



# People with Disabilities at Work

The Newsletter about Customized Employment  
For Persons with Disabilities

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

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

## What's New?

The Whatever It Takes (WIT) staff is pleased to announce the addition of 7 new customers this past quarter. Currently, there are 42 customers receiving services through the WIT program. Nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the customers enrolled in WIT are utilizing Individual Accounts to purchase employment-related items and services, such as transportation to and from the job, interview attire and uniforms, and assistive technology.

This past quarter, 6 WIT customers had the opportunity to take part in a CD-ROM Portfolio Project. Each CD-ROM, which will contain a short video of the customer performing job tasks, the customer's resume and information about the Customized Employment program, will be used as a marketing tool for employers. The

WIT staff is planning a "Portfolio Screening" at HempsteadWorks some time in the upcoming months. Based on feedback from employers and One-Stop staff, future WIT customers may have the opportunity to purchase a their own CD-ROM portfolio using money from their Individual Account.

### Introducing one additional staff member to the WIT team:

Ernie Anderson has joined Abilities Inc. to work in the WIT Program as a Placement Specialist. Previous to owning his own business, Ernie managed a regional finance office for Transamerica Corporation serving fourteen states and also worked as Vice President of Credit for First NH Banks. For the past ten years he has been self employed as a loan broker marketing lease financing to companies in a variety of industries.



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Ernie has a Bachelors degree in economics and finance and an Associates degree in biology and has coached both Little League and youth soccer. He is looking forward to his career change and being a part of a highly professional and caring organization.

Welcome Ernie to the Team!

## Check These Dates

- January 7: Listen and Learn: “The Importance of Mentoring and Internship Opportunities” 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- January 10: Staff Training: “Domestic Violence As It Pertains to Persons with Disabilities” 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- January 21: Listen and Learn: “Work Incentives for Individuals with Disabilities” 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- January 24: Staff Training: “Real-Life Assistive Technology” 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- February 14: Staff Training: “Fibromyalgia” 3:30 P.M. – 4:30 P.M., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- February 18: Listen and Learn: “Building Financial Health” 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., NY

- February 28: Staff Training: “Instruction Technology- Part II” 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- March 4: Listen and Learn: “Workplace Accommodations – How and When to Ask for Them” 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY
- March 11: Listen and Learn: “Customer Service – It’s Importance on Any Job” 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., NY
- March 14: Staff Training, “12 Step Program – How It Works and Why It’s Effective” 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY

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If you are interested in attending a training program, please contact Karen Richter, Coordinator of Special Projects at (516) 465-1405 for a complete listing of the Abilities, Inc. 2005 training schedule.

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## Hired This Quarter:

Three customers have been hired this quarter. To date, they continue to utilize customized employment support, such as Job Coaching, travel training and transportation funds.

Date of Hire:	Job Title:	Starting Salary (Per Hour):	Accommodations/ CE strategies
10/15/04	Home Health Aide	\$9.00	Transportation Funds
10/27/04	Food Pantry Worker	\$5.15	Transportation Funds
12/27/04	Stock Clerk	\$8.00	Work Attire and Transportation Funds

## Where Are They Now? A Consumer Update...



Kyle with his Job Coach, Pam Sullivan  
Photo Credit: Abilities, Inc.

If you are a frequent reader of the WIT newsletter, you may recall a story a few months back about a consumer named Kyle (not his real name).

Kyle, who is a quite amiable young man with Cerebral Palsy, was one of the first referrals to HempsteadWorks' Customized Employment Program. The search for competitive employment had been a long road, made more difficult because of the sluggish economy. Kyle is a wheelchair user, has limited use of his hands, and his speech is quite difficult to understand. He faithfully attended Job Hunt Club meetings at HempsteadWorks where he learned about the job search process, disability and employment and successful interviewing strategies. Kyle regularly contributed at these meetings and, due to his great attitude and determination, quickly became a role model for his fellow job seekers, both those with and without disabilities.

