

Disability Issues

Volume 29 • No. 2

Fall 2009

Summer Internship gives Youth a Taste of Employment

By Susan M. Murray

Over the past summer 18 young people with disabilities had a chance to experience the world of work through internship opportunities in state government agencies. The Summer Youth Internship Program was coordinated by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). While this is not the first program of its kind, the Commission for the Blind has a similar program, this is the first to be funded with federal dollars.

Interns came primarily from the Greater Boston area and represented a cross section of disabilities such as neurological, learning disabilities, sensory disorders and others. Interns were paid a stipend, worked 25 hours a week and were paired with a mentor from the agency. Their jobs included a wide range of responsibilities including filing, answering the phones, research and interacting with other members of the agency. This program was a valuable learning opportunity in which interns gained both job skills as well as "soft skills." Some examples of these "soft skills" included integrating into the work culture, appropriate dress, managing their time, resume writing, and job hunting strategies.

Continued on page 8

Inside This Issue

Bill Filed Requiring Accessible Medical Equipment 1

Making Massachusetts a Model Employer for People with Disabilities

By Linda Long-Bellil

Within his first 30 days in office, Governor Patrick issued Executive Order 478, which reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to promoting diversity and equal opportunity for all individuals in every aspect of state government. It specifically commits to ensuring a more diversified workforce by conducting



better outreach, recruitment, promotion and retention of underrepresented groups of people in the workforce, including people with disabilities. This was good news to many in state government and in the community who had been working for years to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. To achieve this goal,

the Disability Task Force on Employment was established, which included key officials from within the Executive Branch representing the Human Resources Division, Massachusetts Office on Disability and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Office of Disability Policy and Programs.

In June of this year, the Governor issued a "Strategic Plan to Make Massachusetts a Model Employer for People with Disabilities." Written by the Task Force, this plan outlined the following three main goals to affirmatively enhance the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities, including those who age into disability:

Seek to increase the number of people with disabilities employed by the Executive Branch; Explore methods to ensure the successful retention and promotion of state workers with disabilities and older workers who age into disability; Foster an environment and a workforce able to support and facilitate the employment of people with disabilities.

Continued on page 6

PASS Program Promotes Employment

By Barbara Lee

In response to the 1999 Ticket to Work legislation Social Security implemented a number of programs that make it easier for beneficiaries with disabilities to work without sacrificing benefits. One of these work incentives is called a Plan for Achieving Self Support or PASS Plan described here.

What is a PASS Plan? A PASS Plan is a work incentive developed by Social Security to help SSI recipients work. It allows people with disabilities or blindness to set aside resources and/or various kinds of income for a specified period of time to use toward an occupational work goal or to start a business. A PASS Plan can help an individual to achieve a work goal and become self-sufficient.

Who is eligible for a PASS Plan? Anyone who wants to work and receives SSI, or can qualify for SSI once they have a plan is eligible. Anyone who is disabled or blind; who has or will soon have money other than SSI to set aside to get a job, or to get specialized training for a job or who wants to start a business may qualify as well.

How does a PASS Plan work? Under the SSI rules, any income that an individual has may reduce their SSI payment; but with an approved PASS Plan money can be set aside and used to pay for the items needed to reach the individual's work goal(s). The SSI rules state that an individual can not have resources, money or things, worth more than \$2,000.00 for an individual and \$3,000.00 for a couple. With an approved PASS Plan, Social Security will not count this money that is set aside when determining SSI eligibility or benefit amount. This could mean receiving a higher SSI payment, but not more than the maximum for the state where the beneficiary resides. With a PASS Plan, these resources may be used to pay for items or services needed to reach a work goal and will not count against the income limits stated above, allowing an individual to remain or become SSI eligible.

What are the work expenses the PASS Plan can pay for?

