



## People with Disabilities at Work

The Newsletter about Customized Employment  
For Persons with Disabilities

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

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Did you know that...in 2003, 70% of students with disabilities who had been out of school for up to two years had paying jobs, compared to only 55% in 1987 (U.S. Department of Education, National Longitudinal Transition Study, June 2005).

### What's New?

The Whatever It Takes (WIT) staff is pleased to announce the addition of four new customers receiving services through the WIT program. Nearly three-quarters 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, assistive technology and interpreting services.

### Check These Dates

- ☑ **September 30: Listen and Learn Series: "How to Ace an Interview" 2:15 pm – 3:15 pm at Abilities, Inc. in Albertson, NY**

- ☑ **October 7: Listen and Learn: "Getting Along With Co-Workers and Supervisors" 2:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m., at Abilities, Inc., Albertson, NY**

- ☑ **October 17: Staff Training: "Job Prospects on Long Island – the Ever Changing Labor Market" 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm at Abilities, Inc. in Albertson, NY**

- ☑ **October 21: Listen and Learn Series: "The Glass Half Empty – Staying Positive" 2:15 pm – 3:15 pm at Abilities, Inc. in Albertson, NY**

- ☑ **October 24, 25 and 26: SHRM 2005 Workplace Diversity Conference, Las Vegas, NV. Judy Young presenting**



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- ☑ **October 28, 29 and 30: National Rehabilitation Association Conference in Alexandria, VA. Judy Young and Jennifer Sulmonte are presenting about the WIT program**
- ☑ **November 17: Ernie Anderson of the WIT program will be giving a tour of Abilities, Inc. to representatives from the Nassau Community College Placement Office from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm. A meeting with the WIT staff will follow**
- ☑ **November 18: Listen and Learn Series: “Resumes, Cover and Follow Up Letters” 2:15 pm – 3:15 pm at Abilities, Inc. in Albertson, NY**
- ☑ **December 13: Employer Recognition Breakfast, 8:30 am at Abilities, Inc. in Albertson, NY**




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If you are interested in attending a training program, please contact Jennifer Sulmonte, Case Manager at (516) 465-1402 for a complete listing of the Abilities, Inc. 2005 training schedule.

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## Placed This Quarter:

The following customers were placed into competitive employment this quarter. Four continue receiving employment support, such as job coaching, transportation funds, and interpreting services until they reach full productivity and independence.

Type of Position	Type of Industry	Hourly Wage	Employment Support
Sales Associate	Retail Trade	\$7.50	Transportation Funds
Assembler	Wholesale Trade	\$8.00	Job Coaching and Transportation Funds
Assembler	Wholesale Trade	\$8.00	Job Coaching and Transportation Funds
Youth Employment Counselor	Education	\$15.00	Off-site Job Coaching, Transportation and Clothing Funds
Maintenance	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	\$7.50	Transportation and Clothing Funds
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## When Pursuing Employment, Is It Only Luck?

What measures the capacity of a customer's spirit to want work? Is it their determination or some inner need?

I guess the answer to what is the measurement lies in the many factors of the human spirit; what you inherit through the good fortune of nature; what you

assimilate from parents, friends, education or the right "breaks" in life. Some of these parts of life are what make our consumer, Juan (not his real name), who he is today.

Juan has faced several barriers to obtaining competitive employment including limited use of English and seizure disorder. As a result, for the past eighteen months he worked at a sheltered workshop. Because of the seizure disorder and concerns about his well-being at a job, it became apparent that customized employment had to be the plan.

Some of the attributes Juan developed as part of his life that he brought to the employment picture are honesty, dependability, willingness to learn and being a positive person. All those characteristics should make him a great candidate for employment, but that was not the case. It has taken Juan more than two years to find a competitive job.

This is where luck and customization stepped in by virtue of an organization named New York Sports Club and its General Manager and Customer Care Manager, each of whom were understanding of Juan's abilities and not concerned with physical limitations or that his English is marginal. They were concerned about hiring a candidate with a positive attitude; someone who not only could do the job but someone who could get along with other employees and club members.

When these Managers indicated their interest in hiring Juan, we asked for accommodations which they were very willing to give. They explained that their staff are all medically certified, town emergency services are readily available, Juan would never be left alone and he may take breaks as needed. It all fit together: a happy customer and an employee who will be a plus to the employer.

Juan is an achiever. It was his positive attitude and perseverance to achieve his goal of working that helped customized employment and good luck find him a job.

~Ernie Anderson  
Placement Specialist

## **Job Hunt Club: An Innovative Information Exchange**

The Whatever It Takes (WIT) Program is pleased to announce the completion of another successful Job Hunt Club (JHC). WIT Case Managers Jennifer Sulmonte and Lauren Wenzel facilitated a group of WIT customers, occasionally joined by customers of HempsteadWorks, during eight workshops pertaining to job search issues. Though individuals with disabilities are burdened with the same difficulties as able-bodied job seekers, there are additional issues to be taken into consideration. For example, individuals with disabilities are often times resistant to work because they are fearful of losing their Social Security benefits. This is why

the guest speaker at the first JHC on July 19, 2005 was Sheelagh Roache, Senior Benefits Specialist, who gave a presentation entitled "Work Smart Benefit Information." During this workshop, customers were able to discuss their concerns and dismiss any myths or misinformation they may have believed.

After realizing that sometimes supplementing their checks, or even working more hours and losing their checks, would actually mean *more* money, consumers moved on to workshops that prepared them for the journey that would bring them to that destination. In the following weeks, customers participated in interactive workshops on topics such as resume writing, cover and thank you letters, creating professional e-mail accounts, internet job search and cold calls, disclosure, VESID services (with guest speaker Tara Wachswender, VESID counselor), selling yourself to an employer, and on the job and job search etiquette.

The grand finale, on September 6, 2005, was a session for mock interviews that gave the customers a chance to apply all the concepts they learned throughout the workshops. Customers arrived appropriately dressed in interview attire and were each asked a series of questions. Afterward, each customer was critiqued, and all were very pleased to hear not only the praises, but the constructive criticisms as well.

Judging by how proficiently the customers utilized information from

previous sessions during the mock interviews, the JHC was once again proven to be a successful learning tool. We look forward to the next JHC, which is scheduled to take place during the summer of 2006.

~Lauren Wenzel  
Case Manager

## **An Accommodating Employer**

Many of the customers in the WIT program face serious barriers to employment. These barriers are often breached when a prospective employer agrees to make an accommodation for a qualified job candidate. For example, the height of a desk might be changed to accommodate a wheel chair; or extra lighting could be added for someone who has a vision impairment. For a deaf consumer, it might mean having an interpreter at interviews and then at the job site as the deaf consumer learns the job.

A number of months ago, Adeline Sorrentino, a very qualified secretary who is deaf, joined the WIT program with the hope that the customized employment services we offer could find her employment. As we started the job development process, WIT provided an interpreter at each of our meetings, as well as at each interview, so that we all could communicate effectively.

Adeline eventually obtained employment with the Floral Park Police Department. The Commissioner, Michael Reid, hired Adeline to work as a Clerical Secretary on a part-time basis. She worked with an interpreter for the first few days, but now is able to communicate well with the employer and other staff members. She is very pleased with her position and is hopeful it will become fulltime in the future.

Adeline's story is a success for two reasons: (1) she was capable and could do the job; and (2) the employer recognized a good job candidate and was willing to make an accommodation.

~Fanny Sermeno  
Placement Specialist