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The Employment Issue

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A Collaborative Publication from MS CDD, DRMS, and IDS



A FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT

Welcome to the second issue of FUSE, a joint publication of the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MS CDD), Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS) and the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) at The University of Southern Mississippi. All three agencies are funded by the federal Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) to ensure that people with developmental disabilities receive services as required by the DD Act.

A recent report released by the National Disability Rights Network

(NDRN) found a total failure of the disability service system to provide quality work for people with disabilities. In response, this edition of FUSE highlights the intention and pledge of the network agencies to improve employment options for people with disabilities in Mississippi, and further the message that most people with disabilities want meaningful work and can perform it if the attitudinal barriers and inertia are challenged and transformed. The more we adjust the barriers, the greater the opportunities for advancement.

EMPLOYMENT: A KEY FACTOR IN DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

A common goal of most disability advocacy agencies and service providers, including the DD network partners, is to ensure that money and energy are dedicated to improving choices and options for inclusive community living. Integrated, competitive or customized employment opportunities for everyone are critical to the success of these efforts. Before individuals with disabilities can plan to live independently in the communities of their choice, they must be able to financially and sustainably afford to do so. The minimal salaries paid in “sheltered workshops” or segregated employment settings do not go far in providing individuals with the means to afford the lifestyles they choose. They can and will contribute to their communities in measurable and immeasurable ways IF the barriers to real employment are removed.

October 2010 was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Its theme, “Talent Has No Boundaries: Workforce Diversity INCLUDES Workers with Disabilities” is one that we must all embrace and use to inform the public and prospective employers that workers with disabilities represent a diverse and vibrant talent pool. Community employment provides countless opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise self-determination and choice. Communities of diversity are richer, further advanced, healthier, and more productive places in which to live and learn.

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**Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MS CDD) -
Employment Key Element of Transition from School to Adult Life ~
by Dr. Linda McDowell**

The DD Council currently funds a project, *Tools for Transition from School to Adult Life*, which provides training for students with significant intellectual disabilities, their families and other advocates, as well as school district administrators, teachers, and service personnel. Participants have learned to assess transition to adult life needs, develop plans to meet the individual needs, and implement service coordination and tracking of outcomes, including employment. This work has been accomplished through a series of retreats, events, and meetings and has resulted in increased advocacy skills for families and increased self-determination in youth and young adults.

In addition, a Transition Workgroup has been formed by the Arc of Mississippi, Living Independence for Everyone (LIFE) and Parent Training & Information (PTI) in partnership with DRMS, IDS and CDD. This group is discussing complementary training content, advocacy efforts, and projects that will result in meaningful transition outcomes (such as community employment.) Collectively the group plans to advocate for school systems to use trained full-time transition coordinators to create and implement transition plans and curriculum – centered around student and family choices – **with an initial focus on employment outcomes** for students with significant intellectual disabilities. New partners to this Transition Workgroup will include the Mississippi Department of Education, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, and the Mississippi Department of Mental Health to implement and coordinate the shared responsibility for transition outcomes for these students.

These efforts in Mississippi complement legislation recently proposed at the federal level to improve outcomes for students with disabilities who are transitioning into the community.



The collaborative team of self-advocates and service providers that represented Mississippi at the Administration on Developmental Disabilities' Self-Advocacy Regional Summit in Atlanta.

EEOC Issues Final Revised Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Regulations and Interpretive Guidance

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) was enacted on September 25, 2008, and became effective on January 1, 2009. This law made significant changes to the definition of “disability.” It also directed the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to amend its ADA regulations to reflect the changes made by the ADAAA. The final regulations were published in the Federal Register on March 25, 2011.

The EEOC made changes to both the Title I ADA regulations and to the Interpretive Guidance

(also known as the Appendix) that were published with the original ADA regulations. The Appendix provides further explanation on how the regulations should be interpreted.

What do these amendments mean to individuals with disabilities in the workforce, or seeking to obtain employment?

The intent was to simplify the definition of disability, among other clarifications. The regulations also make it easier for individuals to establish coverage under the “regarded as” part of the definition

of disability.”

Establishing such coverage used to pose significant hurdles, but under the new law, the focus is on how the person was treated rather than on what an employer believes about the nature of the person’s impairment.

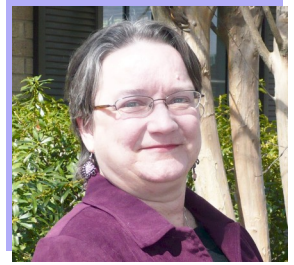
The EEOC enforces the nation’s laws prohibiting employment discrimination.