Examples of things allowed in a PASS Plan are:

- Employment Services: such as job coaching, job search, relocation expenses
- School or Training: tuition, supplies, books, fees or costs related to training such as tutoring, testing,
- Transportation to and from work: public, private, leasing or purchasing a vehicle
- Equipment and tools needed to do the job
- Attendant care
- Child care

How does a person set up a PASS Plan? The PASS Plan application is available from Social Security. Anyone can help you write a PASS Plan such as a Benefits Specialist or anyone who has contracts with Social Security, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or Specialist. Vocational Rehabilitation can support the feasibility of the plan, therefore making approval of the plan easier for Social Security. To locate a Benefits Specialist near you go to this link:

<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>

What is the approval process? After the application has been submitted, a Social Security expert called PASS Cadre will review the plan. They will decide if the plan will be successful and if there is a good chance that the work goal can be achieved. They are careful to review the expenses and determine if they are reasonable and if any changes need to be made. The PASS Cadre can also help the individual find a vocational specialist and will assist in the process.

Beneficiaries are notified in writing if the plan is approved. If the plan is denied then there is an appeals process and/or the plan can be revised and resubmitted. The PASS Cadre will be in touch on a regular basis to be sure that the plan is being followed. Changes can be made to the approved plan but they must be in writing and they will need to be approved by Social Security.

To find a PASS Cadre near you: go to
www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/passcadre.htm

If you or someone you are working with is interested in writing a PASS Plan and/or getting more information, go to these helpful websites: www.passonline.org or www.passplan.org or www.ssa.gov/work

This is one of a series of articles highlighting Social Security work incentives.

Barbara Lee is a Certified Community Work Incentive Coordinator at BenePlan, a program of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Disability Issues

Vol. 29, No. 2 • Fall 2009

Disability Issues is a joint publication of the Medicaid and Comprehensive Employment Opportunities Infrastructure Grant (MI-CEO) located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School Center for Health Policy & Research, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. The MI-CEO Grant is funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and administered by UMASS Medical School Center for Health Policy and Research; UMASS Boston Institute for Community Inclusion; and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (CMS CFDA #93-768). For more information visit www.MI-CEO.org.

Feel free to reprint articles. When doing so, please credit *Disability Issues* (Vol., No. and Date). For articles that appear under a byline or that will be altered in any way, please obtain permissions from the editor. Any inclusion or exclusion of a particular entity, product or service in this newsletter does not constitute endorsement or opposition.

Editor: Paul Kahn

Editorial Board:

Bill Henning
Raymond E. Glazier
Linda Long-Bellil
Mary Mason
Maura Mone
Susan Murray
Sandy Novack
J. Archer O'Reilly III
Meryl Perlson
Nancy Schock
Carolyn Thompson

Contributors:

Bill Allen
Ray Glazier
Linda Long-Bellil
Maura Mone
Susan Murray
Sandy Novack



From the Editor: The Benefits of Work

There is nothing like the lack of something to make you appreciate it. Because I have been sick for much of the last several months, I have not been able to work, and now I fully understand how many ways I miss it.

My work consists of editing and writing in a variety of genres. It gives me a sense of purpose and productivity. It enables me to interact with other people on a respectful collegial basis-- with my editorial boards, with my contributing writers, with my production team, with the directors of my plays and with the people who edit my poetry and prose. Work also creates a structure for my time. And, of course, it also pays, which helps to keep me clothed and fed.

This October as we celebrate Disability Employment Month I am thinking about all those benefits of work. We have a right to enjoy them as much as anybody else. So, let us recommit ourselves to better education, better access, all the ways of creating equality of opportunity for disabled workers.

I look forward to meeting you.

Paul Kahn

Finding Work in a Weak Economy: Is Telework for You?

