



Alabama

California

Florida

Georgia

Michigan

Nevada

New York

SUMMER 2006

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### 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.*

## Growing Pains

By Judy Young

Abilities, Inc. received its first PWI grant in 1969 and has been administering these programs for the past 36 years. In spite of the knowledge and experience gained over this long period, the first year of each grant cycle is a challenge, and this time was no exception. Our PWI “family” has added four new organizations: disABILITYLINK of Atlanta, Dayle McIntosh Center of Orange County, California, Special Employment Services, Inc. of Las Vegas, and Center for Independent Living of Central Florida in Orlando who had either minimal or no previous experience with PWI programs and operations. Consequently, staff had to be hired and trained, Business Advisory Council (BAC) members had to be recruited, and State VR offices needed to be informed and asked to refer job-ready consumers to the program.

At most sites, staff were in place by

November (the project year started on October 1, 2005) and training commenced at Abilities, Inc. in New York in December. The next challenge was the organization of the BAC and Kick-Off meetings which required securing an employer host and marketing the event to local businesses. To accomplish this goal, Abilities utilized its in-house division, the National Business & Disability Council which was instrumental in getting several host companies as well as reaching out to potential participants. The topic for the Kick-off meetings was “Sourcing and Retaining Workers with Disabilities. The first meeting took place in January in New York City and the last was held in April in Las Vegas. Host companies included CVS, which held this event in New York, Orlando, and Atlanta, two hospitality establishments – Affina Hotels and Marriott International, and Addeco. Attendance at the



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meetings ranged from 8 – 35 persons. Since the Kick-Off events, several sites held additional BAC meetings while others are planning the second mandatory meeting for September.

If all the above tasks were not challenging enough, meeting the placement goals during the first year of a grant cycle is especially complex. This particular challenge presents itself due to the fact that placement

constitutes 90 days of employment. As a result, the first three months of the project cannot yield any placements and the last three months' "hires" can only be counted as placed in the second year. For those new to PWI or the vocational rehabilitation system, this is a difficult concept to deal comprehend. The silver lining, however, is that the second year will begin with solid numbers for all.

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## CAREER OPTIONS

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### **Business Advisory Council (BAC) Members Assist Students with Developing a Confident Dialogue through Practice**

*By Vivian Ouziel*

The ability to sell oneself is a major ingredient for job search success. Career Options in Albertson, NY works closely with Business Advisory Council (BAC) members to develop opportunities for students in our training program to build confidence and develop an interview "sales pitch". Ultimately, any individual whom a student interacts with is given a brief summary of the motivating reason for choosing their training program, an indication of how their prior skills match up with their current training, and most importantly, what job they are seeking.

Networking workshops, technical reviews, reverse interviews, round table discussions, and video interviews are

opportunities where the student can meet with BAC members and improve their communication skills by building their confidence. The following is a brief description of each activity:

**Networking Workshops:** Members of our business community gather at Abilities Inc. and meet with consumers at breakfast to share ideas and informally converse with each other. Students are encouraged to speak about skills acquired during training and discuss how their prior work relates to their new training with as many BAC members as possible, while handing out their resumes and collecting business cards for future follow-up.

**Technical Reviews:** BAC members are invited to Abilities, Inc. to evaluate students enrolled in our training programs regarding their interviewing skills and technical knowledge. Each student meets with a company representative and experiences a mock interview. Feedback is given to the student's instructor, case manager and placement specialist. In conclusion, the student is apprised of their interviewing strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvement are offered.

**Reverse Interviews:** Students in our training programs have the opportunity to interview company representatives during a mock interview. Most often BAC members present themselves as competent, informed and poised interviewees, but sometimes they purposely demonstrate inappropriate or outrageous interview behavior. Students have the opportunity to evaluate each BAC member and offer suggestions for improvement of their skills.

**Round Table Discussions:** BAC members join students to discuss their company policies regarding best interview practices and appropriate employment application. Conversation about job benefits and appropriate work place behavior is shared. Students have an opportunity to pose questions about the employment process.

**Video Interviews:** Business volunteers conduct video interviews for students who are near completion of the training program and ready to enter the job market. Only the student and the interviewer view the video. Relevant feedback regarding appropriate posture, attire, enthusiasm, motivation, technical knowledge and effectiveness of opening and closing remarks are given to the students. Students have the opportunity to ask about suggestions for improvement and the opportunity to redo the interview at a later date to note improvement of skills.

