

# Partnering For Placement

Alabama

Kentucky

Michigan

New York

SUMMER 2005

NEWSLETTER VOLUME 30

## Our Mission

*Abilities, Inc. is a non-profit agency dedicated to facilitating integrated employment and full participation of persons with disabilities in their work and living communities. Employment is accomplished through direct service to youth and adults with disabilities and to employers, insurance carriers, schools and colleges and other rehabilitation programs. Services are delivered, when possible, in diverse community settings in response to consumer and business needs and legislative mandates. Abilities, Inc. is committed to developing and demonstrating programs and services of national excellence.*

## Creative Problem Solving

By Donna L. Doty, Ph.D.

For the past couple of weeks, I have been reviewing the Projects With Industry (PWI) progress reports and secretly gloating. Apparently our PWI staff knows something about finding jobs others do not, and I take vicarious delight in the success these programs enjoy when it comes to assisting people with disabilities. While many of you have expressed disappointment with this term's results, and have gone so far as to seek penance in the form of even longer hours and non-stop toil, let me offer some salvation. All things considered, you are ahead of the game. And by all things, I speak of course, of the economy. No need to reacquaint you with our abysmal economic situation perhaps, but as a point of reference would like to sum up the latest news: we are officially in a recession. Economic activity is sluggish and consumer spending is down. International uncertainties also continue to weigh on the economy as it struggles to rebound; and worse, unemployment rose to six percent this past month. Hardest hit, however, are low-level workers who comprise the majority of the unemployed.

Where do people with disabilities fit into this equation? Sadly, they do not. Bleak as this picture is, bleaker still are prospects for the disability community. Many do not even meet the criteria for unemployment since they have no work history and/or were not looking for work prior to program enrollment, while most others have probably not worked in some time and possess limited skills and multiple barriers. PWI consumers tend to fall into one of these categories: they have a) never worked before; b) limited ability to acquire work skills; c) a need for skill upgrading; or d) difficulty re-entering the labor force because they face numerous hurdles, such as transportation, childcare or personal care. It is within this context that I wish to furnish the latest PWI employment figures.

Collectively, PWI staff have secured jobs for 208 of the 471 individuals served during the past six months—hardly figures to scoff at. Nor is there any shame in the occasion of many dozens of BAC meetings, technical reviews, employer development activities and other events, all created with the promise of



Abilities, Inc.  
201 I.U. Willets Road, Albertson, NY 11507  
(516) 465-1400

placements to come. You have my admiration. A special kudos is also in order for Anita Zimmerman and the staff of Career Options, Vivian Ouziel, Judy Simonson and Traci Johnson, for their outstanding work finding jobs for 81 percent of those served. These results are impressive in themselves, but juxtaposed to the larger economic situation, become tremendous. Great job, everyone!

Your success with a population that is often excluded from participating in avenues open to most other jobseekers, got me thinking about why PWI staff are so good at what they

do. Many of you will be sharing your strategies here and we look forward to learning your secrets, but I offer my own conclusion: you have a great capacity for problem solving that involves generating a seemingly endless supply of possibilities and alternatives for your consumers, as well as a flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity that is unparalleled —Anyone care to challenge this opinion? Just for fun, why not take the following *Problem-Solving Quiz* (created by Queendom.com and modified for this format). The scoring key and interpretation follow. Happy Testing.

*Abilities, Inc.*  
201 I. U. Willets Road  
Albertson, NY 11507  
Judy Young  
Director, National Program Development  
516-465-1491

### Problem-Solving Quiz

Examine the following statements and indicate whether you agree or disagree.

1. I am comfortable with the status quo.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
2. Old assumptions should be thrown out at the start of the problem-solving process  
 Agree  
 Disagree
3. I have difficulty making a decision when there are too many possible solutions or approaches.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
4. I prefer to work with creative rather than careful people.  
 Agree  
 Disagree

5. When presented with a problem, different solutions occur to me
- Agree
- Disagree
6. When working on a problem, I enjoy thinking outside the box even if it means ignoring the instructions given.
- Agree
- Disagree
7. I stop generating solutions once I've found one I think will work.
- Agree
- Disagree
8. I need reassurance that I've made a good decision.
- Agree
- Disagree
9. As a rule, I look for different ways to approach a problem.
- Agree
- Disagree
10. In general, once I've reached a decision, I feel good about it.
- Agree
- Disagree
11. "Tried and true" is preferable to change.
- Agree
- Disagree
12. Making use of previous experiences and applying a method or approach that has worked in the past is the best possible way to proceed when problem-solving.
- Agree
- Disagree
13. When working on a problem, I like clear instructions on how to solve it before I start.
- Agree
- Disagree