By Linda Long-Bellil

In the midst of a deep recession, those of us with significant disabilities may feel that a job search is the last thing on our minds. U.S. Census estimates are that only 30.7 percent of working age persons with severe disabilities are employed, compared to 83.5 percent of working age persons without disabilities. Yet Harris Polls commissioned by the National Organization on Disability have repeatedly found that roughly twice that many persons with disabilities aspire to work and feel capable of holding down a job. The disparity has grown larger as disability employment trends have ironically continued to decline in these post-ADA years. And it's a fact that our unemployment rate is more than half again as high as that of persons without disabilities. Putting these factoids together paints a less than encouraging picture of what is obviously not a level playing field in the job market. So, what's a person to do who yearns for the self-respect, satisfaction, and, yes, income that a job would provide?

The MA Medicaid Infrastructure and Comprehensive Employment Opportunities grant mounted a research initiative on Telecommuting and Telework in order to explore the potential of this relatively new work management tool for enhancing the employability of persons with disabilities. Progressive employers have harnessed new technology to enable employees on travel, or otherwise out of the office temporarily, to perform their usual job duties from a distance, in positions in industries that can accommodate the practice. (It'd be hard to do carpentry remotely). But in many service industry jobs there is no reason for office confinement, given cell phones, fax machines, PDAs, and computers with Internet access.

Telecommuting is a growth phenomenon that benefits workers (job flexibility),

Continued on page 7

Disability Issues

Information Briefs

Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) now Department of Developmental Services (DDS)

This June the state of Massachusetts officially changed the name of the state agency formerly known as the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The department primarily provides services to adults and children with intellectual disabilities in areas such as employment, residential living and community supports.

Mental Retardation is increasingly seen as a negative term by disability advocates and the term “intellectual disability” has largely replaced it. By renaming the agency, the state of Massachusetts showed a willingness to abandon the outdated terminology. According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human services, the agency’s new name reflects the importance of promoting dignity and respect for people with intellectual disabilities. They also stated that the new name better reflects the broad range of services and supports offered by the agency.

"Today marks a new beginning as we join a broad coalition of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, advocates, and lawmakers in celebrating the Department of Developmental Services' new name," said Governor Deval Patrick on June 13, 2009. "It is an exciting day for all of us who support providing individuals with intellectual disabilities the dignity they and their families deserve."

Massachusetts Local Named to Management Spot in Obama Administration

Massachusetts local Christine Griffin was confirmed by the Senate this August as the new Deputy Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The office oversees the entire federal workforce and advocates for innovative Human Resources practices at the national level.

Griffin, who was most recently a Commissioner on the national Equal Opportunities Employment Commission (EOC), was a strong Massachusetts advocate for disability

rights before heading to Washington. She served as the director of the Boston-based Disability Law center from 1996 to 2004 and notably returned to the state last year at an event organized by the local grassroots organization “Employment Now” to speak to residents about promoting practices to make the state and federal government a model employer of people with disabilities.

Adapted from an AP article

Council's PCA Referral Directory Goes Live!

On Wednesday, August 12, 2009, the PCA Workforce Council's on line PCA referral directory became operational. (See Disability Issues, Spring 2009) MassHealth members using PCA services will have free access to a searchable database of workers seeking employment as PCAs. PCA consumers without computers will receive assistance from Personal Care Management agencies under contract with MassHealth, Independent Living Centers, ASAPs and similar agencies. The directory is available in Spanish as well as English.

Go to www.mass.gov/findpca. Click on, "How it works." Help is also available by calling toll-free 1-866-212-WORK (9675) or emailing eparker@rewardingwork.org or by calling the Council at 617 210-5715.

Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative Launches New Web Site!

In October Work Without Limits, A Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative will be launching its new website www.workwithoutlimits.org on Monday, October 26, 2009. Work Without Limits is a public/private partnership that brings together people with disabilities, family members, policy researchers, policy makers, service planners, employment service providers, employers and other stakeholders to maximize work opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, addresses the needs of employers and strengthens the Massachusetts workforce. Founding partners in this initiative include the University of Massachusetts, (The University of Massachusetts Medical School and The University of Massachusetts Boston) and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The Work Without Limits web site will be launched in October in con-

Information Briefs

junction with the month long focus on employment for people with disabilities. Information about work incentives, benefits and employment is targeted to all three major stakeholders; people and their families, employers, and service providers.

