

# Partnering for Placement

An Employment Program of Abilities, Inc.

Alabama

Kentucky

Michigan

New York

WINTER 2003

NEWSLETTER VOLUME 20

## 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.*

## New Beginnings

By Judy Young

On the first of October 2002, Abilities, Inc. launched four new Project With Industry programs (PWI): **Career Options** operating primarily in Nassau County, New York; **Access to Employment** serving persons with disabilities in Louisville, Kentucky, Birmingham, Alabama, and Bronx, New York; **Bright New Futures** offering placement services in Midland and Ann Arbor, Michigan and Suffolk County, New York; and **Getting Started** assisting students and alumni of the City University of New York (CUNY), operating two-year, four-year and graduate programs on 20 campuses, in finding employment and embarking on their professional careers.

PWI programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, which solicits requests for proposals every five years. Grants are awarded based on a vigorous peer review process during which teams of three rehabilitation professionals and/or persons with disabilities determine the merits of proposal. In addition to identifying the strength and weaknesses of applications, the group assigns a point value to each section of the proposal based on six criteria. Offered here are the criteria, point values, and Abilities' typical scores.

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Range of Points</u>	<u>Abilities' Scores</u>
1) Extent of need for project	0 - 20	20
2) Partnership with Industry	0 - 25	25
3) Project design and plan of operation for achieving competitive employment	0 - 25	25
4) Adequacy of resources and quality of key personnel	0 - 10	10
5) Budget and cost effectiveness	0 - 10	7
6) Project evaluation	<u>0 - 10</u>	<u>10</u>
Totals	100	97

Projects With Industry programs were initiated in 1968 by the federal government to demonstrate that persons with disabilities possess the skills necessary and be able to perform the required tasks needed for competitive employment. Recognizing the significant role of the business community, PWI's are required to bring together rehabilitation professionals with local



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employers in preparing people with disabilities for jobs. To formalize employer involvement and collaboration, each PWI must establish a Business Advisory Council (BAC), which meets regularly to assist in planning and implementing the goals of the program.

Abilities, Inc. was one of the first PWI recipients in 1968 and has since successfully competed for new awards. Notably, in this new funding cycle (2002-2005), Abilities received a total of four grants; the only organization to be awarded more than two.

Of the four PWI programs that Abilities launched, there are several new and exciting initiatives. The **Getting Started** project serves students and alumni with disabilities of CUNY. (the largest urban university system in the country) and will both jump start careers and bridge gaps in employment among people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The project will also marshal the services of the Offices of the Disabled Students and Career Services to connect graduating students with disabilities with corporate campus recruiters.

Employers have continuously expressed concern about not seeing students with disabilities during campus recruitment, and this initiative will address and resolve this lack of attendance. It is our hope that in addition to placement service, we will be able to develop a model program that could be replicated by other university systems across the country.

The two other new initiatives launched this October, are the establishment programs at Centers for Independent Living in Michigan: one in Ann Arbor and the other in Midland. The goal of each center is to serve at least 70 job seekers with disabilities and place a minimum of 50 into competitive employment.

It is our honor and privilege to bring new services and resources to these communities and make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.

*Judy Young*  
*Director*  
*Abilities, Inc.*

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

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### **Our Successful and Most Challenging Placements**

*By Anita Zimmerman*

The Career Options staff is committed to assisting people with disabilities obtain the services they require to find meaningful employment. This is the commonality that binds us, and our diverse strengths make us a powerful team. Provided below is a brief bio on the Career Options team.

**Anita Zimmerman** has been with Abilities, Inc. for the past thirteen years. In that time she was the Situational Assessment Evaluator for the Business Skills Training Program, Instructor for the Steps Toward Employment Program (STEP). In her present position as Program Manager for Career

Options she is responsible for the performance of new and challenging assignments and focuses on achieving results rather than potential failures. Anita realizes that one way to attain positive results is develop strong relationships with community businesses by recruiting company representatives to become active members of the Business Advisory Council (BAC). Maintaining strong relationships with these representatives helps the Placement Department remain updated on current market trends, thereby becoming a resource for referring qualified candidates for vacant positions. In addition to her managerial responsibilities and due to her proficiency in American Sign Language (ASL), Anita carries a caseload of Deaf adults and graduates from the STEP program who are seeking employment.

**Vivian Ouizel**, Assistant Program Manager, has been with Abilities, Inc. for the past six years. Vivian works closely with students in the Laboratory Assistant Training Program, as well as individuals referred for direct placement by VESID (Vocational Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) and the Department of Veterans Affairs. She teaches consumers how to access employment resources within their community and navigate additional community support networks. In addition, she assists consumers who lost their jobs due to downsizing, layoffs, or recent vocational rehabilitation in developing realistic career goals. She develops internship sites, which have results in the successful hiring of many graduates from the Laboratory Assistant Training Program. Vivian is enthusiastic about her work and continually sets higher goals for herself so that companies can access and utilize a pool of qualified productive workers.