14. When it comes to surmounting obstacles, I...
- A  ...prefer to use traditional methods
  - B  ...like to explore alternatives
  - C  ...readily implement innovation
15. Your project staff recently encountered a problem similar to one you encountered in the past. Together you problem-solve and generate a potentially good solution. However, the solution is different from the one that worked for you previously. What is your reaction?
- A  I instruct them in the art of problem solving. Obviously they did it wrong.
  - B  I am uneasy venturing into the unknown and ask my staff to consider solving the problem as I did in the past. It worked before so why change?
  - C  I am concerned about the possibility of failure, but accept that there may be more than one way to solve the problem.
  - D  I feel good about my staff's originality and move ahead with the fresh plan.

***Creativity Quotient Score Key***

Circle the following points based on your agree or disagree responses for items 1-13

<i>Item #</i>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>1</b>	1	2
<b>2</b>	2	1
<b>3</b>	1	2
<b>4</b>	2	1
<b>5</b>	2	1
<b>6</b>	2	1
<b>7</b>	1	2
<b>8</b>	1	2
<b>9</b>	2	1
<b>10</b>	2	1
<b>11</b>	1	2
<b>12</b>	1	2
<b>13</b>	1	2

Add up your points

For items 14 and 15, give yourself the points that corresponding to your responses.

<b>14</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	
	1	2	3	
<b>15</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
	1	2	3	4

Add up your scores for:

**item 14**

**item 15**

**items 1-13**

**TOTAL SCORE**

*Creativity Quotient Score Interpretation*

If you scored	As a problem solver you can be described as:
15-21	<b>Not particularly creative.</b> When problem solving, you are more comfortable making use of previous experiences and applying a method or approach that worked in the past.
22-27	<b>Moderately creative.</b> You can conceive of a variety of solutions and will usually try them provided you are given reassurance.
28-33	<b>Highly creative.</b> You look at a problem from many perspectives and do not hesitate to implement new and untried solutions.

---

## CAREER OPTIONS: A Career Development Model for Projects With Industry

---

### Employment Strategies for These Uncertain Times

*By Anita Zimmerman*

Finding meaningful, competitive employment for individuals with disabilities should not be any different than assisting any non-disabled person seeking a job at least theoretically. Right? After all, they go through the same interview process and training period as anyone else hired for the job. However, in reality, there are many differences. Job developers, before finding their consumers a job, need to carefully consider any and all barriers to employment.

Many of the consumers we serve through the Career Options project require one-on-one support and assistance with their job search. Perhaps they will need assistive technology to perform the job; job coach; an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter; answers to questions about disclosure during the interview; counseling to alleviate their anxiety level and restore self-confidence, as well as self-esteem and so forth. On the other hand non-disabled

professionals are able to overcome these barriers before we begin our job search.

The tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the New York area impacted many large and small businesses. The recession that began in March 2000 only added to the discouragement and frustration felt by both consumers and staff. Corporations consolidated departments, and combined job descriptions, resulting in the need for fewer skilled and unskilled personnel. Our consumers are competing against a large unemployed workforce seeking to fill a limited number of jobs. We needed to work “smarter” and become more creative.

Abilities, Inc. at the Albertson site has four training programs. Each program has their own Business Advisory Council (BAC). Every six to eight weeks a practice interview session is arranged to provide the consumer with a chance to interview with an employer. This

“trial run” has proven successful during these trying times. It is no coincidence that many consumers have been offered positions after their practice interview session. Placement staff carefully matches each consumer’s skills, desired location, type of industry, and personality with the interviewing company. The purpose of the practice interviews are discussed with the BAC members beforehand. We also advise which consumers are ready for employment. Three consumers from the Steps Toward Employment Program (STEP) were hired from one practice interview session during March.

“Target Interview Day” was an idea presented to our department more than a year ago. The concept is simple. If an employer has multiple vacancies, our staff will screen and target the most appropriate candidates. We ask the companies for their application form, as well as a detailed job description, work location, hours, and salary range prior to the scheduled interview. In addition, we administered any test the position may require. We provide the employer with a private office

for uninterrupted interviews and schedule applicants accordingly. Each representative is provided with their respective consumer’s employment information. It contains a completed application, a resume, and an evaluation form. The Targeted Interview Day may be a little more time consuming for the staff, but the outcome has been favorable.