BAC members play a vital role in preparing our students to enter the job market. By their participation in the above-mentioned activities, students are offered valuable advice and guidance in developing a winning interview technique and a confident dialogue thereby, insuring ultimate success in securing the job they are seeking. The success of the Career Options placement program is enriched by our Business Advisory Council members through their contributions of time and commitment which provides excellent support for our students.

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## AT YOUR SERVICE

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### Building Self-Esteem Leads To Successful Employment

*By Peter Gonzalez*

M.C. had not worked in several years and was lacking in self-confidence. We

worked on job readiness training and basic interpersonal communication skills. I assured

him that if we worked together in these areas, he would be successful. He decided to start with employment on a part time basis where he could be trained to do a task and stick to it. He wanted to work with an employer who would be sensitive to his concerns and disability. While planning these activities I thought we would be spending at least one more week on training, however, he requested we accelerate the interview process. After several appointments with different employers, we met an employer who was open and willing to work with M.C. while maintaining contact with me to report progress or voice concerns.

M.C. was hired for a part time job (light industrial warehouse position) in February. He did so well that in a couple of weeks he was trained and enjoyed his job. On a few occasions, there were some concerns that were addressed immediately. This intervention enabled M.C. to continue to progress, increase his level of self-esteem and it gave him the desire to improve his job status. During our periodic contacts and meetings, he eventually expressed a desire to work more hours and earn more money, so we followed up accordingly. He successfully completed more than 90 days on the job, which constitutes a job placement.

We eventually began a new job search. M.C. wanted to leave his current job in good terms and reminded me of one topic we worked on during our employability skills workshop, "How to Resign". His progress these past months and foresight is impressive. He wanted to go from a part time \$6.50 per hour warehouse job to something more challenging and earn more money. After completing the resignation letter, he submitted it in a professional manner.

I was able to arrange a two-part interview with another employer. This time, he did not need me present for the interviews. M.C. was not only hired, but will be trained to do maintenance work, earning \$8.50 per hour. The new employer will have him work and train 40 hours per week. What a success story!

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## **PWI, A Las Vegas Success Story**

*By Robert Saunders*

Success is always elusive, it always requires time and persistence and it is always a great accomplishment when achieved.

Our current PWI Las Vegas program is the first of its kind here in the hot desert. It has provided the Special Employment Services, Inc. agency and the Las Vegas disabled community with many benefits not previously available. On the one hand, consumers can now receive immediate direct job readiness and development assistance. Typically consumers

had to go through a lengthy process before receiving services. Now persons with immediate employment needs can receive immediate assistance and still apply for other agency services. For Special Employment Services, Inc., PWI means that we can communicate directly with the disabled population, to serve and inform communities of PWI services. This has allowed us to run public service announcements on local radio stations, to distribute literature directly to housing communities, convenience stores,

restaurants, supermarkets and to other service agencies serving people with disabilities.

Getting results from these methods requires time and persistence and ultimately we begin to see results. By continuously submitting public service announcements to local radio we are now beginning to see the fruits of our labor. We most recently served people who came to us because of the radio public service announcements or through literature found in their communities. This success has inspired us to redouble our efforts in these arenas; meaning developing a weekly program to consistently submit press releases and extending those releases to include print media and television in addition to radio. To take more extensive efforts to have a visible

presence in supermarkets, malls and other areas where there is large people traffic, via leaflets, fliers and brochures.

For us in Southern Nevada, an informed community will produce more and more consumers to utilize the many beneficial services our PWI can offer.

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## EXPERIENCE COUNTS

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### Overcoming the Odds

*By Santoya Baxter*

The Projects with Industry Program in Birmingham, Alabama has assisted in helping individuals with disabilities overcome the odds and stereotyping of society pertaining to employment and being successful in life. Everyday our consumers are excelling and exceeding society's expectations of individuals with disabilities by finding and maintaining gainful employment, as well as utilizing resources that may be of assistance.

Mr. Wallace (not his real name), a consumer with a background in medical computer application and programming began abusing drugs and suffering from chronic depression four years ago. He had entered several rehabilitation programs hoping to recover and change his life. Mr. Wallace's family had been supportive of his recovery

efforts in the past, but was reluctant to provide further support due to several failed recovery attempts. After realizing that he needed professional assistance in dealing with his depression and substance abuse recovery efforts, he entered the Salvation Army Rehabilitation Program. He has exceeded his goal by completing the program and now works as a Manager at the Downtown Salvation Army in shipping and receiving. He serves as a mentor for other recovering substance abusers and trains them for employment. The program teaches self-esteem, job readiness and work ethics. He attributes some of his success to staff of the PWI program and Birmingham Independent Living Center (BILC) for assisting him in not only searching for employment, but for also encouraging him to enter the rehabilitation program.

