

Disability Issues

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Spring 2013

Demystifying The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)

By Karen Beth Mael and Bill Allen

The mission and vision of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is to promote quality, empowerment and independence of individuals with disabilities. These goals are achieved through enhancing and encouraging personal choice and the right to succeed or fail in the pursuit of independence and employment in the community. The MRC provides comprehensive services to people with disabilities that maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community. This is achieved by utilizing three unique divisions of the MRC which work synergistically to achieve individual goals as self determined by the individual with a disability.

The Three Divisions

Community Living Services (CL)

This division works with a myriad of programs to empower individuals with disabilities to live independently within the community. Some of the programs include Home Care; Brain Injury and Specialized Community Services; Protective Services; Independent Living Services, Home Care Services; Assistive Technology; Independent Living for individuals Turning 22; and Consumer Involvement.

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Pathways to Employment Through Sports

By Oz Mondejar

As a child growing up with a disability, in my case a birth related limb difference, I was used to having to "sit on the sidelines" in so many aspects of our society in terms of access and inclusion. One area in particular that was very difficult especially as a child was sports. When my classmates would be selected for teams I would quite literally sit off to the side, not included in any way. The camaraderie and confidence that came from performing as part of the team were lessons I did not even know I was missing. That is until I grew up and as an adult found myself competing in the work place with my peers who did have the chance to learn those lessons. That's why I was so thrilled

to see the recent news by the US Department of Education mandating schools must include students with disabilities in sports programs or provide equal alternatives such as adaptive sports.

I think the quote from Education Secretary Arne Duncan included in the announcement sums up why I feel so strongly that this is important.

"Sports can provide invaluable lessons in discipline, selflessness, passion and courage, and this guidance will help schools ensure that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to benefit from the life lessons they can learn on the playing field or on the court."

The ripple effects of this new law will be felt in our society for years to come. As the children with disabilities today in school someday enter the work force, they will have stronger attributes on par with their peers that will allow them to succeed in whatever their chosen path. The simple act of being included will give them confidence everywhere from the classroom to the boardroom.

Another positive impact for both children and the community with disabilities

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Participant at the annual Spaulding Rehab, Mass General and New England Revolution Youth with Disabilities Soccer Clinic.

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Disability Determination Services (DDS)

The DDS Division is funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and determines the initial and continued eligibility for federal SSI and SSDI benefits. Special outreach efforts are made to homeless shelters and individuals with HIV.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program assists people who have a disabling condition who would like to find or return to work. VR also works closely with employers in the community to help create job openings and to help increase employer awareness regarding the benefits of diversity in the workplace.

The Pathway to Work...

A vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) will meet with you from one of our 25 field offices located throughout the Commonwealth at a designated time. He or she is a highly qualified professional who is trained to work with people with disabilities to develop a plan to meet specific career goals, such as yours. The VRC will work with you and identify your strengths, limitations and barriers to employment. He or she will determine with you the services necessary to help you achieve your goals and assist you in entering or re-entering the world of work.

Becoming Eligible for Services

Within 60 days after you have signed your application, you will be notified in writing that you are either eligible or ineligible to receive services.

What Is The Next Step?

You and your counselor may start by having a series of meetings. Every service provided is based on your skills, abilities, needs and preferences.

"Informed Choice" Decision Making

Informed choice means you have obtained all the information you need through the Vocational Assessment process to make sound decisions about your career path. You and your counselor will work as partners and may have several meetings to discuss the details of your employment plan. When the process is completed, you should have a thorough understanding of your job options and an awareness of all the services available from which you may choose. You and your VR counselor will now be ready to finalize and agree on your Individual Plan for Employment (IPE).

Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)

What is an Individual Plan for Employment? It is a document in which you and your counselor list your employment goal, specifying your responsibilities, as well as the services the MRC is responsible for to help you become employed. It is an agreement between you and the MRC-VRS Program. Open communication with one another is important. If something happens that slows down your progress, contact your VR counselor immediately.

