



# People with Disabilities at Work

The Newsletter about Customized Employment  
For Persons With Disabilities

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Sponsored by *Whatever It Takes*  
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Office of Disability Employment Policy

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**Did you know that...** compared with other workers, workers with disabilities are more reliable, more punctual, more productive, make fewer requests and take fewer medical leaves?

—*Industry Promotion Society*

## What's New

### Introducing WIT staff:

**Susan Quinn**, Service Coordinator. Ms. Quinn has worked with people with disabilities for 28 years, and most recently as a case manager for Abilities' Welfare-to-Work program in Queens. As a person with a disability, Susan is aware of the problems faced by those seeking employment and is excited about assisting others in their job search. As Susan explains, "I have first-hand knowledge of the barriers that still exist and am very happy to be a part of this program." Ms. Quinn received her Associates degree from Nassau Community College and has been accepted into a Bachelor's program in Health and Human Services at Empire State College.

**Bessie Mercado**, Service Coordinator. Ms. Mercado brings 10 years of experience as a caseworker to her current position. Another Abilities' veteran, she formerly worked as a site manager for PRIDE (Welfare-to-Work) as well as a caseworker for the New York City Department of Social Services. Bessie looks forward to serving people with disabilities in Hempstead and reveals that she has "always received satisfaction and enjoyment working and helping the community."

## Check These Dates

- January 31:** Disability Jeopardy, a training program of disability issues for one-stop staff and vendors hosted by HempsteadWorks, 50 Clinton Street, Hempstead, Room 110A. There will be three training sessions in all, the first to begin at 12:30, the second at 2:00, and the third at 3:30. Prizes will be awarded to winners!
- February 27:** Strategic Planning Meeting, 12:00 noon at HempsteadWorks, Suite 110A.
- 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.

## Customer Profile

The WIT Program has served four customers during the past quarter, all with a diversity of disabilities, interests and goals. One such customer, who lives in a Day Rehabilitation Center and has a bi-polar disorder, is seeking employment in the hospitality industry. Another is a young man with cerebral palsy who is unhappy with his current part-time position. He seeks employment that affords greater interaction with others.



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## What's New Continued

In working with the disabled population, I learned of their strong desire to work, the limitations and the many obstacles they must overcome in order to enter the workforce." Bessie earned her AAS in Business Administration from Elizabeth Seton College and a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from Mercy.

**Peggy Christman**, Service Coordinator. Ms. Christman has been with Abilities, Inc. for five years, first as a secretary and then as a project assistant for Projects With Industry, another Abilities' employment program. As a mother of a person with a disability, Peggy brings a wealth of personal experience to *Whatever It Takes*, and will play a key role in the Customer-Family Cooperative, a idea conceived by Ms. Christman to support customers and their families during job search and employment. Peggy is looking forward "to connecting customers with available services so that they can overcome barriers that are keeping them out of the job market." Ms. Christman earned a BS in Comparative Literature from Empire State College.

**Maya Pavlovsky**, Employment Specialist. Ms. Pavlovsky emigrated to the US from Russia in 1979 with a Bachelor's degree in Electronics from the Engineering Institute of Minsk, and began her career working as a senior programmer/analyst in the corporate sector. In 1992, Maya changed careers and became an Employment Specialist for the New York Association for New Americans in order to help other immigrants find employment. While there, she gained valuable experience working with diverse groups of people to provide case management, job development, job placement, training and assessment services. Maya's background and knowledge will enable her to successfully "create employment opportunities for customers who seek services from the WIT program."

**Sandy Kovacs**, Employment Specialist. Before his current position with Abilities, Mr. Kovacs most recently worked as a coordinator of the Resource Center for the Office of Disabled Student Services at Queensborough Community College, where he supervised a team of tutors and technology aids for young adults with learning, hearing and visual impairments. Sandy said his "main goal was to make students feel comfortable in college, and help them understand that their disability was no

## Customer Profile Continued

We are also serving two young women with physical and developmental disabilities who would like to work in the childcare industry as teachers' aids. One is a graduate of the Henry Viscardi School and the other has received a childcare training certificate from Molloy College.

The WIT staff is diligently working with each individual to customize employment opportunities that meet their career goals and personal interests, as well as match their professional knowledge and skills. Most recently, an interview was arranged with a local hotel for the customer interested in the hospitality industry. This individual's prospects for employment look promising and we hope to report the good news come the next publication of *People With Disabilities At Work*.