Mr. Chambliss (not his real name), a former Sergeant in the United States Army attached to the navy seal team, was injured in a car accident in 1986. The accident left him with a spinal cord injury and paralyzed from the waist down thus confining him to a wheel chair. During the time of his accident, he was enrolled in college in Virginia and was forced to relocate to southern states near family. Mr. Chambliss enrolled in the PWI Program during the Fall of 2005 to get assistance in finding employment and completing college course work. Today, Mr. Chambliss is enrolled at Miles College majoring in Instrumental Music and Education K-12. He is also working in the weight room at the Institute. Once Mr. Chambliss completes his studies, he would like to give back to the community by teaching Alternative School classes. Mr. Chambliss has managed, with the help of PWI Staff and his Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Counselor, to obtain an accessible 2000 Dodge Caravan. The consumer recently

stated that if it had not been for enrolling in the PWI Program and getting assistance from other services through BILC, he may have never accepted and dealt with the psychological process of being physically challenged and the reality that he will not be able to walk again. With our support he has accomplished some of his goals he set forth.

Consumers such as Mr. Wallace and Mr. Chambliss are just two examples of success stories that the program has aided. The PWI staff does more than just assist individuals with finding and maintaining employment and maintaining. We also incorporate positive attitudes in the decisions that the consumers make about their lives. The program is a way for consumers to accomplish one of the goals on their list of many and seek other services that may allow them to become self sufficient and independent.

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## **The True Measure of Success**

*By Michael Dolan*

In this day and age we generally measure success by the number of persons that we help find a job or new career. Unfortunately with all the number crunching, we forget that we touch the lives of so many people in many different ways.

It goes without saying that we are the leaders in providing opportunities for employment to a large population of persons with disabilities in the areas that we work.

One particular job seeker thanked me, because other organizations that had assisted him in the past never responded to his calls or called. This young gentleman was alone in his job search. All he needed was someone to talk to, find out what he was up to with his search, if he had any interviews, or needed his resume to be sent out for him. This streetwise young man from the Bronx was looking for a job on his own. He knew what to do but still needed someone to point him in the right direction every now and then. When he finally got a job

at Fresh Direct Market in Long Island City, he said the most rewarding words for a person is "Thank You". Those words, as we all know, not only make our day, but even our week or month.

A second job seeker had no trouble sending out his resume, but could not understand why no one would contact him for an interview. He also was appreciative of the fact that we have a network of employers that we can call upon to send the resume to and get valuable feedback. He was also extremely grateful that we not only got the feedback, but then fixed up his resume. He got a job in his chosen field of study.

He made it a point to inform his sponsoring counselor that I stood by him when

he was down and losing hope and that we kept him motivated when he felt that nothing was happening, and he to, said "Thanks".

So when we are asked if our program is a success, do not look at the total numbers of those that you have assisted in finding jobs, look at those lives that we have touched and the opportunities that we have presented.

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## Success the Easy Way

*By Kathy Herron*

Here in Ann Arbor at the Center for Independent Living we are excited about achieving some of our goals ahead of schedule and with relative ease.

The last nine months have been spent working with employers and individuals with disabilities to join the two groups together. Through our efforts we have created a network of employers committed to having a diverse workforce and willing to do what it takes to retain good employees. Some of the ways in which we can clearly see the fruits of our labor are:

We have a Human Resource Manager at a local cable company that calls us when they need employees for their call center. We let her know the candidates that we are working with that have applied for positions on their website. She then calls them for their first of several interviews. While all candidates go

through the proper channels for hiring (filling out application on line) they clearly have an opportunity to get the interview through our efforts. We have two individuals placed there and two others that made it through the third interview.

Also, a merchandising company hires employees to stock magazines at various stores in our area. Our relationship with the field manager of this organization allows us meet at a job site with the candidate, go through the interview, and a start date is decided upon after the interview. This company is open to job coaching, on-the-job training, and evaluation. To date there have been five candidates placed at this merchandising company.

We are very proud of our consumers who have worked diligently to secure employment. And we will continue to cultivate

relationships in our community with businesses to ensure their continued success.

