

APSE ECHO

Employment Choice Hope Opportunity



Summer 2006

A Message from the NJ APSE President

By Jennifer Joyce

I am so excited to have recently taken on the role of the President of the NJ APSE Board of Directors. Throughout my years in supported employment and my involvement with NJ APSE, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to interact with and learn from many of my predecessors and am honored to follow in their immense footsteps.

In the past few months there have been several indicators of the resurgence in the recognition of the importance of competitive employment in integrated settings for individuals with disabilities.

Governor Corzine signed both the Olmstead (S1090/A2947) and PRISE (S1220/A3010) bills into law on August 2, 2006. The Olmstead Bill requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to implement the Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision. Employment, and establishing the supports necessary for success in the workplace, must play an integral part in developing the plan for moving individuals out of the developmental centers and into the community. Because the PRISE Bill mandates that information about state agencies providing funding for adult services is included in the *Parental Rights in Special Education* (PRISE) booklet, every parent of a student receiving special education services will have access to this information that is so critical to a student's successful transition from school to work. The PRISE Bill also requires that at least one representative from each school district is identified as a resource on the adult service system for students and their families and that the schools conduct outreach to local community disability organizations and service providers.

State Agencies are continuing to make a commitment to competitive employment in integrated settings for individuals with disabilities. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services has streamlined their reporting documentation in an effort to encourage consistency between local offices, reduce paperwork time, and allow providers to devote more time to supporting individuals in gaining and keeping employment. The Division of Mental Health Services has committed to providing training and technical assistance to partial care providers throughout the state in an effort to increase the opportunities for individuals experiencing psychiatric disabilities to work competitively in their communities. The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) is in the process of revising the Supported Employment Manual and, through the leadership of Carol Grant and Kathie Szul, has reprioritized supported employment. These examples are just a few of the highlights, but I am confident that there will be more to come.

The National APSE Conference was held in Boston from June 28 – 30, 2006 and was filled to capacity with over 600 attendees! Appropriately enough, the theme for this year's event was *Employment For All: Start a Revolution*. It brought me great satisfaction to introduce myself to staff or Board members of the National Chapter of APSE because nearly everyone acknowledged the leadership role NJ APSE plays as one of the first, largest, and most involved state chapters. This role is only fulfilled due to our exceptional Board of Directors and passionate membership.

Inside this issue:		So, how do we continue this momentum? We begin with the understanding that every single one of us is an advocate . Every time we provide support to an individual with a disability on a job site, speak to an employer about a potential employee, talk to our friends or families about the work we do everyday, attend a meeting, training or conference, network with colleagues, write a letter to a legislator, or testify on employment for individuals with disabilities at a hearing, we are taking one more step closer to the ultimate goal of employment for ALL individuals. Continue to check your e-mail for Action Alerts, updates, and information from NJ APSE, get involved on one of the NJ APSE Divisions/Committees, thank your legislators and Governor Corzine for supporting the PRISE and Olmstead Bills and for remaining dedicated to employment for individuals with disabilities, keep your state agencies informed about the issues preventing employment for individuals with disabilities, and educate our communities about the unlimited employment capabilities of individuals with disabilities. If we all take the opportunity to do just one of these things , I am confident that the momentum will continue, and, ultimately, the employment statistics for individuals with disabilities will improve dramatically.
Encouraging Partnership	2	
NJ WorkAbility	2	
Governmental Affairs Update	3	
Governor Signs Bills	3	
National Conference	4	

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Encourage Partnership & Success!

By Lee Webster, Chief Rehabilitation Services/CRP Unit

One of the many valued strengths of the VR system is its continued ability to take on the challenges of extremely difficult barriers to employment that are brought on by the most severe disabilities. In meeting such challenges, detailed planning includes the utilization of a wide range of resources which, for the most part, are unnoticed by the public and even the consumers we serve.

DVRS continues to successfully adapt to a changing environment, and it is encouraging to see that we have maintained the support of our many community partners. As a group we have increased employment outcomes and brought about self-sufficiency for a vast number of consumers throughout the State of New Jersey.

Over the past few years we have seen advances among many of our Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) agencies. Some CRP agencies have accomplished major expansions of their operation and have increased the variety of VR services offered. It is a credit to the VR profession to see an expansion of options for the VR consumer rather than a reduction of opportunities and options.

DVRS has additionally made programmatic adjustments over the past few years to advance the efforts of our partner CRP agencies. These advancements include the rate increase for job coaching, overhaul of the job coach reporting forms, reorganization of the CRP unit, rate increase for extended employment, expansion of funding for mental health supported employment Long Term Follow Along, creating a mobilized version of the short-term comprehensive vocational evaluation, and the addition of five new fee-for-service supported employment agencies.

Now that the economy has begun to cause enormous pressures on limited resources, it is important to maximize partnerships while highlighting our mutual successes. Towards that effort, consideration should be given to enhanced visibility of our partnerships to the public. CRP agencies should consider adding DVRS to all literature and publications. VR professionals can also consider reminding consumers, employers, and other funding sources that DVRS is a major partner in the success of the consumer. We as a profession should continue to find inventive strategies to promote all the VR partners that are successful so that we can reverse the fact that our success often remains unnoticed by many in the public.

NJ WorkAbility

By Cynthia Mapp, Program Manager, Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Division of Disability Services

New Jersey Workability is a state and federally funded Medicaid buy in program that provides Medicaid benefits to individuals with permanent disabilities. To be eligible for NJ WorkAbility, a person must be between the ages of 16 & 64, be employed full or part time and have a permanent physical or mental disability. Individuals who are self employed are also covered but must provide documentation of self employment activity.