**Judith Simonson**, Senior Placement Specialist, has been with Abilities, Inc. for the past five years. Judith works very closely with students in the Microsoft Office Specialist and

Business Skills training programs to assist them in securing meaningful employment. She also is a liaison with the Department of Occupational Resources and actively recruits new BAC members, develops internship sites, conducts job readiness classes, and provides ongoing career counseling for individuals with disabilities. In addition to these responsibilities, she provides valuable input for the development of Abilities programs. She assisted in the development of the Customer Service curriculum for the Business Skills Program. One of Judith's greatest strengths is her ability to motivate consumers to overcome challenges set before them and encourage them to succeed.

**Traci Johnson** is the newest member of the Career Options team. As Placement Specialist, she is committed to finding jobs for people with disabilities. Her educational background and work experience as a Career Counselor for a major college has given her the tools necessary to meet her goals. Traci is skilled in organizing Career Fairs, facilitating workshops, assisting students in resume writing, and providing students with skills needed to attain career goals.

Each member of our team faces many challenges in next three years. Surely, there will be disappointments and triumphs. However, we believe that the blending of our strengths, skills, and personalities will only reinforce our commitment to meet the goals of assisting people with disabilities secure competitive employment in our community.

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## BRIGHT NEW FUTURES

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### Looking Forward

*By Lisa Quinn*

Howard (not his real name) came to the PWI program at the Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living through Michigan Rehabilitation Services in early December. Howard is Certified Learning Disabled but determined to get through college and is currently enrolled in a local community college taking some remedial courses. Howard reads on a third grade level with spelling skills at a second grade level. Outside the challenges of Howard's learning disabilities, he was also in a car accident about a year ago and sustained a closed head injury which affects his temper as well as his memory. Despite these barriers, Howard was anxious to get to work and willing to work hard to do so. In sitting down and talking with Howard I discovered that although his reading skills are elementary, his math skills are about average and that he really enjoys working with his hands. Howard expressed a strong interest in finding a job where he could work as an apprentice for a carpenter or an electrician.

One of the first things Howard and I worked on was his resume. Howard had been using a poorly done resume, which needed a lot of fine tuning. Howard and I worked on his resume and put together some references, which he didn't previously have; he was very excited about the final product. Howard had been sending out his previous resume for months and had not received any responses; the week after we put his resume together he called to let me know that he'd received three responses, and that he got an interview for a open janitorial position at the University of Michigan.

Howard was very nervous about his interview and came in for an appointment before it took place. We talked about his interview skills and he had a lot of questions about how to answer certain questions that the interviewers might ask of him. Howard and I did some role playing and mock interviews. Howard needed the job and was excited at the possibility of working for the University of Michigan, but still really wanted to accomplish his goals of finding a way to apprentice for an electrician or carpenter, as well as find a way to continue his college education. Knowing that the University of Michigan is a huge local employer with needs in every area, I encouraged him to let the employer know of his interests, and to inquire as to whether there might be an opportunity for him to apprentice with one of U of M's electricians or carpenters in the future.

Howard came back successful in his interview and was hired for the position. He was thrilled to let me know that not only did he get the job, but U of M also promised him that if he was successful and stuck with the job for at least 6 months, they would move him into an apprenticeship position with one of their electricians! On top of that, U of M will pay 75% of Howard's college tuition once he's past his probationary period. Working with Howard has been a rewarding experience and Howard is very excited to be on track to accomplishing his future goals.

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## One Day at a Time, One Placement at a Time

By Sara Brandon

I love the title of our project, "Bright New Futures". In three small words such a strong message is conveyed.

This project is new to our area, which encompasses eight counties. The community, the consumers, the staff at the Center for Independent Living of Mid-Michigan (CIL-MM), and Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) has welcomed this project with open arms. The need for job placement among people with disabilities is overwhelming, and as a one-person project, I admit I am overwhelmed most days, but extremely thrilled to have the opportunity to make a difference in our community, one placement at a time.

In January, we officially launched our project to the community. Locally, we have given our PWI the title of M.A.T.C.H. (Matching Applicants to Companies that Hire). We had wonderful media coverage surrounding our kick-off and thanks to the efforts of Phyllis Varjian, a CIL-MM staff member who is responsible for community awareness, we had both newspaper and television coverage. Judy Young visited us for the kick-off and shared a wealth of knowledge with our entire staff. Thank you Judy!