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## PARTNERING FOR PLACEMENT

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### Success Comes in Many Forms

*By Jessica Long*

When we think of success we usually think of outcomes, tangible numbers that can be measured and evaluated. We begin with the end in mind, set goals and work diligently to achieve them only occasionally taking the time to recognize the small but significant accomplishments along the way.

Whether at the beginning, middle or end of their journey, all job seekers that come to see me have the same goal in mind to become successfully employed. While the goal is the same, the steps and amount of time each individual takes to get there is very different. For some, just making the decision to work and affirming that decision by making a phone call or setting up an appointment is a significant accomplishment. Others find success in discovering hidden skills and talents often acquired by unusual circumstances. Going on an interview or learning how to navigate the

public transportation system takes a tremendous amount of courage and determination. For those that have mastered the art of networking success comes in sharing job leads in hopes that another will benefit.

The process of searching for a job also brings about unexpected personal successes like learning to stand up for yourself, overcoming fear, embracing change, forming new friendships and gaining a sense of self-worth. These small successes are worth celebrating. After all, the joy is in the journey.

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### Orange County Reaches Their Goals

*By Lisa Bullen*

With the support from various Department of Rehabilitation Offices in the surrounding areas, referrals of individuals ready to go to work has made this "PWI" connection a great success. We have exceeded

our goal by eleven and this year served 71 clients.

Employers have presented excellent opportunities for our clients. All individuals securing employment in desired job markets,

and retaining their employment contribute to us achieving our goals. By the end of the fourth quarter, the goal of 52 clients placed will be met and exceeded. Continuation of job placements will carry on successfully into the second year of the PWI program. Clients hired in July, August and September will help us to surpass our goal.

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## **Moving in a Successful And Positive Direction**

*By Gina Sahin*

Most people want to be successful in life. There are goals set and then the hard work begins in order to reach those goals. The question is, "What is Success?" Actually, success can mean different things to different people. Success comes in all different shapes and sizes with one common denominator. Success is important and it takes work to reach it. Goal setting and success is ongoing and evolving. No success is ever too small to appreciate if achieved through effort and hard work.

We usually think of success as the accumulation of wealth, power or money. Personal success can include completing a college education, buying a home, quit smoking or saving money. Work related business goals can include increasing the company's bottom line, completing projects on time, increasing sales or reducing waste. Whether personal or business, success means moving and growing in a positive direction.

Under the PWI project, success can also be measured. In general, it includes helping consumers achieve at least 90 days of employment and thereby building up our employer base. The PWI project is successful when employers and consumers mutually benefit. In other words, both move in a positive direction.

Going beyond the success of achieving placements under PWI, I decided to look at the goals and successes that moved our consumers in a more positive direction. One consumer wanted a job as a "grand manager". She said "All I want to do is carve fruit, I love it". Edible Creations, a new employer, recently hired her thereby gaining her artistic passion and experience. The employer was happy to hire someone who has passion for the job that equals her ability. The consumer's desire to work is one goal but placing her in an environment that she loves is truly the real success.

Success for some can also include working full-time with benefits. "I need a job with benefits" said one consumer. This is difficult to achieve as many local retailers and businesses don't offer medical benefits. However, Home Depot hired two consumers for difficult to fill positions. One is a full-time Cashier, the other, an overnight Warehouse Worker. Both were successful in obtaining guaranteed full-time hours plus benefits. The Home Depot employer is very satisfied and recently commented that the cashier is friendly, willing to assist and a hard working young man. The other is going beyond his job by cooking for the company's frequent barbecues. Apparently, the consumer's hobby and passion is medieval cooking. Human resources commented "nobody wants to cook for the

barbecue, so he volunteers". Both of these consumers are moving in a positive direction.

MaryHaven's Micrographics Dept. a first time employer for me, recently hired two employees. Both consumers wanted full-time jobs with benefits. Both wanted to use their previous business skills in the work place. Again, success was achieved through employment; both employer and consumers are satisfied. The icing on the cake, so to speak, is that one of the consumers is also extremely computer savvy. The employer said that not only is he a great worker but he also can help with maintaining the equipment. The employer was thrilled to have him and the consumer was delighted with the chance to utilize his computer skills. Truly a success story.