Through grant funding, we were able to assess his skills, interests and assistive technology needs. Kyle revealed during a person-centered planning meeting that he had very limited work experience and was willing to explore any available opportunities. With all this in mind, the Placement Specialist developed an individualized employment plan and negotiated a clerical job try-out at a local church. His Job Coach had an idea of what he was capable of doing, however on the first day he accomplished things we had not even considered. His job tasks include photocopying, labeling and stuffing envelopes and inter-office mail delivery. His Job Coach consulted with an Occupational Therapist at Abilities' Kornreich Technology Center, and together they designed a device to hold envelopes in an open and upright position, which facilitates the insertion of papers with greater ease. Kyle continued with the job-tryout for several months and ultimately was offered a part-time paid position.

Kyle is a role model for all job seekers because of his steadfast determination to find work. While he was pleased about his job at the Church it was only part-time. Coincidentally with the Church hiring him, a well-known retail chain opened a store not far from his home. He decided he wanted to work there too. When the "Now Hiring" sign went up, he was practically first in line. He was interviewed and hired on the spot and has been working there since September on a part-time basis. He works primarily in the Electronics and Media Department, replenishing stock and making sure the inventory is in the right place.

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## Consumer Update continued

Kyle recently informed his Job Coach that he has memorized almost the entire department.

Between his two jobs Kyle is now out and working four days a week. He is financially more self-sufficient and has become a contributing member of society. In addition, since he began working, he seems to have gained a greater sense of purpose in his life. Due to these great strides in reaching his employment goals, Kyle was recently nominated for the Town of Hempstead Workforce Investment Board Biennial Continuous Improvement Award. Good luck, Kyle!

~Pam Sullivan, Job Coach

~Karen Richter, Program Coordinator

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## Innovation Without Boundaries

Assistive Technology is designed to provide additional accessibility to individuals who have physical and cognitive difficulties, impairments and disabilities. One form of assistive technology that may be added to a workstation is an alternative input device, which allows an individual to control their computer through means other than a standard keyboard or pointing device. Examples of alternative input devices include but are not limited to alternative keyboards, pointing system devices, and speech recognition programs.

Alternative keyboards allow individuals to input data into a computer by using varied sized keyboards, on-screen keyboards, alternative key configuration and keyboards for use with one hand. Mini or compact keyboards are for individuals with good motor control but poor range of motion. Compact keyboards generally have the QWERTY layout and are 50 – 80% of the size of a standard keyboard. An individual who cannot reach all the keys on a standard keyboard may benefit from the mini or compact boards. Expanded keyboards can benefit individuals who lack sufficient motor control and accuracy. Most expanded keyboards have membrane type layouts with large keys and more space between keys and can be customized according to the needs of the individual. On-screen keyboards are helpful for individuals who are not able to use a standard keyboard due to dexterity or mobility difficulties. On-screen keyboards are an image of a standard or modified keyboard displayed on the computer screen that allows the user to select keys with a mouse, joystick, touch screen or any other pointing device seen fit. One-handed keyboards benefit the user who is limited to one hand for all typing activities and can be customized to either left-handed or right-handed versions.

Pointing system devices are designed for users unable to type on a standard keyboard or unable to drive the mouse. Head pointer systems consist of a headset that is controlled through software. This software relies on the movement and aiming of the head to operate the computer system. The typical system consists of a pointer device and receiver that keeps track of head

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## Innovation w/o Boundaries continued

movements. The receiver translates the head movements into mouse movements, allowing an individual to move the mouse or enter text. Closing an adapted switch can access a desired object or icon. The adapted switch can be fired using any limb of the body, the wink of an eye, breath control stick or any other reliable body movement. Some point systems use timing to make selections. This system focuses on an object or icon for a specified time period. A pointer system may be programmed, allowing an individual to choose the time required to select an object.

Voice recognition systems allow people to give commands and enter data using their voices rather than a mouse or keyboard. Voice recognition systems use a microphone attached to the computer, which can be used to create text documents such as letters or e-mail messages, browse the Internet, and navigate among applications and menus through voice. Speech recognition software can be easily installed onto a PC as long as a sound card exists or is being installed simultaneously. There are two basic voice recognition systems, one that performs small-vocabulary dictation. Voice recognition systems capable of command and control function have a vocabulary of several hundred words and are suitable for controlling function application programs by voice. Voice dictations systems have vocabularies in the tens of thousands and cannot only be used to control a computer, but for document dictation as well. Many voice recognition programs must be trained. The training process allows the system to store voice patterns for recognition. In order to train this system, an individual

must use a microphone, speaking a prepared list one word at a time. The computer does require sufficient memory and stores the word list for later recognition.