Although, the economy in our area is going from bad to worse, I have faith that our project will be successful. Coming from a background in sales and marketing, I understand the importance of relationship building and persistence. I believe that it may take a little time to develop the relationships,

but once they are there the placements will follow. It is an everyday effort with no room for frustration. In March, we will be adding an additional staff person to our project. I am anticipating our efforts to move along at a faster pace, leading to an increase in placements.

Our biggest source for referrals has been Michigan Rehabilitation Services. Many of the referrals are "job ready." The consumers are eager to help in the job search process and they want to learn how to do it effectively. I am very impressed with the relationship that has already developed between us. I even have an office with a computer to use at most of their offices.

The future of our project looks promising. We are making headway everyday. My motto has been "one day at a time, one placement at a time."

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## Suffolk County's Newest Program Award

*By Catrina Lian*

Bright New Futures is Suffolk County's newest Projects With Industry program award. Although this is Suffolk's third PWI, it is the first collaborative effort with two out-of-state partners located in Michigan.

These sites may be miles apart, but it's safe to say that employment issues faced by persons with disabilities in each of these areas are not. Labor market needs and trends may vary greatly from one region to the next, but the obstacles faced by a job seeker with a disability remain constant throughout. The Projects With Industry programs allow us the opportunity to assist in leveling the playing field.

For us on Long Island's east end, the objectives defined by Bright New Futures, is a continuation of services offered here since 1990. The Projects With Industry goal of bridging the gap between rehabilitation and business has been realized through a creative

array of services offered to consumers and employers alike. From identifying eligible participants, to conducting job seeking skills workshops to assisting with motivation, self-advocacy, career exploration and development...to educating and assisting an employer on a workplace accommodation or sensitivity awareness, to the ideal result of connecting a good job applicant to a good job opportunity.

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*Catrina Lian*  
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## ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

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### **New Innovations**

*By Elizabeth Cooper*

I have worked in the Homeless/Substance Abuse Program, which is under a grant with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and will now become the Employment Coordinator with the PWI program.

I received my Bachelor of Sciences Degree in Human Resource Management (HRM) from Birmingham Southern College. I have worked with Human Resources for a number of years and have various working experiences that will enhance my work performance in this position. I am the mother

of a disabled son who is just now receiving his first job in a community setting. I know firsthand, the feeling of being able to become a more productive individual in the workforce.

I feel that my membership with the Birmingham Chapter of Human Society is a great asset to the Independent Living Center. I have also been a member of the National Society of Human Resources. I hope to bring networks and contacts to assist consumers in seeking employment. I am networking around the to give a high level of positions to our consumers. I want to broaden the scope to the Business Advisory Council by introducing new persons on the council. I want to rotate

business meetings around the city to give exposure to the PWI program and to the ILC. In seeking qualified applicants, I visit on a regular basis, the Enterprise Community Job bank, Shepherds Fold, Birmingham One-Stop Shelters, in seeking qualified applicants.

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## **Access to Employment**

*By Rhonda Kidd*

The Center for Accessible Living in Louisville, Kentucky is thrilled to continue the PWI relationship with Abilities, Inc. Upon notification of receiving the Access to Employment grant, a new collaboration was established with Birmingham, Alabama and the New York PWI staff. The three-way partnership has provided the Center for Accessible Living an opportunity to continue a much needed employment program that support job seekers with disabilities in the metropolitan area.

The first quarter of the new year has been busy. Staff were hired, new forms for the project were finalized, an agreement with the Kentucky Vocational Rehabilitation was signed and the first meeting of the Business Advisory Council held. Not only were these first steps being accomplished, but jobseekers continued knocking on the door for services.

Because of the previous twelve-year history with the Projects with Industry program, job seekers were self-referring for

eligibility into the new program. Marketing has been limited but will intensify over the next quarters. Vocational rehabilitation counselors will be contacted to maintain the referrals and knowledge of the opportunity available to assist jobseekers with services. Our Business Advisory Council continues to offer advice and opportunities to assist program participants. Already two informational interviews have been done by BAC members, and several members attended an open house at Christmas time in support of the project. The Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach team is also referring potential jobseekers regularly and is supporting eligible individuals with benefits counseling.

Staff have discussed the current economic situation and we know that it has changed drastically from previous years. We fully expect to find the labor market much shrunken, making it more difficult to assist jobseekers find employment. Even with the challenges of the economy, the Louisville Access to Employment staff are ready to assist, prepare, and educate job seekers and

employers. We are encouraged by the motivation and support of jobseekers and our Business Advisory Council members.