Getting and Keeping a Job

As the services in your IPE come to a close, you and your counselor will be discussing going to work. During this time you will be preparing to go on job interviews, designing a resume and learning techniques about interviewing for a job. You and your counselor will work together in this very important step - getting a job!

Once you become employed, if you have any difficulty on the job, notify your counselor immediately so he or she can assist you. Your counselor may be able to help you with problems such as transportation, reasonable accommodations, additional training and support services like job coaching to help you on the job. It is important that you understand what your employer expects of you and if you choose to disclose your disability.

Exercising Your Rights

You may seek resolution of problems or disagreements about your rehabilitation services by contacting your counselor, counselor's supervisor and/or the office manager. You have a right to appeal any action or inaction affecting your rehabilitation services. You must make a written request for appeal within 30 days of being notified of a change in, or denial of, services.

For more information about MRC Programs and Services please contact us at:
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mrc/
or call 617-204-3600.

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From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Spring is finally here and soon we'll be enjoying the warmth and sunshine of summer. We invite you to "get physical" this summer. In this issue, we provide resources for adaptive soccer, baseball, golf, and gardening.

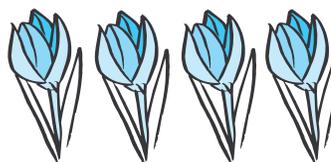
The benefits of exercise and sports are numerous. There are the obvious enhancements to physical and mental functioning. In addition, there are individual and professional development skills that we don't often consider. The article, "Pathways to Employment Through Sports", illuminates how participating in sports benefits us in all aspects of our lives – from the classroom to the boardroom.

Dr. Cheri Blauwet is one example of someone who embodies skills she developed participating in competitive sports in her professional career. She is a Paralympic athlete, marathon winner, and medical physician. In addition to benefiting her own career, Cheri uses her experiences of facing challenges and achieving success to contribute to the overall healthcare she provides to her patients.

Have you ever wanted a short, concise overview of the many services provided to individuals with disabilities by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)? We are delighted to bring you just what you've been looking for! MRC contributes an article to help you to understand their three divisions, know what's available, and a brief description of each service.

Enjoy the longest days of the year. See you outside!

Marianne DiBlasi, Editor



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Soil is Good for the Soul

By Susan Murray

One of the many rewards for living through a winter in the Northeast is, spring. Almost overnight it seems buds appear on the trees and daffodils and crocuses poke through the earth. My heart cheers as they tenaciously push through a late snow and I am itching to get out and get my hands in the dirt, my face in the sun and my heart communing with nature. Gardening provides not only food for my table but a tranquil and colorful setting to enjoy the outdoor weather.

There are numerous articles on the emotional as well as the physical benefits of gardening. A wise person once said; "to nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but also the soul". Gardening has proven therapeutic for people with depression and even Alzheimer's dementia. However, anyone who has a garden will tell you that although their psyche might feel uplifted after a day tilling the soil, their body aches.



I am considered "able-bodied" and have noticed with each passing year it becomes more difficult to spend as much concentrated time digging, stooping, kneeling and hauling.

I wondered if something existed to help people with physical disabilities enjoy working the soil and grow a garden. Perhaps, I too would benefit from incorporating more accessibility functionality into my gardening. It would certainly help me to continue doing what I love well into my later years, especially if I develop age-related physical impairments. This led me on a quest to see what's available.

Sometimes the simplest ideas yield the most remarkable solutions. Just ask Raymond LaRoque, a gardening enthusiast who refused to let a cane and, eventually, a wheelchair deprive him of his passion for gardening. After a spinal cord injury took him out of a career in sales, a friend who knew of his interest in gardening built him a box on stilts and filled it with dirt. With a garden on stilts, the soil was at a level he



"I could no longer reach down to my garden, so I brought the garden up to me!"