Zola Drop in Center Announces Programs for People with Disabilities

The Irving K. Zola Center for Persons with Disabilities, 20 Hartford Street, Newton Highlands, MA 02461 was created in January 2006 to provide a location for persons with disabilities to congregate, socialize and participate in the community.

The Zola Center is a social drop-in center open on Saturday afternoons from Noon-4:00 P.M. and staffed by volunteers. In 2008, the Zola Center won a nationwide grant sponsored by Avon Products, Inc., to encourage persons with disabilities to participate in Amateur (Ham) Radio for communication and hobby. Through collaboration with Boston Amateur Radio Club a "License in a Weekend" study workshop was held to prepare persons with disabilities to take the FCC license exam. A second workshop is being planned for Fall 2009. Full scholarships are available for women with disabilities to take the workshop, license exam and purchase radio equipment.

The Zola Center is pleased to announce the creation of a Free Food Distribution Program through collaboration with the Brookline Food Co-op. Registration, by telephone or e-mail is required to receive free food. Walk-ins can not be accommodated. Food is donated from local supermarkets, bakeries and restaurants. Actual food items will vary. Sample items may include fresh fruit, vegetables, and bread and bakery items. The Zola Center needs volunteers to set up tables and organize food in the morning and break down tables and sweep the floor in the afternoon. Volunteers will be allowed to obtain their food prior to the public opening.

For more information; contact Donna Suskawicz, Director, at (617) 277-5131 or zolacenter@juno.com

Source: Justice for All

New Bill Seeks to Curb Discrimination Among State Contractors

It is no secret that people with disabilities have a significantly lower rate of employment than people without disabilities. Although Massachusetts agencies, such as Departments of Mental Health and Mass Rehab Commission, spend millions of dollars on providing employment services to people with disabilities, experience shows that barriers to employment still remain in some of the very community agencies that are contracted with the Commonwealth.

With that in mind, Jim O'Day Worcester area Representative sponsored a bill - requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish standards for hiring and reporting on hiring people with disabilities as part of the contracting process. The legislation does not set quotas, but instead relies on the principle of shining a bright light on practices that do not meet either the letter or the spirit of law and regulations.

In June, Disability Policy Consortium Assistant Director, Robyn Powell testified before the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities describing her experience of seeking employment after completing her degree with honors in social work:

"...Some outwardly expressed their reluctance to hire me because of my wheelchair, while others never returned repeated follow-up calls. This pattern continued for six months: I went on over 30 interviews, all with human service providers that acted as vendors of the then-DMR."

The Employment Now Coalition celebrated a victory when Governor Patrick announced a plan to make the Commonwealth a Model Employer of people with disabilities and expressed support in principle for HB164. Together, we can make employment in the human services sector a reality. At the time of this writing HB164 sits in the Massachusetts' House Ways and Means Committee. Please call or write your Legislator to express support for HB164 to help this bill move forward.

Model Employment - *continued from page 1*

The Task Force identified more than 25 objectives necessary to achieve these goals. Central to all of them was the need for the Executive Branch to foster a welcoming environment for persons with disabilities as valuable contributors to the labor force, and an informed state workforce able to support and facilitate their employment. The Task Force noted that “people with disabilities must have the ability to identify themselves to managers without fear of stigma, reduced expectations or opportunities.”