In my opinion, keeping a **positive attitude** is really the most important strategy of all. It’s a strong and effective way of thinking which motivates and encourages everyone around you.

*Abilities, Inc.*  
201 I.U. Willets Road  
Albertson, NY 11507  
Anita Zimmerman  
Program Manager  
516-465-1503

---

---

## BRIGHT NEW FUTURES

---

---

### The Right Fit

*By Lisa Quinn*

With a competitive job market and a tight economy, Employment Specialists everywhere have had to take a step back, evaluate what they’re doing, and revise their game plan. This is what happened when Greta (not her real name) came to the PWI program.

Greta had been working as a Respiratory Technician for many years when she learned she would need multiple abdominal

surgeries. After surgery she was no longer able to lift more than 20 lbs. This made her job impossible since she was required to move heavy equipment during her shift. For several months she was given light duty as an accommodation and an opportunity to interview for new positions, but eventually her employment ended. Because Greta had a medical background it was assumed that she could learn computer skills and transition into an office environment, preferably in a

healthcare setting. Greta went through some computer training and was able to pick up computer skills, but was not able to adjust to an office environment. Greta was used to working one-on-one with people and enjoyed the constant interaction. She was not adjusting to the office role and its multitasking demands. Unfortunately, she was not able to meet performance expectations and, after a trial period, Greta was let go. She found herself in need of both a job and a clear direction. She turned to the PWI program at the AACIL for help.

In looking at Greta's healthcare experience and computer training, it isn't hard to see why office work in a healthcare setting seemed like a logical next step. But after meeting with Greta, Barb Schoen, an Employment Specialist at the AACIL, became aware that although Greta had these skills, an office environment was proving to be a poor fit. Barb also felt that there must be some alternative situation that could utilize Greta's strengths while also fulfilling Greta's need for personal interaction. After meeting a few times, looking at several avenues and discussing possibilities together, Barb started calling companies that employed personal assistants in a non-medical capacity so that there wouldn't be the lifting barrier. In time Barb was in luck, she talked with an employer who was impressed with Greta's skills and caring nature. The employer brought Greta in

for an interview and agreed that she would function well as a personal assistant. In this role, Greta will be able to utilize her problem-solving skills, her knowledge of medical conditions and her great sense of humor. She would also be able to maintain a flexible schedule and have the people interaction that is so important to her.

It is important to remember that every person is different, and what worked for one person is not necessarily going to work for another. This is where creativity and individuality come in. We have to make sure to focus on a person's *strengths* instead of simply focusing on what they have on their resume. This may be history. And it's essential to focus on what they can do, not on what they can't do. Where Greta's need for interaction may be viewed as a negative in an office setting, it is a definite plus in her role as a personal assistant. We expect Greta to bloom in her new job!

*Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living*  
2568 Packard Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI, 48104  
Lisa Quinn, Employment Specialist  
(734) 971-0277

## **The Most Important Thing About Employment Strategies**

*By Joe Fortmann*

To be honest, there are lots of important things about helping individuals locate meaningful, long term, private sector employment. In the view of this writer, the first consideration is the individual.

- Who is this person?
- What is their history?
- What motivates this person?
- What makes them tick?
- Are they willing to work?

Almost everyone has an ability an employer can make use of. If there is no will to work, no desire, little progress will be made. The person looking for work, asking for assistance in finding work, the person we look in the eye, across a table, must understand that they own the job search process. No one else can make it work for him or her.

When there is a feeling that we know the individual to be served, how will they be best served?

- Is there a work history, education or training to build on?
- What kind of job is the individual getting ready for?

Some people will insist they will do anything! Reality is somewhat different. An analogy of laying the classified section of the local newspaper in front of them, and asking them to select jobs from the ads, has been successful in focusing the job search. Several job search web sites ask for key words and phrases to describe a desired job classification. 'Homework' has been given to individuals who seem to be stuck on one,

particular kind of job. The task is to list as many key words and phrases they can think of to describe the kind of job they might fit into. This strategy has been quite successful in focusing a job search.

Search the net often; not less than every other day. Monday afternoons seem to be really ripe with new listings.