Raymond LaRoque
Founder

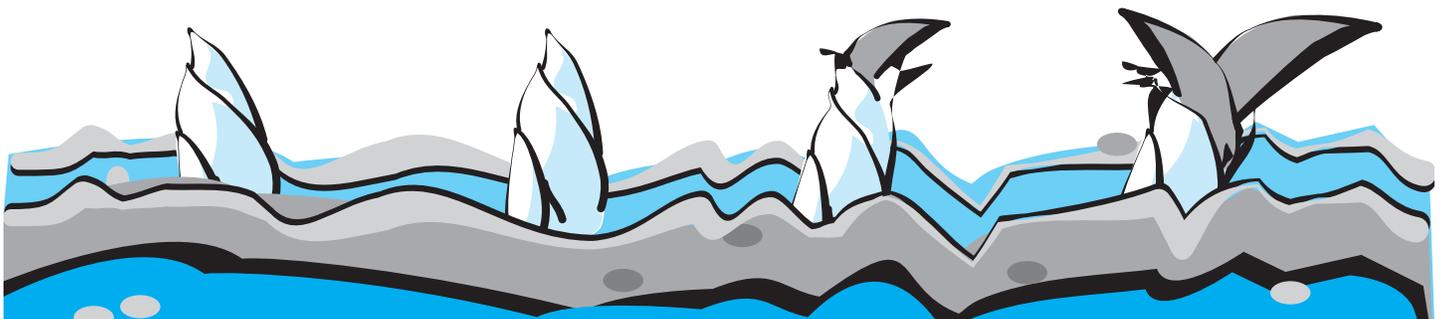
could reach and work with. He was able to grow an assortment of vegetables like peas, beans, eggplant, basil, and tomatoes to name a few. His excitement grew along with his garden. When he did some research, he found there was nothing suitable in the market that allowed gardening in the manner he had adopted. As a result of his ingenuity, Accessible Gardens™ was born.

Contrary to the traditional garden built at ground level, or the typical raised garden bed contained within a walled perimeter built on ground level, the sturdy Accessible Gardens™ raised garden bed is elevated to table height, with ample clearance for wheelchairs or walkers. It puts the entire garden within arm's reach with no kneeling or bending required. The garden area is large enough to grow an assortment of vegetables, herbs and a variety of edible and decorative flowers. Beyond that practical aspect of having a garden at table height LaRoque says, "Our Mission...is to enable every individual with a physical disability or limitation to enjoy the mental, physical, social and spiritual benefits of gardening".



More information about Accessible Gardens™ as well as information about how to plan a garden and answers to frequently asked questions can be found on the company web site: www.accessiblegardens.com or by calling 401-290-7870.

Susan M. Murray is on the Editorial Board of "Disability Issues", a retired health care consultant and a Certified Master Gardener.



From Racing Champion to Resident

By Tim Sullivan

The parallels between racing in a marathon and practicing rehabilitation medicine are numerous. However few physicians can understand both perspectives as innately as Dr. Cheri Blauwet, current Resident of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital and winner of the Boston and New York Marathons. Cheri sees her role as a physician as an intuitive extension of her prior career as an athlete, and focuses her medical career on health policy, disability, and physical activity.

Dr. Blauwet sustained a spinal cord injury in a farming accident as a young child. However she was raised to be active and to see a disability as simply another way of living. In high school, she found wheelchair racing and in college at the

University of Arizona, she became the captain of the wheelchair track and road racing team.

Soon, she shined on the world stage as a Paralympic athlete in the sport of wheelchair racing, competing for the United States Team in three Paralympic Games winning gold, silver and five bronze medals at the 2000 and 2004 Paralympic Games (Sydney '00, Athens '04, Beijing '08) and bringing home a total of seven Paralympic medals.

Dr. Blauwet is one of just seven physicians world wide serving on the International Paralympic Medical Commission. The council is responsible for setting policy and regulation around the health and well-being of Paralympic Athletes. This role has allowed her to bring the two passions of her life together to benefit both her own clinical experience and create a better system for athletes. Cheri has published extensively on the power of sport to promote well-being and disability rights for individuals with mobility impairment.

Additionally, Cheri is a two-time winner of both the Boston and New York City Marathons, and has been nominated for the ESPY, Laureus World Sport Award, and Women's Sports Foundation Athlete of the Year. In 2004, she was the winner of the American Association of People with Disabilities Paul Hearne Award, given annually to three emerging leaders nation-wide for their potential to change the face of the disability movement.