Creating this environment requires educating managers and co-workers about disability and non-discrimination and dispelling widely held misinformation and myths to cultivate an open and accepting culture. As part of this initiative, the administration created a Reasonable Accommodations Capital Reserve Account that will support agencies’ efforts to promptly and effectively accommodate new employees with disabilities and newly disabled existing employees. Enhancing existing outreach to and recruitment of applicants with disabilities and ensuring that the hiring process effectively identifies qualified applicants with

disabilities are also key to the success of this initiative. Not only will the Commonwealth work to include more people with disabilities in permanent positions, but also in internship programs, which provide valuable work experience. In addition, the Commonwealth is considering implementing a mentoring program that would be designed to encourage the participation of individuals with disabilities.

This Strategic Plan places Massachusetts on the forefront of this issue along with other pioneering states such as Maine

and Minnesota and has generated great excitement within state government and the community alike.

Paul Dietl, Director of Human Resources, recently stated that “while the names of most of our employees with disabilities are unknown to us, their efforts are revealed every day in the work our state does to provide needed services and resources to our communities. I am committed to implementing Executive Order 478 and to eliminating discriminatory barriers in the workplace.”

“As the state’s lead agency on employment of persons with disabilities, I am thrilled to be part of this administration, which has shown such dedication and hard work in putting together this comprehensive plan to recruit, hire and retain employees with disabilities in state government,” said Charles Carr, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, “As the largest employer in the Commonwealth, we have the opportunity to encourage the private sector to partner with us in including people with disabilities in the workforce.”

Bill Henning, Co-Chair of the Employment NOW Coalition, a grassroots advocacy group which focuses on employment, stated, “We look forward to supporting the Commonwealth in its efforts to hire and retain people with disabilities.”

It is also a critical piece of the Governor’s Olmstead Plan which promotes community living for people with disabilities. With the efforts of state agencies aligned toward these goals, people with disabilities have more opportunity than ever to achieve their goals and become productive and full members of the community.

Subscribe to Disability Issues

Disability Issues is available without charge to anyone who finds it useful and interesting.

To request a print or e-mail subscription, please write to

Center for Health Policy and Research
University of Massachusetts Medical School
333 South Street, Shrewsbury,
Massachusetts 01545

call (508) 856-5763/voice or go to www.masschec.org

Disability Issues is also available on tape and in large print. To receive either of these special formats, contact the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library at 1-800-852-3133 or e-mail library@perkins.org. To view *Disability Issues* on-line go to www.masschec.org.

Employment and Telework Resources

TeleWork Advisory Group of WorldatWork:
Research and Resources
www.workingfromanywhere.org/

Telework Tools: A Comprehensive Toolkit to Telecommuting:
www.teleworktools.org/

EEOC - Work At Home/Telework as a Reasonable Accommodation:
www.eeoc.gov/facts/telework.html

NTI -Work-at-Home Jobs for Americans with Disabilities:
(Information for Vocational Rehabilitation counselors and for potential contractors, on-line application for training and employment)
www.nticentral.org/

Expediter – Offers injured individuals sub-sedentary, gainful employment independent of the constraints and hassles of in-office hours or on-site supervision. Submit resumes at:
www.expeditercorp.com/career/index.html

MITE – Telecommuting: A Work Option for Persons with Disabilities: (research findings, assessment tools, how-to manuals, seminars)
www.mite.org/telecommutdisabilities/telecommutdisabilities.html

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Vocational assessment, training, job placement and other supports.

Keeping your MassHealth coverage while employed; learn about CommonHealth and other Employment resources.
www.masschee.org/index.aspx

employers (lower overhead costs) and society (less commuting pollution and wear and tear on transportation infrastructure). Some 45 million Americans worked remotely at least one day in 2006, and 28.7 million of these worked in this mode at least once per month. Telework refers to jobs that are performed entirely from home using technological hookups – call center positions in work like customer service, word processing, computer programming, accounting, billing, claims processing, data entry, dispatching, editing, filling orders, researching, report writing, scheduling, transcription, graphics, auditing, and record-keeping.