More information is available at www.eeoc.gov.



DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI

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Disability Rights Mississippi Seeking Increase in Employment Options

Mississippi's DD Network partners have pledged to work together to improve employment options for people with disabilities in Mississippi. A recent report by DRMS' national association, mentioned on page 1, identifies the barriers to employment that people with disabilities face and dispels myths about their capability to be fully employed, equally compensated, and integral members of American workplaces and communities. The report, found at www.ndrn.org, is called "Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work."

In Mississippi, people with disabilities often work for employers that segregate them away from their community and offer them little choice or opportunity to do anything but menial work for little pay. These "sheltered workshops" abound throughout the state. Residents of regional centers are expected to attend workshops within the facility where they make pennies per hour and often sit idle.

In brief summary, the report calls for immediate action at the federal level to end segregated employment, balance wages, create new tax incentives for employers, and increase and strengthen labor protections and laws for workers with disabilities.

In Mississippi, the immediate goal is to provide options for those seeking customized or competitive employment in the community. DRMS is available to assist in issues regarding employment discrimination, workplace accommodations, or similar work-related legal issues. In addition, DRMS will seek policy changes at the state level to insure that employment options are available to all who desire them, and to create disincentives for maintenance of sheltered workshops, segregated employment, and sub-minimum wages.

DRMS Board Member Le'Ron Jackson To Receive Governor's Award

DRMS Board member Le'Ron Jackson has been selected to receive the Governor's Initiative for Volunteer Excellence (GIVE) Award. He was nominated by Ann MacLaine, Executive Director for DRMS. He and other recipients will be honored at a luncheon on April 11, 2011. He is the sole recipient in the category "Outstanding Service in Disability Advocacy."

Le'Ron has been involved in numerous advocacy agencies across the state for many years, including My Voice My Choice. He recently graduated from Jackson State University, and has plans for going to law school to further his career in advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Congratulations to Le'Ron.



Le'Ron with First Lady Marsha Barbour after receiving his GIVE award for Outstanding Service in Disability Advocacy on April 11, 2011.

DRMS provides information and advocacy services to social security recipients (SSI or SSDI) who want to attempt to work without losing their benefits. The Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security, (PABSS) program is coordinated by DRMS advocate Mike Jones. For more information contact him via email at mjones@drms.ms

Institute for Disability Studies



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI



Employment One Goal for IDS Project Serving Homeless

“Employment has always been a major component and goal for the homeless individuals with disabilities that we serve through the Shelter For All Program,” said Chandar Turner, Associate Coordinator for Homeless Services at the Institute for Disability Studies. “We try to guide our clients to the path of stability and introduce a full life.”

Turner noted that employment not only provides stability for Shelter For All clients who have experienced homelessness, it also plays an important part in their choice of self determination and their inclusion in their community. “We like to include employment in each individual’s person-centered plan,” said Turner.

Shelter For All case managers work with clients to determine their employment interests and strengths. They then identify employment resources available in the community for each client.

“In recent years, we have had several employment success stories. In one case, a man who had been homeless and had been assisted through Shelter For All, became a homeowner. Another homeless man living in that same area got a job with the contractor renovating the new homeowner’s house. The second man found employment and was able to demonstrate his considerable carpentry skills.”

Other successful Shelter For All clients have gone from being homeless to becoming a receptionist, a certified nursing assistant and a retail employee.

People with disabilities and chronic illness are often concerned about losing their benefits if they seek and accept employment. Said Turner, “Some individuals realize through employment—‘Hey, I can do this. I really am living a fulfilled life.’”

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Below, IDS Case Manager LaShundra Sims, left, and Associate Coordinator for Homeless Services Chandar Turner, right, discuss employment resources for a client.



Former Institute for Disability Studies Staffer Wins Leadership Award

Vicki Killingsworth, a retired staff member of the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) at The University of Southern Mississippi, was recognized with the 2010 Leadership in Advocacy Award by the Association of University Centers on Disability at its annual conference award gala in Washington, D.C.

The Leadership in Advocacy Award is presented annually to an outstanding individual who has exhibited exceptional leadership and self-advocacy skills in the area of developmental disabilities.

Vicki received this award for her many years of work statewide promoting homeownership for people with disabilities.



Vicki Killingsworth, right, is presented the 2010 Leadership in Advocacy Award by Dr. Tamar Heller, president of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE PROVIDED BY THE Arc of MS

The Arc of Mississippi will provide Customized Employment to men and women who experience intellectual or other related developmental disabilities or mental illness in the six southern counties of Mississippi. Customized Employment will match the strengths of the individual with the needs of an employer. Customized Employment is a process, not a program.

