***Disability Issues***

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*Providing individuals with disabilities, their families, friends, and advocates with relevant information to enhance their quality of life, health, and employability options.*

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**Graphic Design:**

Louise Martling, Eleventh Hour Design

**Printing:**

Jon Rebuck, P + R Publications, Inc.

**Constant Contact Conversion:**

Darron Louie, Spaulding Rehabilitation Network

**Spaulding Rehabilitation Network Liaison:**

Colleen Moran

**From the Editor:**

Dear Readers,

Like many of you, I watched Ken Burns’ documentary, “The Roosevelt’s: An Intimate History”. In Episode 4, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) wakes up one morning in August 1921 and discovers he cannot move his legs. Overnight, he has become disabled with Polio.

Much of Franklin Roosevelt’s remarkable history as President is familiar and legendary. What I had never seen before, were the 11 hidden years when he grappled with adjusting to his disability. FDR exercised intensely, became depressed, and then travelled to a resort in Warm Springs, Georgia to bathe his legs in the mineral springs. At Warm Springs, I was deeply touched to see FDR laughing, playing and exercising in the pool with others who had Polio – freely showing his thin legs. This FDR is very different from the man who fiercely hid all traces of his disability when in public.

It’s now 93 years later and I wonder how much society’s beliefs and attitude toward disability have changed. How many people with disabilities feel safe to discuss their disability openly? Perhaps we have experienced awkward silences and discrimination when we talked about our disability. Like FDR, many of us wait until we are in community with others who have disabilities to freely talk about this part of ourselves.

I wonder what would have happened if FDR had more openly “disclosed” his disability. Would he have been elected? Would he have been a less respected and effective President? Or, would he have led our country to see people with disabilities as competent, capable human beings who can be respected and beloved leaders? We’ll never know.

What we do know is, bold progress has been made since FDR was President. As individuals and as a community, we have claimed our value and worth. Elmer Bartels helped people with disabilities live “like anyone else”, qualified individuals with disabilities are being offered jobs at Hiring Fairs, Ronald Kahn is openly sharing his experience with PTSD and alcoholism, Disability Images is taking photos of people with disabilities living positive lives, and people of all ages and abilities are showing up at “Let’s Talk Dirty” workshops. I think FDR would have learned a lot from us on how to live more freely as a person with a disability

Marianne DiBlasi, Editor

**Transforming Career Fairs into Hiring Events**

**By Bill Allen**

For the past two years the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) in collaboration with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program (OFCCP) has sponsored "hiring events" with federal contractors. This bold concept has transformed the traditional career fair with the expressed goal of increased employment offers and outcomes. In essence the hiring event has leveraged competitive employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. In March there were over 60 employers that participated in the hiring event providing on-site interviews at three locations across the Commonwealth. UMASS Boston represented the most employers with 46 federal contractors spending one full day interviewing qualified individuals with specific skills and abilities that were matched to open positions that employers were seeking to fill. There were 285 scheduled interviews across the state with employers representing open job orders, which included jobs in engineering, healthcare, retail, construction, manufacturing, finance, and security.

To understand how this happened, it is important to mention the strong partnership of the MRC and OFCCP and how their missions are in alignment to serve individuals with disabilities that are ready, willing and able to enter or re-enter the workplace. Approximately three years ago, MRC and OFCCP teamed up to develop a plan to engage federal contractors. A business-to-business briefing was held in July of 2012. There were approximately 30 employers (federal contractors) who came together to learn how other employers have had great success hiring individuals with skills that are needed in the workplace. The business briefing was focused on demonstrating that individuals with disabilities are more than equal to the task, adding value and productivity while on the job. Since that business briefing, the OFCCP/MRC Career Hiring Event has become a standard operating practice at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

**MRC Consumer Feedback**

The MRC Research and Development Department conducted surveys for the federal contractor's hiring event with MRC consumers who participated in the event for the past two years. The survey results have shown high levels of satisfaction and enthusiasm. The most recent hiring event (March, 2014) revealed that 92% of surveyed consumers were either very satisfied or satisfied with the overall hiring event. In particular, participants stated that their experience with having an on-site interview was extremely effective. A majority of the consumers/candidates felt they were adequately prepared for their interview process. Conversely, employers were extremely satisfied with the level of skills and motivation of the candidates. Most strikingly, there were 35 individuals hired the day of the actual event. Another collateral benefit is that job seekers were given several opportunities to make connections with many employers. Many candidates had several interviews and the opportunity to network with employers who were seeking the same skills, which resulted in receiving more than one job offer. In other situations, job candidates discovered that employers provided much needed information about how to enhance their careers and income potential.