Realizing the significance competitive sports has played in her own life, Dr. Blauwet feels personally committed to

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Cheri winning the Boston Marathon in 2005.

Information Briefs Information Briefs

Nominations for 2013 Paul Kahn PCA Service Award

The PCA Quality Home Care Workforce Council, in collaboration with 1199 SEIU Health Care Workers East, will present the **4th annual Paul Kahn Awards for PCA Service** in October 2013. Consumers, PCAs, families, nonprofit staff, and governmental agency staff may nominate one or more PCAs whose service and dedication to PCA work deserves recognition. Awards will be given to PCAs who demonstrate

- Dedication to their work
- Longevity of PCA service
- Actions that increase the value and image of PCA work.

To download a nomination form, please visit www.mass.gov/pca or contact Michelle Byrd at 617-210-5715.

Nominations must be received by June 1, 2013.

Disability Issues

Summer Sports Programs

If you are looking for some sport activities to do this summer, here are a few suggestions.

For a comprehensive list of Adaptive Sports and Accessible Recreation Programs

for Massachusetts residents with disabilities, visit <http://www.massresources.org/adaptive-sports.html>

Soccer

TOPSoccer – The Outreach Program for Soccer – is a community-based training and team placement program for young athletes with disabilities. It is organized by state youth soccer association volunteers. The TOPSoccer program is designed to bring the opportunity of learning and playing soccer to any boy or girl with a mental or physical disability. For more information, visit www.mayouthsoccer.org/topsoccer.aspx

Power Soccer is the first competitive team sport designed and developed specifically for power wheelchair users. Athletes' disabilities include quadriplegia, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, and many others. The game is played in a gymnasium on a regulation basketball court. Two teams of four players attack, defend, and spin-kick a 13-inch soccer ball in a skilled and challenging game similar to able-bodied soccer. To find teams in the MA area, visit www.powersoccerusa.org/teams

Baseball

MA Little League: Challenger Program is a program for mentally and physically challenged youth, helping them to enjoy the full benefits of Little League participation in an athletic environment structured to their abilities. They provide the framework so Little League programs may offer a structured, athletic activity for all youth in their communities. Playing with the same equipment on the same fields, Challenger Division participants have the opportunity to experience the joys of pulling together as a team, being cheered, and earning awards for their achievements. For more information, visit www.eteamz.com/massll/news/index.cfm?cat=383939

Beep Baseball: The Boston Renegades are a team of visually impaired athletes and volunteer coaches from the greater Boston area that compete in an adaptive form of baseball. This is a competitive team, which is part of the NBBA and plays against opponents all over the country. The Boston Renegades are operated by the Association of Blind Citizens. Visit www.blindcitizens.org/renegades.html for information.

Golf

Braintree Municipal Golf Course offers golf clinics for people with special needs every Monday evening at 6:00 pm. The program begins Monday, April 23rd and concludes with the 12th annual NEPGA/Special Olympic Tournament on October 21st at Braintree Municipal. This special program is conducted by PGA Head Professional Bob Beach. Braintree also has an adaptive golf cart for physically challenged golfers. For more information about the special needs program at Braintree, contact PGA Professional Bob Beach at 781-843-6513 ext 2 or via e-mail at bbeach@braintreema.gov

Golf For All - a program of the Northeast Accessible Golf Association, is dedicated to providing accessible golf programs for people with physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges. They run year-round programming for veterans, people with autism, Parkinson's Disease and movement disorders, spinal cord injuries and paralysis, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, amputees, blind golfers, and more. Clinics are taught by PGA professionals who have successfully completed a certification process for teaching golfers with adaptive needs. For more information, visit www.golfforall.org



Taking Care: Lessons from Mothers with Disabilities

By Kate Ryan



Taking Care: Lessons from Mothers with Disabilities is a new book out by Mary Grimley Mason, a long-time disability advocate and scholar who has published extensively in and about the disability field. It chronicles the lives of twenty-five women with various physical disabilities,

and explores how they navigate the personal and physical challenges of being a parent. It was co-written with Linda Long-Bellil, who contributes a chapter on public policy and mothers with disabilities.