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## GETTING STARTED

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### New Beginnings with PWI And Getting Started

*By Michael Dolan*

Sometimes when a grant or a program ends there is no continuation of services within a particular community. Fortunately, even though we ended one PWI grant at the end of September 2002, we have secured two fabulous grants to serve the disabled population in the Bronx for years to come. At this time, I will discuss the "Getting Started" program. The main goal is to work with three colleges in the Bronx: Lehman College, Hostos Community College and Bronx Community College to provide opportunities for internships, work experiences and employment for students that are registered with the Offices of Disabled Student Services.

Many of the employers that I have spoken to so far are extremely excited about the opportunity to recruit college students with disabilities. This enthusiasm has spread to the college campuses, and the staff members of the local colleges have been receptive to our assistance in bringing jobs to their students and alumni.

Many of the programs and initiatives that have been successful in the past will be continued with this program. For example, we

will be providing practice interview sessions with employers from the area. Roundtable discussions that have been popular to both the job seeker and the employer will also be utilized by this project.

We are also looking into work experiences for students that may have an excellent educational background but lack work history. We look to provide opportunities for internships, and work experiences to students we feel will benefit from additional services and better prepare them for the world of work.

As far as I know, this is the only program of its kind that is actually focusing on college students with disabilities to help them "Get Started" with a job. From the enthusiasm of the employers and the college staff that I have spoken with, I have no doubt that we will be successful.

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## News from NBDC

### Getting Started is Getting Started

*By Lana Smart*

November 22, 2002 marked the start of the Getting Started program. Graciously hosted by NBC, (a GE Company and NBDC member) at its facilities at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, the kickoff was perfect setting to bring together employers and key university representatives. The Getting Started program is a unique initiative of NBDC and Abilities and the 20 campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY) and is designed to provide full and part-time employment opportunities for students and graduates with disabilities.

Kick off speakers addressed the need and anticipated benefits of this collaboration, and included: Gerald Parks, Manager, Fair Employment Practices, General Electric; Anita Jankowski, District Manager, Social Security Administration; Millie DesBiens, Program Manager, IBM; Otis Hill, Vice Chancellor for Student Development and Enrollment Management, City University of New York (CUNY), Elliot Rosman, Director of Disabled Student Services and Chairman of CUNY Committee on Disability Issues, Queensborough Community College, as well as Edmund L. Cortez, President and CEO of the National Center for Disability Services and Abilities, Inc.; Francine M. Tishman, Executive Director and COO of Abilities, Inc., Lana Smart, Director, National Business & Disability

Council; and Judy Young, Director of Corporate Training for NBDC and Project Director for Getting Started. Jennifer Sheehy, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, closed the meeting by delivering "Words from Washington" expressing the administration's commitment to improved employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In addition to providing services to CUNY students with disabilities and the employers who recruit them, the Getting Started program will play a role in building a model to demonstrate how to create successful relationships between the business community and university systems nationwide. For more information, please contact, Margaret Lawson at 917-224-7884, Zoraida Fagundes at 917-224-7741 or Michael Dolan at 917-931-3125.

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### Emergency Evacuation Preparedness Checklist

*By Laura M. Francis*

Since the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, businesses in all industries and major cities

around the country have focused increased attention and resources on preparing for

emergency situations. This has included the development or updating of emergency evacuation plans. In response to this critical need, the *National Business & Disability Council (NBDC)*, with input from its member companies and partners, has developed an *Emergency Evacuation Checklist* to assist people with disabilities in the workplace.

The publication, partially funded by Philip Morris Management Corp., is designed as a user-friendly checklist to give human resource, health and safety managers, security, and building operations personnel the opportunity to customize their evacuation plans to include people with disabilities.

The publication contains an extensive listing of recommendations to be used in reviewing organizations current initiatives and identifying areas where additional work may be needed. The *checklist* focuses on four major areas, including 1) General Emergency Procedures for People with Disabilities; 2) Emergency Procedures for People with Mobility Impairments; 3) for People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, and 4) for People who are Blind or Visually Impaired. Within each, a series of emergency situations, ordered in logical sequence, assists the user in

identifying actions to be taken. Space is also provided to document target and completion dates, and make other relevant notations. There is also a glossary of terms, illustrations of symbols of accessibility and a useful resource list.

Additionally, the publication contains an Evac-Pac, which was developed as a means by which employees can keep personal data (e.g. drivers license, medical insurance information, emergency numbers, etc.), a small amount of cash, and car/house key with them at all times, thus alleviating last minute concerns about irretrievable items. A small flashlight with an on/off switch is also included.

For more information, or to order this manual, please call Laura Francis at 516-465-1519 or email [francis@business-disability.com](mailto:francis@business-disability.com)

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Abilities, Inc. provides employment and training services for youth and adults with disabilities.