**Make it a Hiring Event for Yourself:**

The following are unique strategies you can deploy to transform your next visit to a career fair into a potential offer of employment for you or someone you know:

1) Identify employers that may be federal contractors. At last count there were over 200 thousand federal contractors and there are new regulations that are requiring federal contractors to enhance their recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities.

2) Understand your skills and talents and match them to the open positions that employers are seeking. The more you are in alignment with realistic goals, the better your chances of securing your next job.

3) Zero in on where the jobs are. Contact your local Career Centers and staffing agencies. Staffing agencies usually have the pulse of what positions employers are hiring for and the specific skills that are needed. When there is a growth pattern within a particular industry, staffing companies are there to assist with the immediate needs of an employer and they represent all market sectors.

4) Before attending the career fair, learn everything about the company that is participating in the event. Check out the open job orders and apply on-line just before the event. Often times, employers have access to their information electronically at the career fair and may be able to review your application and resume.

5) Prepare yourself for an interview. Even at career fairs, employers are trained to be interviewing you from the moment you introduce yourself. The first impression rule aptly applies to all career fairs, so be prepared.

*Bill Allen is Director of Statewide Employment Services-Job Placement at Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission*

**TOWARDS A BETTER DAY**

**By Ronald Kahn**

The tedium of my life distracted me from the task at hand. For decades after returning from a tour of duty in South Vietnam in June 1966, and despite being diagnosed by the Veterans Administration with severe PTSD, I chose to shrug off this diagnosis and believed that I could shunt off this acronymic psychological condition and "tough it out. I was a veteran and believed that my military background had taught me that to move forward, one only needs to put one foot in front of the other. I bought into the belief that as long as one was able, and I certainly was physically able - I was never "wounded”, I was perfectly ambulatory, and I could work and support myself in the style to which I'd become accustomed.

All my civilian life I blithely accepted the fact that I was what is known as a "functioning alcoholic" who'd gained the reputation as a dependable and hard worker. And, but for what I consider a quirk of fate, which ironically took me out of the VA care system (and my comfort zone), I wouldn't be writing this apology and confession of the terrible misconceptions surrounding a PTSD diagnosis.

*Nota bene*. On the morning of 9-11-2001 I was sipping on the first of many beers in a barroom watching the twin towers of the World Trade Center crumble into the streets of New York City. Along with my drinking buddies, we found the perfect excuse to continue to self-medicate (for this is what the psychological component of alcoholism needs, any reason to have a drink until one doesn't need a reason, we just need alcohol). At this point in my life, 57+ years old, my body was beginning to rapidly crumble too, in an eerie replica of the disastrous events of 9-ll.

My attendance at work as a clerk in the passport office became sporadic. Soon I spent all my days - as well as nights - drinking. Bottoming out it's called. That's when what I call the *quirk of fate* occurred. This older man, who frequented the same bar as I, approached me one day. He was looking for someone to accompany him to a colonoscopy he was having performed at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Brighton. I agreed. Things went smoothly. We took a cab coming and going and he forced forty dollars on me for doing as he'd asked. I wasn't going to accept but he insisted. I spent it all drinking.

The quirk of fate unfolded thusly. While I was waiting for "Red" during his procedure at St. Elizabeth’s, I began to think about my own situation and how I needed help. I spoke with a receptionist who said that 4-5 doctors who have a medical practice were accepting new patients. Dr. Casey's schedule was able to accommodate mine and we became a team. I needed a push in the right direction, and I got it.