Telework is, in fact, a Universal Design concept, a broad-spectrum design feature that is beneficial to the general population, but is particularly helpful to persons with disabilities as diverse as agoraphobia, MS, or quadriplegia. Among the benefits:

Fewer distractions and interruptions, Scheduling flexibility, No commute, Part-time work opportunity, No dress code (work in your pajamas). Turnover is high (30 percent per year) in the call center industry, partly because many call center agents cannot tolerate it on a full-time basis. This works to the advantage of job seekers with disabilities in two ways: 1) There are a goodly number of job openings at any given time, and 2) The industry standard is now part-time employment, which puts money in workers' pockets without reaching the threshold that would mean a loss of Social Security benefits and other benefits.

A fairly new business model is the education and training / job brokerage organization typified by the nonprofit National Telecommuting Institute (NTI) of Boston. NTI places Telework trainees most often in one of its contractual call center operations for businesses and government agencies for example, booking reservations, or taking tax form

orders for the IRS. NTI, in most cases, functions as a virtual staffing agency to the hiring organization and is the consumer's employer of record. NTI operates nationally as a Ticket to Work Employer Network (EN) and typically receives referrals from state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies (MRC here) of consumers interested in Telework from home, or direct applications through its website (see sidebar). NTI only accepts applicants for whom it has job openings identified through its job development activities with employers. Applicants must have a good telephone voice, a pleasant manner, enjoy working with people to solve problems, and be able to reliably maintain an agreed-upon work schedule.

Once an applicant has been screened for eligibility and a target job placement identified, NTI provides, under a Ticket or at the VR agency's expense, a training program of variable duration, depending on entry skill levels, in Telework. The training that NTI or the employer provides is job specific and typically paid at \$7.00 per hour. Agents transition to full wages (\$8.50-\$15.00 per hour) once they begin performing actual work. The training that NTI and/or the employer provides assumes a basic level of computer literacy and working knowledge of standard business software and communications protocols.

If Telework appeals to you, check out the information resources on the Internet and discuss the options with your VR counselor. Beware of any work-from-home scheme that asks you to front money for training, equipment, or materials.

*Raymond E. Glazier, Ph.D., often telecommutes from his home office (See: *The Pleasures and Perils of Working from Home, Disability Issues, Spring 2007*), both of necessity and as a convenience, in his position as Director of the Abt Associates Center for the Advancement of Rehabilitation and Disability Services, Cambridge, MA.*

Summer Internship - continued from page 1

Interns were able to learn more about their own strengths and how to match their skills and interests with a job. Additionally, the interns attended weekly luncheon meetings with speakers from executive branch including Commissioner Carr and Secretary Bigby.

Among the state agencies participating in the pilot program were the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the Executive Office of Finance, Department of Revenue, the Governor's Office of Civic Affairs, the Department of Industrial Accidents, the Secretary of State's office. The intern positions were located at these agencies within Boston. Bill Noone, Director of Research and Development at MRC, was very pleased with the intern who worked for him. He said of the program; "Evan did an outstanding job assembling research data to support the development of a new program designed to assist people with disabilities going to work, the Summer Youth Internship Program provided Evan with an opportunity to gain work skills and experience."

The Summer Youth Internship Program offered indispensable lessons that can be applied to future programs. Lorraine

Barra, Northeast Director of MRC and a co-leader for the program, described it as "labor intensive but a very positive experience" overall. An evaluation is currently underway; Lorraine hopes the program will be replicated and even expanded to afterschool and school vacation programs.

Susan Murray is a Project Director for Work Without Limits, an initiative of the University of Massachusetts and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Disability Issues

Center for Health Policy and Research
University of Massachusetts Medical School
333 South Street, Shrewsbury, MA 01545

Nonprofit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Worcester, MA
Permit No. 176

Olmstead Enters Double Digits

By Linda Long-Bellil

June 22, 2009 was the tenth anniversary of the Olmstead decision by the United States Supreme Court. Over two hundred people rallied at the Massachusetts State House that day to show their interest in Olmstead and moving it forward. What follows is a brief overview of the history surrounding Olmstead, as well as an interview with Bill Henning, Executive Director of the Boston Center for Independent Living, in which he gives his perspective and reflections on Olmstead.