From computers to communication devices to environmental controls, the world of technology offers many adults and children with disabilities the tools necessary to be more successful in school, at work, and at achieving independence in daily living.

~Jennifer Sulmonte  
Case Manager

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## Helping Hands

Living on Long Island can be expensive, especially during the winter months when the heating bills are costly. Many people with disabilities and low-income homeowners are concerned that after paying the mortgage, taxes and utilities bill, they do not have any money left for necessary repairs on their homes. In addition, due to disabilities, illness, aging, inflation or other uncontrollable causes, homeowners are often unable to do the repair work themselves and their homes have become unsafe and unlivable.

Rebuilding Together Long Island, Inc. offers to repair and rehabilitate homes of poor, elderly and disabled homeowners. It brings together people of all faiths and walks of life in an effort to assist people in need. The organization, which is non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-profit, serves the communities of Nassau and Suffolk Counties and is dedicated to restoring the homes of low-income

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## Helping Hands continued

homeowners who are elderly, disabled, and/or single-parent families, so they may continue to live in comfort with dignity and independence. Volunteers perform repairs in the following areas: electrical, plumbing, wall repair, weather-stripping, lock-smithing, carpentry, painting, glazing and construction of wheelchair access ramps. The Long Island Chapter of Rebuilding Together was started in 1992, and to date, they have helped over 1,000 homeowners and built over 40 wheel chair ramps.

Contact Information: Rebuilding Together  
Long Island, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1554  
North Massapequa, NY 11758  
(516) 541-7322 / (516) 741-5291

~Ivy Chang  
Disability Program Navigator  
(516) 485-5000 ext. 1141



Volunteers building a wheelchair ramp

## "The Benefits Corner"

### Proactive Approach to Reporting Wages to Social Security

Whether you are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, it is important that you report your earnings to the Social Security Administration to avoid getting into an overpayment situation. An overpayment is money that a recipient or beneficiary must pay back to Social Security when you received money that you were not entitled to receive.

According to Social Security regulations, all disability beneficiaries must report earned income or wages. In fact, for the SSI program the Social Security Administration yearly cross-references Social Security numbers of their beneficiaries with those on record with the Internal Revenue Service as having earned income over the past year. If wages show up, they will want to talk to you. Now there are a few differences when it comes to SSI and SSDI.... Since SSI is a needs-based program, for example, all resources and income (both earned and unearned) have a direct affect on benefits. Since SSDI is not a needs-based program, only wages from a job will

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## Reporting Wages continued

affect benefits. To avoid an overpayment with SSDI, it is important to keep track of where the beneficiary is in the work incentive process. Have they exhausted their Trial Work Period? Are they earning over the Substantial Gainful Activity level? Overpayments can add up into the thousands with SSDI because, unlike SSI, IRS records are only accessed during a Continuing Disability Review (CDR). Depending on your classification it may be as long as seven to ten years between reviews. Therefore, it is important to know where you are in the SSDI process and report income on an on-going basis.

Social Security offices can be slow about tracking wages. Even if you call and let them know, you may never hear from them again, or only after a couple of years have passed. The best advice is to take charge of your earnings reports yourself! Get written proof that you have reported your income or use certified mail. Keep accurate records, keep all W-2's, pay stubs, etc. of your wages. Keep your medical files current, document all on-going symptoms, so you can prove that you are still disabled even if you are working. Your best defense is well-kept documentation. If you notified Social Security that you returned to work and they failed to change your status, you can prove it with copies of postmarked letters and envelopes and copies of the forms that you sent to them.

The bottom line... if Social Security charges you with an overpayment, you will need accurate records to present your case. Social Security can attach (or garnish) federal income tax returns and future retirement benefits to collect on overpayments, and can also attach

wages. If you know you are getting checks you should not be getting, return them, because sooner or later they will want their money back.

For more information about income reporting or Social Security Work Incentives, contact a Benefits Specialist at Abilities' Work Smart: Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach Program at 516-465-1407. All services are free and confidential.

~Sheelagh Roache  
Senior Benefits Specialist