The Arc of Mississippi is a private, non-profit organization at work statewide on behalf of people and families experiencing intellectual and other related developmental disabilities. Specifically, The Arc of Mississippi provides training, advocacy and resources, in part, through partnerships and collaborations with the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Bureau of IDD and The Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Arc of Mississippi currently provides an array of supports and services including self advocacy development and support, transportation infrastructure development, person centered planning, employment supports, representative advocacy, transitioning to adult life training and support, and education and professional development for direct support professionals and other human service personnel.

Mike Callahan of Marc Gold and Associates in Ocean Springs is a national expert in this area. He is currently working with Mississippi Rehabilitation Services and the Arc to provide the planning and supports needed to locate or customize employment for people with disabilities.

The Arc's Employment Initiative under this grant proposes to accomplish several things:

- To assist men and women with intellectual disabilities or mental illness find meaningful employment in an economy decimated by the Deep Water Horizon spill on top of a catastrophic economy to mitigate symptoms of mental illness, build capacity, and foster community-based quality of life for people with IDD.
- Leave behind professionals trained in Customized Employment in each of the six southern counties who can expand the work and carry on the support of persons employed through this initiative.
- Work for systems reform to build in long-term supports for employees and potential employees deemed unemployable in the traditional sense.

The Arc of Mississippi will accept referrals from each of the two mental health centers on the coast, other Department of Mental Health programs, private providers, local Arc chapters, and families. Referrals can be made to Mike Montgomery at 228-497-1044 or online at msarc mike@gmail.com.

FUSE PARTNERS HOSTING COMMUNITY INPUT FORUMS

- **May 3, 2011 (Tues) 3:30 - 5:30pm**
Tupelo, MS - Lee County Library
- **May 5, 2011 (Thur) 4 - 6pm**
Vicksburg, MS - Vicksburg Public Library
- **May 11, 2011 (Wed) 4 - 6pm**
Pascagoula, MS - Senior Citizen Center

Events are free to the public, town-hall type meetings, with light refreshments offered, to provide an opportunity for parents, individuals, or service providers to have their voices heard regarding needs, gaps in service, and concerns. It's a chance for the public to help guide the work these agencies do. For info, call any of the agencies listed in FUSE.

Dispelling Some Myths:

- Research conducted by DuPont since the 1950s shows "employees with disabilities equal or exceed coworkers without disabilities in job performance, attendance, and attention to safety."
- At Carolina Fine Snacks in North Carolina, half of the company's 20 manufacturing employees have disabilities, "running the gamut from vision and hearing loss to cerebral palsy and intellectual disability." Its owner, Phil Kosak, notes that prior to hiring employees with disabilities, turnover averaged 80% every 6 months and productivity stood at 50%-60% of capacity. The hiring of workers with disabilities helped make turnover a non-issue and raised productivity to 90% of capacity.

FUSE: News You Can Use

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY STRONGER, HEALTHIER, AND MORE ADVANCED?

REGISTER TO VOTE, GET TO KNOW YOUR CANDIDATES AND ELECTION DATES, THEN REMEMBER
TO CAST YOUR VOTE!

EVERY VOICE AND EVERY VOTE COUNTS!



FUSE is a collaborative effort of the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities, Disability Rights Mississippi, and the Institute for Disability Studies and can be made available in alternative formats if requested.

Links and Helpful Resources

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add - The Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) is the U.S. Government organization responsible for implementation of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, known as the DD Act. ADD, its staff and programs, are part of the Administration for Children and Families, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

www.tkmartin.msstate.edu - Center at Mississippi State University focusing on advanced assistive technology for individuals of any age with a disability.

www.business-disability.com - The National Business and Disability Council.

www.dol.gov/odep/ - The US Dept. of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

www.askjan.org - National Job Accommodation Network. Provides free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations.

www.yourtickettowork.com - Employment program for people with disabilities who are interested in going to work.

www.eeoc.gov - Information about the ADA.

“The greatest barrier to employing people with disabilities is one of closed minds—not because of malevolence but because of fear of change, lack of information, and lack of belief in every person’s value,”

~ Neil Romano, the former Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy in the U.S. Department of Labor



**We want to hear from you!
If you found FUSE to be helpful and informative, but would rather receive it via email, then please call and make sure we have your email address
(1-800-772-4057).**

If you have suggestions for future FUSE topics, please let us know! Call or email us. Together we can spark a new idea!