In a time when there are fewer resources, staff reductions, and cuts of many kinds to agencies and programs assisting individuals seeking employment, partnering with other agencies and organizations is crucial. The more heads thinking, brain storming, working to find a needy individual employment the better.

After all, the individual really is the most important thing about making an employment strategy successful!

***Center for Independent Living of Mid-Michigan***  
 1206 James Savage Road  
 Midland, MI 48640  
 Joe Fortmann, Employment Specialist  
 (989) 835-4041

## **The Boy Scouts Aren't The Only Group Who Should Be Prepare**

*By Catrina Lian*

If I learned anything through the years working in job placement, it's that there is no one proven strategy that works for all the people all the time. Well, except maybe one... "be prepared for the interview". Okay, I admit, not every model interviewer will get that job they're applying for on the first shot, but on the flip side, take the candidate with the perfect credentials who shows up for the interview 40 minutes late with no phone call or references, a

perfect coffee cup ring on her resume and two more in her nose... I could say with relative certainty, that interview was over before it ever got started. Okay, you could look at the bright side and say, "well, she *did* show up, and she *did* remember to bring an extra copy of her resume, and she *did* take the time to co-ordinate her nose rings with her outfit. So I'll amend my success strategy to "be *properly* prepared for the interview".

Over the years I've seen many qualified job seekers bomb out at the first interview simply because they were unprepared. They did not know what to expect or what was expected of them. Take the case of a consumer who had a very long, steady work history. He adamantly refused to participate in the job seeking skills group because he had well over 20 years experience working with the same employer. What could we possibly teach him about obtaining a job? Hmmm, impressive, 20 years with the same employer....which means your last interview experience was ....that's right!...., over 20 years ago. Maybe a refresher course wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

The weekly job seeking skills group has been a component of services offered through PWI since it's inception in Suffolk County back in 1991. Statistically, the consumers who faithfully attend the weekly group obtain employment quicker than those who choose not to. Twelve years later, ...that's 624 weeks later, I am still amazed to see how easy it is for a motivated, qualified job seeker to make a fatal mistake at the interview that could dramatically diminish or completely extinguish their chances for a job offer. Fatal mistake? Well, how about answering the dreaded "What is your greatest weakness" question with "I'm always late no matter where I go" or "Where do you see yourself in three years" with "sitting behind *your* desk." How about handing in an

employment application with nothing completed on it except the words "you already have my resume on file" or handing in the application with so many cross outs it looks like a small animal stepped in ink and ran relay races on it. How about responding to the "Why did you leave your last job" with "because I was escorted out by security."

I could go on ad infinitum after 624 weeks of JHC, but I'm sure you see my point. Maybe one of these faux pas' can slip by, but imagine two, three or more at one interview. How much safer it is to make these mistakes "among friends" rather than a recruiter's office. Finding the perfect employer with the perfect job match or creating the best resume in the world ends up meaning nothing if the person attached to it leaves the interview with high eyebrows and a puzzled look on their face.

***Abilities, Inc. c/o VESID***  
*Plaza 518*  
*East Main Street*  
*Riverhead, NY 11901*  
*Catrina Lian*  
*Program Manager*  
*(631) 727-6929*

---



---

## ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

---



---

### A Working Experience with BILC

*By Elizabeth Cooper*

Successful Employment Strategies at the Birmingham Independent Living Center, Access to Employment Program first begins with an initial telephone call or a walk-in

consumer. The consumer can either be from a provider agency or from The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The Employment Coordinator will start developing

a picture with step-by-step employment goals using the information given in the first contact. The telephone conversation provides an opportunity to ask questions of interest in molding a more complete picture of the prospective consumer.

The personal interview will yield employment retention goals, interpersonal skills, in combination with all other general information. All of this information will indicate job readiness skills and job abilities needed to perform in different levels of employment. In this brief conversation, the Employment Coordinator accumulates all of this information and then contacts favorable employers to set up an interview.

Almost from the beginning, ILC will find out if the consumer has a disability and whether they receive SSI or SSDI, and possibly a brief description of any limitations. Other information varies such as: working hours, (whether day or evening to be the best times for the consumer to work), transportation issues( to see if the consumer has a personal vehicle, or if they may be using public transportation), and so forth. The consumer's home address will

determine in which community to look for job opportunities.