## Employer Profile

We are proud to announce that Judi Schillaci, Director, Verizon Community Affairs, Long Island, has joined the Strategic Planning Committee for the *Whatever It Takes* (WIT) program. Judi will be a valuable asset to this new initiative.

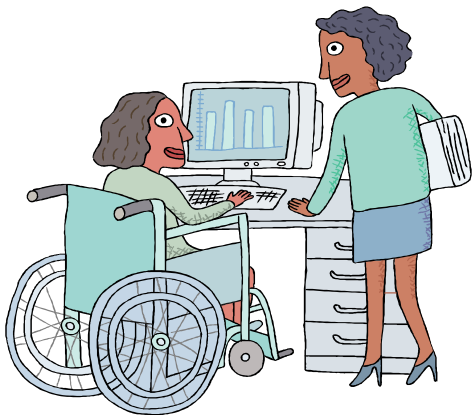
Judi Schillaci is a dedicated and dynamic professional who maintains a long-term commitment to individuals with disabilities and the programs of Abilities, Inc. Currently, Judi serves as a member of Abilities' *Projects With Industry* (PWI) Executive Committee and is Co-Chair of one of the Business Advisory Councils. In these capacities, she shares her knowledge and expertise with consumers, professionals and other business leaders by providing resources and input into the curriculum, presenting sessions on business telephone etiquette and customer service skills, conducting numerous practice interviews and roundtable discussions, and offering tours of Verizon facilities. Equally important, through each of these programs, Judi communicates optimism and confidence.

One of the highlights of Judi's collaboration with Abilities was a groundbreaking project called *Skills for the New Century*. This project allowed jobseekers with disabilities to avail themselves of computer-based courses in business and technical skills at Verizon's e-Learning Centers in Garden City and Patchogue, while training side-by-side with Verizon employees.

## What's New Continued

longer an obstacle to a college education." Mr. Kovacs, who grew up with a learning disability, received his own BA in Communication Arts and Sciences from Queens College. Sandy came to Abilities "to aid individuals with disabilities transition into the work world."

**Pamela Sullivan**, Job Coach. Ms. Sullivan was employed for many years as a legal secretary and paralegal, both of which have enabled her "to become a good observer of people and to develop strong problem solving abilities." Pamela is looking forward to putting these skills to use assisting people with disabilities adapt to the employment environment. She is confident that if there are problems, she can "solve them quickly and quietly with little disruption to the workplace, employer or customer." Ms. Sullivan has a BA in English from Marymount College and is currently enrolled at Hofstra University in the Deaf Studies Certificate Program studying American Sign Language.



**Working Hard** SEE YOU

**Jennifer Sulmonte**, Job Coach. Ms. Sulmonte has a long history of volunteer service, and through these experiences has come to realize her "love for working with and helping people with disabilities." Prior to her current position, Jennifer has worked in a diversity of fields, such as Customer Service, Childcare and AIDS Education. She brings this background and skills to bear in her new role. As she expresses, "with my creativity, motivation and dedication, I will be part of this program's success." Ms. Sulmonte is working toward her AAS in Early Childhood Development.

## Employer Profile Continued

Apart from her work with Abilities, Judi planned and implemented Verizon's innovative *TTY Loan Program*, making TTYs available on loan for Nassau and Suffolk library patrons who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech impairments.

A true community leader, Judi Schillaci currently serves on the Boards of Directors for the Middle Country Library Foundation, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County and the Long Island Works Coalition, and has been honored for her achievements by the Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association, Suffolk Independent Living Organization, Nassau-Suffolk Law Services, Abilities, Inc. and the Hispanic Brotherhood of Rockville Centre.

Judi Schillaci began her career at the once New York Telephone Company as a service representative and was quickly promoted from supervisor to manager to her current position as Director of Executive Appeals, which she's held for eight years. Judi readily draws upon all the skills and experience acquired in her varied positions to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

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## WIT Employment Philosophy

**Right to Employment:** You have the right to be employed regardless of type or severity of disability, or age, race, nationality, gender, creed and orientation.

**Right to Competitive Work:** You have the right to work in a competitive, integrated setting

**Right to Equal Wages:** You have the right to earn a salary equal to your experience, ability and current labor market standards

**Right to Equal Benefits:** You have the right to benefits equal to that of colleagues performing a similar jobs

**Right to Equal Opportunity:** You have the right to be hired based on your abilities, skills and experience rather than disabilities

**Right to Control and Choice:** You have the right to choose and regulate your own supports and services based upon personal goals and career interests