The book is concise and very well-written, and though it can veer a bit to the dry and academic side at times, is an invaluable contribution to the literature of disability studies because there have been so little research done on people with disabilities who are parents. Mothers with disabilities have been raising children forever, but our present-day society tends to view people with disabilities as asexual beings, perpetually in the role of care-receiver and incapable of having families of their own. In the book, every woman interviewed had experienced ableism (direct discrimination due to their disability) at some point in their parenting careers, whether from ill-informed doctors or well-meaning family members.

Mason did a thorough job of searching out women from a wide variety of backgrounds, ages, classes, and races, as well as reaching those with traditional and non-traditional families and acquired and congenital disabilities. It was nice, though not particularly surprising, to see that mothers with disabilities are much more similar to non-disabled mothers than most people think, and that they get along in this world the same way anyone does: by doing the best that they can.

Most of the mothers in this book needed some help to raise their children, and they received it from personal care aides, family members, spouses and community members. All of them emphasize that even when they could not do some physical tasks, such as lifting a toddler, they could be there for their child's emotional and learning needs. Mason points out that this support is just as vital to a child's well-being as is providing for physical needs.

This book would be a very good addition to medical libraries, especially those of ob/gyns, as it offers practical tips at the end of each chapter for mothers, physicians, health care professionals, and social workers. It points out that having a parent with a disability can actually infer some advantages to a child, such as being able to see a person wholly and being responsible. Mothers with disabilities, or anyone in the disability community, would also find good, practical tips on dealing with everything from societal attitudes to physical barriers.

Taking Care: Lessons From Mothers with Disabilities is available on Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble.

Kate Ryan has a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on disability studies. She currently works as a personal care aide while searching for work in the disability field.

Information Briefs

Mothers and Children: Perspectives from Mothers with Disabilities

Mary Grimley Mason and Linda Long-Bellil, both Mothers with a disability, will discuss the challenges and successes of mothers with disabilities, how they defy stereotypes about their mothering, and offer a significant model for all good parenting .

"This is the hardest thing you will ever do," says Melanie, a young disabled mother with cerebral palsy, about raising a child, but she goes on to say that it is fulfilling, joyous and "an amazing gift." Excerpt from the book, *Taking Care: Lessons From Mothers with Disabilities*, which is available on Amazon.com or Barnes and Noble.

Date and Location:

Thursday • May 16 • 12:30pm
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From Racing Champion to Resident - *continued from page 5*



ensuring individuals living with a disability have the opportunity to face challenges and achieve success in all areas of their life. With her unique blend of skill, energy and advocacy, it's evident to all that she will help those she treats reach their greatest triumphs for years to come.

It's fitting that Dr. Blauwet has practiced medicine in the same city where she competed and triumphed as a sports athlete in the Boston Marathon. Cheri will graduate in June 2013 and will move back to the mid west to practice in Chicago. Spaulding patients and staff have benefited greatly from Dr. Blauwet's contribution of her talents in medicine and sports. We wish Cheri the very best in the next chapter of her career.

Tim Sullivan is Director of Communications, Partners Continuing Care & The Spaulding Rehabilitation Network

Pathways to Employment Through Sports - *continued from page 1*

is the way that their peers view them. When you are a contributing and valued member of the team during those formative years, it's not much of a leap to see that bear fruit in the workplace. You begin to be noticed for what you can do, and how that talent regardless of who possess it, can benefit the team. It also creates a new lens to view perspective employees, collaborators and co-workers. In many ways to borrow a sports phrase, it brings us that much closer to "leveling the playing field."

In my years as a human resource professional, without fail the best candidates are those that have had a diverse and well-rounded background. They bring experience that is both direct to their profession as well as many qualities fostered in other areas of their lives. For many of them, participating in sports played a critical part to their growth as an individual and development of professional skills. Our youth will now grow up in a world where everyone can be part of the team, and that is the kind of win we all can cheer for.

Oswald (Oz) Mondejar is VP of Human Resources, The Spaulding Rehabilitation Network & Partners Continuing Care.