



# People with Disabilities at Work

The Newsletter about Customized Employment  
For Persons With Disabilities

Sponsored by *Whatever It Takes*  
A Project Funded by the US Department of Labor  
Office of Disability Employment Policy

January-March 2003

Volume 1, Number 2

Did you know that... Among those of working age (approximately 17 million), 73 percent of Americans with disabilities are unemployed.

## What's New: The Customer-Family Cooperative

The Customer-Family Cooperative scheduled its first meeting for April 11 at 2:00 pm, with another one coming up on May 30<sup>th</sup>. We look forward to seeing you there.

What is the Cooperative? The Customer-Family Cooperative was first conceived by WIT Service Coordinator, Peggy Christman, as a voluntary support network to be developed by and for WIT customers and family members. The network, comprised of customers, family, friends, neighbors, mentors and the staff of project WIT, will identify and mobilize community resources that will enable customers to achieve their career goals and independence. Members of the network will be encouraged to work as a team to pool their resources and troubleshoot potential obstacles.

The Cooperative will hold meetings monthly to discuss topics of interest and exchange information about community

## Check These Dates

- April 10:** Open House, to introduce and celebrate the *Whatever It Takes* program. Hosted at HempsteadWorks Career Center, Suite 400, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. All are welcome.
- April 11:** The Cooperative will hold its first meeting at Abilities, Inc. in Adm. Conference Room 1, at 2:00 pm.
- May 16:** WIT staff presentation: overview of the program, services and accomplishments to date. To be held in Abilities' Learning Center, 3:30 to 4:30 pm. You are in for a treat: prizes to win, sweets to eat.
- May 30:** Cooperative Pizza Party; Abilities Administrative Conference Room #1, 7:00 p.m.

## Disability Jeopardy

The WIT Program sponsored a training session at HempsteadWorks in January, using the television game, Jeopardy as a format. (Continued on page 3)



Published and distributed by Abilities, Inc. at the National Center for Disability Services, 201 IU Willets Road, Albertson New York 11507; 516/465-1542, 516/485-5000 X1139 or 800/662-1220 (TTY); [www.abilitiesinc.org](http://www.abilitiesinc.org)

## Cooperative Continued

jobs and services that can be tapped to assist customers achieve employment goals. Guest speakers will be invited to these meetings. It is anticipated that topics may include issues such as:

- Understanding Social Security benefits and work incentives
- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- Advocating for your employment rights
- Disability disclosure in the workplace
- Opportunities for self-employment
- Developments in assistive technology

How the Cooperative works: The activities of each Cooperative will be facilitated by a Coordinator in conjunction with the network team. In brief, their role is to assist customers and family members organize support services, such as transportation to and from work, sign language interpreters and personal care attendants for the workplace, and so forth. Additionally, the Coordinator will create a forum for exchanging information about job opportunities in the community, and organize meeting locations and schedules.

Interested in becoming a Cooperative Coordinator? The Coordinator will dedicate at least two hours a week toward the management of Cooperative activities. Responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Creating contact lists
- Networking with members
- Accessing information about local job opportunities
- Identifying community resources
- Providing peer support
- Organizing transportation/carpools
- Conducting monthly meetings

## Cooperative Continued

Meetings of the Cooperative will be held at locations such as local libraries, faith-based organizations, community centers, customer homes, and other convenient public or private locales

Rate of pay: \$10.25 per hour.

Those interested in applying for this position can contact Jennifer Sulmonte at 516/465-1402.



## Customer Profiles

The WIT staff is pleased to announce the addition of 14 new customers to the program this past quarter. Highlighted below are some of the success stories, which detail recently obtained positions as well as some of the services provided.

Childcare Worker: A notable achievement involves a customer who expressed interest in the childcare profession. After assisting her with resume development and other pre-employment services, a work-tryout was arranged at a local childcare facility. A job coach was assigned in this instance, since the position entailed a strenuous physical schedule and there was concern about the customer's ability to satisfy all the job requirements. After a full day of work the customer was exhausted and realized she could not handle the responsibility. Alternative positions in the childcare field were explored, and another interview scheduled on behalf of the customer with a popular children's clothing chain.

## Customer Profiles Continued

The interview went well and the customer was hired. She continues to receive job-coaching, and we anticipate she will not require this service much longer. A workplace mentor will be identified for general supervision prior to the termination of services.

**Office Associate:** We were also able to assist one of our customers whose visual disability made working fulltime difficult. Among the pre-employment services provided for this customer was information on how to obtain the zoom text for her computer to accommodate low vision. Additionally, we suggested she speak with her church leader to inquire about permanent part-time work as she mentioned she was actively involved in her church. This customer is now working part-time as an office associate for her church.

**Medical Receptionist:** One of our most promising customers is a young woman whose disability requires the services of a health aid, on and off the job. Her primary career interest is medical billing. An internship at a local hospital was arranged for two days a week to provide her with relevant work experience. Confirmation was received that her health aide could accompany her. Additionally, a job coach was assigned for the first day to ensure sufficient orientation. Travel training was not needed in this case, as the customer was familiar with transportation services for the disability community.

We suggested she speak with the human resources representatives and volunteer coordinator to make them aware of her interest in a paid position.

In response, the hospital provided the customer with receptionist training to substitute for a volunteer when needed.

Eventually, the customer obtained a paid position with her chiropractor that involves medical billing from home. She is currently learning a computer-billing program and once her boss is confident in her ability, she will be the sole contractor.

A job coach is assisting the customer to install the new software on her computer and learn how to use it. The customer is also starting a six-month medical billing course. She continues to intern at the hospital.

## Jeopardy Continued

Judy Young, the Director, served as host. A variety of disability issues were addressed via the Jeopardy questions and answers. There were three sessions and included the HempsteadWorks staff and other partner members of the One-Stop Center. Prizes were awarded to winning groups.

At the beginning of each game session, the participants were apprehensive and quiet. As the game continued the participants became very excited and competitive. They began to shout the answers and were determined to be the winning team. Some were very surprised by their knowledge (or the lack of) disabilities and were fascinated by the new facts that were learned in the game.

HempsteadWorks staff expressed how much they enjoyed the game and how they felt as though they were on television playing the real game show. They never thought they would enjoy a training session so much. I was there to help Judy with the game and I must say that I also enjoyed Disability Jeopardy.

---Bessie Mercado, Service Coordinator