Tommy Olmstead was the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources in the state of Georgia. The two plaintiffs were women with mental illness. Both were determined by mental health professionals to be able to be treated in a community-based setting, but the state of Georgia argued they should be housed and treated in an institution. The defendants claimed the plaintiffs had been denied community placements due to inadequate funding and not because of disability discrimination. Institutionalization, however, can lower the quality of life of people, curtailing their ability to participate in their community socially, job-wise, and every other way, hence isolating, constricting, and financially limiting the life and growth of people. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the plaintiffs because segregating them in an institution was a form of discrimination under Title II of the ADA.

Novack: What was the significance here?

Henning: The ADA provides for full integration of the highest degree possible. The Supreme Court agreed; you can not segregate people in institutions. Advocates now had a tool to say to states: "You must provide community-based service and not hide people away." The state wasn't complying, (there were two further notable cases)—the Rolland case, and also the Hutchinson case involving people with brain injury.

Novack: What is happening now in Massachusetts?

Henning: Governor Deval Patrick came out with the Community First Olmstead Plan, because the state needs a road map to further comply with Olmstead.

(note: "'Opportunity (to live in the community) and choice are at the heart of both the Olmstead ruling and our 'Community First' agenda,' said Governor Deval Patrick. 'Our new plan helps reform the way we deliver long-term care.'" From HYPERLINK "<http://www.mass.gov>" www.mass.gov: "Patrick Administration Plan Promotes Community Living Options for Individuals with Disabilities and Elders.")

Novack: Where are we now?

Henning: That's the ten million dollar question. Are we half full or half empty? We have an administration pledged to close institutions like Fernald, and I give credit for this. But, there are barriers to getting into programs. There are 30,000 people in nursing homes, but there could be more nursing home diversion. A shortage of housing keeps people in nurs-

ing homes, or keeps people in substandard situations in shelters. My point is it's not just an issue of in and out of institutions, but the highest quality of living. I applaud Patrick's support of health reform, but there can be limited pieces of the pie. If the economy improves, there will be more money to go around. Advocates must continue to push for nursing home diversion.

Novack: The spirit here...

Henning: The spirit of the ADA is independence and quality of life. It is not just having people out of institutions because, for example, no accessible transportation leaves people institutionalized at home.

The ADA is a prescription on what a program should be to be successful. It was a statement that people have a right to be productive and fully participate in the community. People with disabilities should not be considered second class citizens. People with disabilities should not just accept things. Good public education is needed.

Novack: Steve Gold and others have compared the black civil rights movement to the struggles of people with disabilities. Any comment?

Henning: There are similarities, but it is dangerous to analogize it. We can not mirror another civil rights movement. Disability issues are different. And, we must sell NEW answers these days.

Novack: If a person with a disability is reading this now, what would you want to tell him?

Henning: We need people with disabilities to push relentlessly. The government will respond, but there are competing voices for government's attention, so people with disabilities must learn to be heard by speaking up, put yourself on the public agenda. There are limited resources, and homelessness, women's rights, the move to end wars—they are all good issues—but we must have disability issues heard.

Be engaged. If you have ten dollars, make a donation. Write letters, make calls to legislators.

A community is made up of activists, community organizations, but people with disabilities must speak up themselves, too. There's the Star Trek line: "Boldly go where no one has gone before." So say to yourself "I'm going to go on the bus in a wheelchair and people will see me." I went to a wedding where people with disabilities were dancing and being seen; they were demanding to be normal. You would not have seen this years ago, people would have been segregated. (Again), Olmstead is about living in the community.

Sandy Novack is a member of the Editorial Board, and is a geriatric social worker in Greater Boston.