind.) designed a tag-stamping device that achieved these objectives. The mechanism helps workers with

disabilities affix a “lot number” on military clothing manufactured in KCARC’s facility in Vincennes, Ind. The device assists people who may not have the fine motor skills needed to do the job manually.

The device meets all of the needs originally identified by KCARC officials, including size constraints, being able to operate with one hand, printing the lot number on the tag, specific ink requirements, low force requirements and cost. The device, which was designed after 16 different testing procedures during its seven-month development cycle, was developed and assembled for \$200, using volunteer and student labor. The device could be reproduced for \$655.

The Rose-Hulman design team received \$10,000 and was honored at NISH’s National and Training Achievement Conference. KCARC and Rose-Hulman’s department of Applied Biology and Biomedical Engineering will also receive \$10,000.

New disability determination process approved

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has approved a new process for determining the disability status of an applicant.

Research began in September 2003, when a Web site was made available for people to visit and add their perspectives on the previous process. Since then, Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart and agency staff have conducted hundreds of meetings with interested groups and individuals. Out of these interviews, a new process has been established.

Highlights of the new regulation include:

- A quick disability determination process for those who have obvious disabilities.
- A new position – the Federal Reviewing Official – who will review state agency determinations upon the request of the claimant.
- Retention of the right to request a de novo

hearing and decision from an Administrative Law Judge if the claimant disagrees with the decision of the Federal Reviewing Official.

- Closing the record after the Administrative Law Judge issues a decision, with provision for certain good cause exceptions to this rule.
- A new body – the Decision Review Board – to review and correct decisional errors and ensure consistent adjudication at all levels of the disability determination process. The current Appeals Council will be phased out gradually.*

The SSA is pleased to take a significant step forward in providing the quality service that the American public expects and deserves from its disability programs.

*Information provided by the SSA.

Reports on mental health systems released

Data from two reports detailing the state of mental health and mental health reform was recently announced.

The first report was conducted by The Campaign for Mental Health Reform, a partnership of 16 national mental health organizations, and gives recommendations to the government on how to improve services for people with mental illnesses.

The report, titled "Emergency Response: A Roadmap for Federal Action on American's Mental Health Crisis," describes consequences that occur when people do not have access to the treatment and services they need.

The seven steps included in the report to improve mental health services are:

- Maximize the effectiveness of scarce resources by coordinating programs and making systems "seamless" to consumers.

- Stop charging those whose mental illness results in inappropriate behavior with a crime.
- Make Medicaid accountable for the effectiveness of the mental health services it pays for.
- Prevent the negative consequences of mental disorders by getting the right services to the right people at the right time.
- Invest in children, and support and value their families' role in making treatment decisions.
- Promote independence by increasing employment, eliminating disincentives for economic self-sufficiency and ending homelessness.
- Address the mental health needs of returning veterans and their families.

The second report, titled "Grading the States 2006," was conducted by The National Alliance on Mental Illness, and it studied state adult public mental healthcare systems. From those results, both states and the country as a whole were given grades based on the system's effectiveness. The United States received a "D," and Indiana received a "D-."

Indiana ranks 19th in the country on total mental health spending and 28th in per capita spending. Recent innovations in Hoosier mental health services include commitment to transformation, the implementation of Assertive Community Treatment in partnership with universities and the prison education program.

Indiana's urgent needs, as listed by the report, include caution on scope and speed of changes, greater transparency, consumer and family participation in decisions, and waiting list reduction for community services.

To see the first report, visit www.mhreform.org/emergency/index.htm.

To see the second report, visit www.nami.org/grades.

New option available for Medicaid Waivers

Hoosiers with disabilities will now have more control when it comes to selecting their own personal attendants. The A&D Medicaid Waiver will offer a new option beginning July 1, 2006.

The option will enable individuals to take a proactive approach to their own personalized care as Indiana moves toward consumer-directed care. It will enable people with disabilities to not only select, but schedule, train, supervise and fire their own personal attendants. The individual, or his or her representative, will have full employment rights, except for handling payroll.

As far as hiring is concerned, individuals will be able to employ whoever they choose to be their attendant – whether a friend or a relative, or a caregiver working with an agency-based service. Some may choose to split the time between two attendants, and if the individual is not comfortable with this increased responsibility, traditional care will be continued.

Giving individuals the power to control their own care has proven to be beneficial in states where it has already been implemented.

For more information, call FSSA (Family and Social Services Administration) at (317) 232-1759 (voice).

Work study programs may soon employ students with disabilities

An amendment was recently added in the U.S. House of Representatives to allow students with intellectual disabilities to participate in work study positions while pursuing college studies. The amendment was added to HR 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005, which will reauthorize the Higher Education

Act.

A growing number of post-secondary college programs provide students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to gain more independence by participating in academic learning and training opportunities on campus.

Existing provisions in the Higher Education Act prevent students with intellectual disabilities and their families from receiving federal student financial assistance. Because of this, the students' parents often need to bear the brunt of the financial responsibility.

Now that this new provision allows for students with disabilities to participate in work study programs, they can help contribute to expenses and pay for classes themselves. In addition, these students can also get valuable work experience to list on their resumes. Both benefits help students with disabilities enjoy the same sort of college experiences that other students do.

HR 609 was passed by the House on March 30. It is currently scheduled to be heard in the Senate.

For more information on college opportunities for youth with intellectual disabilities, visit www.thinkcollege.net.

OF NOTE

Reminder: submit Partners in Policymaking applications

The application deadline for Partners in Policymaking has been extended to Friday, July 7. For more information or an application, call Partners in Policymaking at (317) 232-7771 (voice/TT), toll free at (866) 234-1635 (voice) or PIP@gpcpd.org (e-

mail). Or, visit www.in.gov/gpcpd and click on the Partners in Policymaking logo.

Your opinion is needed

The Governor's Council has posted the draft goals and objectives of the 2007–2011 Plan on the Council's Web page. Your review and comments are requested no later than July 1, 2006, before the final document is submitted to the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. Go to www.in.gov/gpcpd/ and click on the link to access the survey online. Printed copies can be obtained from the Council at (317) 232-7775 (voice) or pshankland@gpcpd.org (e-mail).

Arc of Indiana presents advocate workshops

Workshops designed to teach effective legislative advocacy tools are being held statewide this summer. These sessions are sponsored by The Arc of Indiana and titled "How to be an Effective Legislative Advocate." The workshops will be held in the following communities: Batesville (June 15); Carmel (June 21); Michigan City (June 29); Richmond (July 7); Bedford (July 19); Middlebury (July 20); Marion (July 24); Lafayette (July 26); Evansville (July 27); and Sullivan (July 28).

Sessions are limited to 50 people, and registration is required. The cost is \$20 for family members of a person with a disability and \$10 for self-advocates. However, funds are available from the Governor's Council and the Indiana Autism Sertoma Club to help cover costs. See the Arc's Web site for more information (www.arcind.org). To register, contact Abby Gross at (800) 382-9100 (voice) or agross@arcind.org (e-mail).

Annual conference scheduled for November

The 2006 Indiana Conference for People with Disabilities, "Seeking New Truths; Forging New

Paths," will be held Nov. 16 and 17 at the Westin Hotel in downtown Indianapolis. Look to future issues of On Target for more information.

Indiana Governor's
Council for People with Disabilities
150 West Market Street, Suite 628
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

(317) 232-7770 voice
(317) 232-7771 TT
E-mail: GPCPD@gpcpd.org
Web site: www.state.in.us/gpcpd