As part of the initial intake, we always ask if there is an available resume to track job responsibilities and duties to compare with job opportunities today that may be available to the consumer. We generally ask about specific interest, hobbies, and what area they are interested in when it comes to employment. We assist the consumer in getting prepared for job interviews, even conducting in-house mock interviews, or sending them to BAC sponsored locations for mock interviews. Feedback is given and received for consumer growth. All information gathered is needed to assist in job development and placement.

We have learned that there are many employment barriers that must be overcome for a successful hire. We try to match the consumer with the proper job in order to facilitate job retention. In building a working relationship with consumers, we guide through many hurdles to aid their job decisions. After all discussions are made and additional training provided, if needed, placement is assured. Another good match has been made.

***Birmingham Independent Living Center***  
206 13<sup>th</sup> Street South  
Birmingham, AL 35233  
Elizabeth Cooper  
Employment Specialist  
(205) 251-2223

## **Communication, Trust and Respect**

*By Rhonda Kidd*

Working with the business community and individuals on employment related issues presents the PWI staff with some unique and challenging opportunities. There is a learning curve, and staff must be flexible with partners. Communication, mutual trust and respect is

required to make a long-term employment match.

As staff works with the disability community, we must learn to recognize the ability of individuals and acknowledge the barriers confronting the jobseeker daily.

Respect must be given to each individual by listening to their choices, vocational goals, and then by assisting them with attaining these goals and providing them with other supports necessary to accomplish long-term employment. The jobseeker must be informed of their rights and responsibilities as an employee, work ethic, process of hiring qualified applicants with skills, SSA benefits counseling. Other supports such as transportation and housing are critical to participants in securing a stable daily living situation. Many times staff offer retention supports to the employee, as barriers sometime appear after hire. Consumers should be encouraged to pursue career advancement after working for a significant length of time.

The business community confronts the staff with a challenge too. Staff must be able to communicate on the Employer's level in regard to the law, employer rights, policy and procedure and other pertinent issues. The staff must build trust with the employer to refer qualified applicants, as well as offer a safe and knowledgeable environment for employers to address questions regarding accommodations, etc. Many times employers request follow-up after hire if they have concerns about employee

performance and accommodations. Staff should have knowledge of federal and state tax incentives to provide employers with additional incentives to hire qualified applicants. Building a relationship with the employer is necessary in establishing a referral system from one employer to other counterparts in the business community.

Having established respect with the business community will open doors of opportunity. Many employers are excited about offering their expertise in assisting participants attain goals. Informational interviewing, job readiness, and internships are all ways employers can help prepare the participants for employment.

*Center for Accessible Living*  
*981 South Third Street, Suite 102*  
*Rhonda Kidd*  
*Employment Program Manager*  
*Louisville, KY 40203*  
*502-589-6620*

---

---

## **GETTING STARTED**

---

---

### **Creative Placement Techniques**

*By Michael Dolan*

Under the heading of creative, and I am definitely taking some liberties with the word creative, I give an account of accessing job fairs for the betterment of my consumers

Quite often job fairs are organized in the Bronx and many employers from the Bronx and Manhattan take part in hopes of recruiting candidates. And since the Bronx has a large

minority population, they get an opportunity to outreach to find candidates for jobs. But unfortunately, many of the organizations that organize these Fairs forget about persons with disabilities. Many Job Fairs do not provide any accommodations to the applicant with a disability.

So what I have done is go to the Job Fair. Although many of the Job Fairs do not let outside organizations in, I tell them I am the communication facilitator for candidates that are deaf or hearing impaired. Without any hesitation, I am let in. At this point I generally look to see if any consumers of mine are there, and from then I go and network.

Quite often the employers are happy to see me and I tell them my role and spend a few moments with them (making sure that I am not taking time from a job candidate).

One employer from the Bronx that never returned my calls was at the Job Fair. I approached her and introduced myself. She did say that she was going to return my call (yea right), but when I met her face to face, I had time to quickly introduce myself and give a brief background on Abilities,. a new level of

interest was established. The next day I sent her a resume of a candidate for a maintenance job she was hiring for at that time; she ended up hiring this candidate.

Now it is true, that Job Fairs are an extremely difficult way to get jobs for consumers, especially when so many people attend. But for a job developer to get into the Job Fairs and see the recruiters that they know, and have them see you event after event puts you on a level playing field. They begin to see you as an equal and someone who is trying to provide a valuable service for them.