My final observance of success this year is with the ex-felon group. Recently, three consumers with felony backgrounds were successfully placed in jobs at K-Mart, Holiday Inn and Target. Being an ex-offender adds

additional challenges to finding employment as many consumers feel rejected. On a recent site visit to the above employers, I discovered that one consumer was promoted from pushing carts to full-time warehouse worker. Another worker, who displays a friendly personality and works hard, was given a golden schedule of 9-4 and no weekends. The last consumer went from \$7.00 per hour washing dishes in the evening to a \$10.00 per hour day time job in a stock room. All three are moving in a successful direction. Most rewarding is the improved self-esteem, the happiness I see in their attitudes and faces.

In conclusion, success may be measured in many ways, but for me, I see the little successes that add up over time. Successes that continually moves our consumers and their respective employers in a positive direction is truly worth striving for.

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## News from NBDC

### Coping with Asperger Syndrome

By Laura M. Francis

Most of us have read about famous people who possibly had Asperger Syndrome (AS), but were undiagnosed. Among them are Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist, Woody Allen, comedian/actor/writer/director/producer, and James Taylor, singer/song writer, to name a few. These individuals became adults before the diagnosis of AS or high functioning autism even existed. No one can tell for sure if they had this condition or not, but they shared common characteristics of autism in adults who have been diagnosed with AS today.

Asperger Syndrome is one of five Pervasive Development Disorders (PDDs), which also includes Autism, Rett's Syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. PDDs are a category of neurologically based disorders that have a range of delays in different developmental stages. Autism is a relatively rare pervasive developmental disorder marked by severe deficits in the abilities to reason, communicate, and socialize. Roughly 7 - 13 out of every 10,000 Americans are autistic, and the prevalence of autism among males is 3-4 times that among females.

A neurobiological disorder, Asperger Syndrome is named after a Viennese physician, Hans Asperger, who in 1944 published a paper which described a pattern of behaviors in several young boys who had normal intelligence and language development, but who also exhibited

autistic-like behaviors and marked deficiencies in social and communication skills. Some of the autistic behavior shared by these individuals included, but was not limited to, their inability to be able to eye-to-eye gaze; inability to use proper facial expression or body postures and gestures to regulate social interaction; failure to develop relationships; repetitive motor mannerisms, (like hand or finger flapping, twisting, etc.), having difficulty determining proper body space, and becoming distracted with a persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.

Many individuals with AS are able to continue their education by attending college or trade schools and ultimately seek employment. Individuals with AS may be successful in careers that require focus on details but have limited social interaction with colleagues such as computer sciences, research or library sciences.

The Cambridge Lifespan Asperger Syndrome Service (CLASS), an organization in the United Kingdom that works with adults (age 18 or older) developed a simple ten question checklist to help identify those individuals who fit the common characteristics of AS patients in order to gather data to better understand the disability so that proper accommodations could be made, if needed:

1. I find social situations confusing.
2. I find it hard to make small talk.

3. I did not enjoy imaginative story writing at school.
4. I am good at picking up details and facts.
5. I find it hard to work out what other people are thinking and feeling.
6. I can focus on certain things for very long periods.
7. People often say I was rude even when this was not intended.
8. I have unusually strong, narrow interests.
9. I do certain things in an inflexible, repetitive way.
10. I have always had difficulty making friends.

As Asperger Syndrome is a social and communication disorder, individuals may have problems with social interaction, nonverbal communication, or managing change. They appear to lack common sense. Other difficulties include motor skills, writing, math, abstract reasoning, or concept formation. They may experience anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems.

Here are some case scenarios of employees with Asperger Syndrome and accommodations that were made to enhance productivity.

- An employee is very disorganized, and often comes to work unprepared. In order to assist him, his supervisor consulted a specialist in AS and they

suggested making a list of job-essential items (keys, cell-phone, calculator, day-planner, and roster) for the employee to tape inside his book bag. The employee can review the list prior to leaving for work, to make sure he has the items he will need to perform his job tasks.

- A cleaning staff person with AS was not cleaning to quality standards. As an accommodation it was suggested that the employer use a job coach to model skills and techniques for cleaning, in addition to using a multi-set alarm watch to help the employee budget time, allowing herself enough time to complete each task to the employer's standards.

If you would like to learn more about AS, contact the Autism Society of America: Adults with Asperger Syndrome at [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org) or contact NBDC Information Services at 516-465-1519 or email [lfrancis@abilitiesonline.org](mailto:lfrancis@abilitiesonline.org). ■

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*We Focus on Ability*

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