NJ WorkAbility covers all the medical and healthcare services available through Medicaid. Including but not limited to medications, durable medical equipment, outpatient counseling, medical transportation and personal care services.

An individual on NJ WorkAbility can now earn as much as \$49,020 annually, have liquid assets up to \$20,000 and still be fully eligible for Medicaid Health coverage. Social Security Disability Benefits are completely disregarded and cannot be counted towards unearned income. This allows individuals with disabilities to work and earn an income at a higher level than ever before and take advantage of job and career opportunities.

For additional information or to schedule presentations about NJ WorkAbility, please contact a NJ WorkAbility specialist at **1-888-285-3036 toll free or (609) 292-1210 (TTY)**.

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Governmental Affairs Update

By Michael Prendergast

The Governmental Affairs Division is in the process of preparing for the upcoming year and is looking for additional members to help out in its activities. Our first meeting to plan out our agenda for Fiscal Year 2007 will be held in August. If you are interested in participating please call Michael Prendergast, Division Chair at 732-246-2525 ext.18.

As some of you are aware, NJ's State Budget for FY 2007 did not budget for any mentionable increase in supported employment (SE) services. In fact the budget decreases SE for the Division of Developmental Disabilities by \$1 M. This cut is said to be due to underutilization of SE funds during the FY 2006 budget period.

Even though this news is not the best, SE did not see the drastic cuts that other services or programs saw in the final budget. For this development, NJ APSE has sent out thank you letters to the Governor and Legislators for their support for these important services and continues to advocate for increased SE funding in FY 2008's budget.

Some of the objectives for the NJ APSE Governmental Affairs Division for next year will be:

1. To again work with the Disability Budget Coalition on getting the message of the importance of SE out to the Governor, Legislators and Department Leaders.
2. To continue to provide testimony in support of the expansion of funding for SE services, on behalf of NJ APSE membership, at Legislative Hearings and Departmental Budget Forums.
3. To forward all pertinent action alerts to our membership
4. To work with the NJ APSE Board in reaching out to the new Commissioners of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Thank you for your continued support of NJ APSE and its efforts to keep NJ Government apprised of the importance of employment in the lives of NJ citizens with disabilities.

Governor Corzine Signs Two Significant Bills

By Jennifer Joyce

On August 2nd, Governor Corzine signed two bills affecting individuals with disabilities into law. Both bills, S1220/A3010 and S1090/A2947, will have an impact on supported employment. NJ APSE advocated in support of both bills.

The first bill, sponsored by Senators Rice and Turner and Assemblymen Cryan, Greenwald, and Schaer requires the NJ Department of Education (DOE) to include information about adult disability services in the *Parental Rights in Special Education* (PRISE) booklet that is distributed to parents every year. Specifically, the new law requires the PRISE booklet to include contact information and a description of services for the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Division of Mental Health Services, and the Division of Disability Services. This law, which goes into effect in 90 days, will help ensure that students and parents know about these important services *before* graduation, giving them more time to prepare for transition and apply for needed services. The law also requires that all school districts designate a staff member to serve as a "disability services resource" for parents. The designated staff member must be knowledgeable about adult disability services and must provide information and assistance to parents in contacting the relevant state agencies. Finally, the schools must conduct outreach to local community disability organizations and service providers. This bill is a great step in helping ensure that fewer students with disabilities fall through the cracks when it comes to transitioning into adult life because it empowers families early in the process and requires schools to become more involved in this part of transition.

The second bill, sponsored by Senators Rice and Vitale, Assemblymen Cryan, Gordon, and Manzo, and Assemblywoman Voss, requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to implement the Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision and develop a plan to move people out of developmental centers. According to DHS, about half of the individuals currently living in institutions (1,500 out of 3,000) are both ready and willing to move into the community. In putting together this plan, DHS has to determine what supports and services will be needed in order to successfully transition people into the community, and hold public hearings to get input from the community. Since competitive employment is a key component to successful community living, it will be critical that DHS hears from the supported employment community at those hearings.

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEW JERSEY APSE: THE NETWORK ON EMPLOYMENT

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National APSE Conference

By Sue Schwartz

The recent APSE conference was held in Boston this June 28 through the 30th. It was well attended by over 600 participants and had much to offer. "Start a Revolution" was the theme throughout, and there was much to enjoy, be inspired by, learn, and take home.

Seminars were provided on the essentials of Job Development as well as newer techniques in job creation and using innovative presentation tools to introduce prospective employees. Additional break-out sessions covered transitioning from school to work, financial goals and independence, and how to get the most from the Department of Labor's One-Stop Job Centers. Workshops on ethical, legal and political issues were also available.

Each morning a general session energized those in attendance. One particular session hosted by David Harp provided insight into how to change behaviors and neural pathways as well as learn to play the harmonica. Where else can you find a few hundred people rocking a room with everything from children's songs to Blues?

The APSE Dinner by the Sea on the Boston waterfront provided a great opportunity to mingle with colleagues throughout the nation, congratulate the award recipients, and enjoy lobster and other New England delights. David Harp was once again on hand to provide a musical tribute to each award winner.

The final day of the conference began with a membership meeting and breakfast and ended with the final general session presented by Geri Jewell. Geri, a comedian and actress, who was seen on "The Facts of Life" and is currently on "Deadwood", shared her personal experience of cerebral palsy to make everyone laugh, change attitudes, and tell the story of her journey to become a successful actress.