**Abilities, Inc .c/o VESID**  
 1215 Zerega Avenue  
 Bronx, NY 10462  
 Michael Dolan  
 Placement Manager  
 (718) 931-3125

## Employment in A Constricting Market

*By Margaret Lawson*

*Tight market. Recessed economy. High unemployment.* All of these are phrases that jobseekers hear today, but since our consumers still need jobs, we have to help them develop successful employment strategies. Before we can do this, however, we have to give them realistic news about the employment market.

At a recent, employer committee seminar in the Bronx, Jim Brown, Labor Market Analyst since 1987 with New York State Department of Labor, said the job market in Manhattan is driven primarily by corporate spending (insurance, banking, brokerage, etc.). Our current recession is a professional and technical recession that has trickled down. Since many businesses have closed, there are fewer tenants in corporate buildings; and fewer tenants mean a lean maintenance crew and so forth. By the end of September 2002, The Wiz

had closed 18 stores citywide. One of the stores closed was located in the Bronx and employed 59 people.

Admittedly, helping anyone to find a job today is a challenge. Allison Hemming, founder of The Hired Guns, an interim workforce agency and a recent speaker at Baruch College, offered these tips to anyone facing the challenge of looking for a job:

1. Put Down the Mouse and Step Away from the Computer – [the Internet has magnified competition to an unrecognizable number. Jobseekers and employments specialists are competing against local and global candidates. There's a mighty BIG chance that an employer may never see the infamous resume attachment, unless s/he is

- alerted beforehand. My personal advice is to choose the fax machine, or e-mail the resume AND fax it.]
2. Build a Master Resume – [generic resumes don't work, but you can start with one and nick it whenever applying for a position with a different objective.]
  3. Brand Yourself – [Determine your best skill or quality and wear it like a tailored suit. Our consumers have successfully completed or almost completed collegiate studies, engaged in technical programs and more. We have to teach them to make these accomplishments part of their identity.]

4. Diversify or Die – [Too many people are relying on one strategy for job searching. Networking, not the Internet, is still the number one way to land a job.]

Hungry college jobseekers and alumni wrote notes, as Ms. Hemming spoke. So did I. I've already begun to employ these strategies in finding jobs for the consumers are participating in Getting Started.

I'm a believer – great strategies lead to great results, so let's Get Started!

*Abilities, Inc.*  
201 I.U. Willets Road  
Albertson, NY 11507  
Margaret Lawson  
Employment Specialist  
(917) 224-7884

## A Dream to Build the Future

*By Zoraida Fagundes*

“There is nothing like a dream to build the future.” If a person has a dream, that person has a goal, and having a goal is the best thing to do is to try to fulfill it. When I refer somebody to an interview, I always tell that person to focus not on his or her disability but on his or her good skills and to make sure that qualifies for the position that is applying for because that gives confidence. The most important thing that the employers are

interested in is that the job seeker meets their requirements for the position that they have available and that can do the job well. The person has to be very positive, have a good resume, and be very familiar with it, dress appropriately, be punctual to the interviews and have a good attitude and to remember that the first impression is the one that counts the most and that is important to get a job but it is even more important to keep it.

*Abilities, Inc.*  
201 I.U. Willets Road  
Albertson, NY 11507  
Zoraida Fagundes  
Employment Specialist  
(917) 224-7741

## News from NBDC

### **Problem-Solving Skills and Assistive Technology Equal Long-Term Career Success for Pharmacia Corporation Systems Engineer**

*Submitted By Lana Smart*

Twenty-five years ago Pharmacia Corporation systems engineer Dennis Raheer was fresh out of college with two solid degrees in hand. He was set to begin a career in the up-and-coming new world of computers—but his search proved frustrating. What he needed was a chance to prove that his visual impairment would not hold him back. The Upjohn Company—predecessor to today's Pharmacia Corporation—gave him that chance.

#### **Solution Overview**

The frustration of the job search is all too familiar to many people. But most people won't face five years of unsuccessful attempts. And most people couldn't hold a positive attitude for that long either. But that's just what Dennis Raheer, Sr. Systems Engineer Database Administrator, Pharmacia Corporation, had to do to get this start.

Raheer is legally blind, but he doesn't waste time thinking about whether that prevented him from getting a job 25 years ago. Back then, as now, he just put his remarkable problem-solving skills to work. In the mid 1970's, Raheer was a graduate of Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in Computer Science and a master's degree in Marketing Research—so he was confident of his qualifications. He just needed a chance to show that his visual impairment would not hold him back, or prove to be insurmountable problem for an employer.

He had successfully completed his studies with the help of state-of-the-art assistive

technology of the day—a closed circuit TV (CCTV) device that projected an enlarged image of written material onto a monitor in a size he could read. With training and education and with his assistive technology, he knew he could do the job. His job search eventually led him to a Michigan State Technical Institute training program for people with disabilities. He was overqualified for the training, but there was one particular aspect of the program that Raheer thought might prove advantageous. The training was overseen by a Business Advisory Committee that included a number of high-level people at prominent local companies. Raheer reasoned that the Advisory Committee contained just the people he needed to get to know. He was right.

#### **Business Contacts Bring Opportunity**

The head of the IT organization at Pharmacia's predecessor, The Upjohn Company, was also the head of the program's Advisory Council. Raheer made sure the Upjohn IT director became familiar with his qualifications. After six months in the program, Raheer worked out a six-month trial employment opportunity with Upjohn. "At the end of the six month, I signed a permanent contract with them as a computer programmer" he says.

That was 1980 and Raheer has been moving up through the ranks of the IT organization ever since. Raheer's job now continues to draw on his problem solving skills

as he assists several internal customer areas to design and implement database systems.

### **Assistive Technology is Essential Tool.**

All along the way, Raher has used assistive technology to help him do his job. As his eyesight changed over time, he moved from the CCTV technology and has used Window-Eyes from GW Micro for the past nine years. With Window-Eyes, he gets information through sound rather than sight. A software voice synthesizer verbalizes the information translated to speech by Window-Eyes.

Raher says his assistive technology is essential to his work. “What would I do without it? It’s real simple, without it I wouldn’t have this job. And, it’s the ongoing development of assistive technology along with the other technology I use to do my job that is essential to my success.

### **Pharmacia Support “Excellent”**

Raher says Pharmacia has been very supportive in providing him the assistive technology he needs to do his job. “From day one, Pharmacia’s support has been excellent. From its beginnings, the company has been people oriented and community oriented. That’s why there was a representative on that advisory committee back in 1980.”

And the company is smart about how it supports its employees, too, says Raher. “You’ve got to be able to do the work and to do it productively to make it pay for everyone. My company’s attitude is, “you’re a resource—we need you to do your work. We buy a special plotter for this guy over here—we’ll buy this tool for you.” It was really kind of that attitude of “this is just another aspect of your job and a tool that you need for your job.”

### **Company Seeks Strength Through Diverse Workforce**

Pharmacia is a company that takes its diversity seriously. As a “founding member” of the National Business & Disability Council (NBDC) 25 years ago, in 2002 Pharmacia was recognized for its leadership role and commitment to integrating people with disabilities into the workplace. “Our greatest asset is our people,” the company states. Randy Manuel, Director of Diversity and EEO, explains that sustaining a diversity vision and such a value requires the CEO, Board of Directors, and Management Committees to embrace improving diversity as a part of the corporate culture and its business strategies. A key goal is to “create an inclusive, engaging and rewarding work environment that enables individuals to develop and contribute to their fullest potential.”

*“Our greatest asset is our people..... sustaining a diversity vision and such a value requires the CEO, Board of Directors, and Management Committees to embrace improving diversity as part of the corporate culture and its business strategies.”*

Randy Manuel  
Director of Diversity and EEO  
Pharmacia Corporation

***National Business & Disability Council***  
*Abilities, Inc.*  
201 I.U. Willets Road  
Albertson, NY 11507  
Lana Smart  
Director  
(516) 465-1510

This Newsletter has been developed by  
The Edwin W. Martin, Jr. Career and Employment Institute  
of Abilities, Inc. and it is partially supported by funds from  
the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the  
U.S. Department of Education

**Staff responsible for the management of this project include:**

Edmund L. Cortez, President and CEO  
National Center for Disability Services and Abilities, Inc.

**Abilities, Inc.**

Francine Tishman	Judy Young	Lana Smart
Executive Director	Director	Director

Anita Zimmerman	Catrina Lian
Program Manager	Program Manager

Donna L. Doty, Ph.D.  
Grants Writer/Administrator



*We Focus on Ability*

201 I.U. Willets Road, Albertson, NY 11507  
Abilities, Inc. provides employment and training services  
for youth and adults with disabilities.