I inquired about the process of becoming a patient. Things not only went smoothly in this regard, but it was as if an invisible hand guided me through the next few difficult, transitory months. Doctor James Casey looked over my thick folder of medical records that the VA had forwarded to him. During a physical examination at one of our initial appointments, I'll never forget the words that he said to me: *"You've got a lot on your plate..."*

The good doctor arranged for me to enroll in an outpatient drug and alcohol abuse program at St. Elizabeth’s, called *CECAP.* With the expert guidance of their staff of counselors, I stopped drinking with an alacrity that amazed myself and those around me. Sober now for at least five or six years, I've also quit smoking, another lifelong habit picked up while in the military. During the latter stages of my addictions, through sheer strength of will, I matriculated at UMass-Boston with a degree in political science - despite sustaining a severe head injury in an automobile accident which nearly took my life.

Perhaps the good *karma* that seemed to take over my life beginning with “Red” and his colonoscopy could be interpreted as the result of my willingness to do good things for others. But I'd like to emphasize that, first and foremost, the most important thing is to do good things for yourself. If you are struggling, get treatment whenever and wherever possible. It leads to a better day.

*Ronald Kahn is a Vietnam veteran living in Brookline, Massachusetts. He is a graduate of UMass/Boston where he majored in Political Science. He is a writer.*

**Have you Ever Wanted to be a Model?**

**By Pat Hunt**

Disability Images specializes in taking positive lifestyle images of people with disabilities to be used for stock photography. Publishers and companies often purchase the license to use stock photos in their marketing and advertising materials. Many of these images use able-bodied models to pose as a person with a disability. Disability Images is committed to authenticity and using people with disabilities as models to represent the many aspects of their lifestyle, including sports, home life, transportation, relationships, rehabilitation, education and careers.

On a sunny Friday in August, Mark Hunt, Photographer and Creative Director of [DisabilityImages.com](http://disabilityimages.com/), drove to the home of Marianne DiBlasi, editor of *Disability Issues* and woman living with Spina Bifida, to do a photo shoot. Marianne had offered to be a model and, together, they had a lot of fun creating some “slice of life” scenes. Mark took photos of Marianne tending to the flowers in her beautiful garden and others of her demonstrating her use of mobility devices – crutches and wheelchair.

These are the type of images that Disability Images is looking – photos that represent many types of disabilities and lifestyles. From visual and hearing impairment, to people with Bi-Polar and Asperger’s; from ACL surgeries and Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy to Cerebral Palsy and Learning Disabilities; the focus is on showing that people of disabilities are living positive and engaged lives.

If you are a person with a disability who is interested in earning income by being a model for the Disability Images website, or if you are a 501(c)(3) company and you would like to access the imagery for a discounted rate, please contact Pat Hunt at Pat@DisabilityImages.com.

*Pat Hunt and her husband, Mark Hunt, are the owners of* [*www.DisabilityImages.com*](http://www.DisabilityImages.com)*. Pat is also on the Advisory Board of Work Without Limits, a statewide network of engaged employers and innovative, collaborative partners that aims to increase employment among individuals with disabilities.*

**Love and Intimacy Corner**

**Ask Ms. Love**

**Hot, Hot Summer**

**By Ms. Love**

*Ms. Love was recently asked how she stayed cool this past summer and she replied that part of her assignment for Disability Issues is to aim for hot, hot, hot. Below is her experience at a steamy, hot workshop.*

In June, I invited a friend to accompany me to a free one hour workshop at sex-positive retailer Good Vibrations entitled *“Let’s Talk Dirty: Saying Steamy Sentences with Confidence”.* The advertisement for the event was enticing: “Learn how to maximize your biggest sexual organ: your brain! Join Lead Sex Educator/Sales Associate Maria for a workshop on what to say and how to say it. Build up your dirty talking repertoire for different moods and learn how to use dirty talk throughout your day to keep that fire burning all night long.”

I was the first attendee to arrive so I got to check out all the other attendees as they walked in. Who goes to such events? Two young women came together and sat in front of me; I would guess they are the age of typical college students. Another pair of young women sat behind me. My male friend, of middle to older age, sat next to me; he told me he already knows how to say steamy things but came because he is open to new ideas. Across the aisle from me sat a 30-something male, alone, and a 40-something woman, also alone. In short, a variety of ages, both sexes, and people of different pairings or solo attendees were present. Two people walked with canes. The rest of the attendees were similarly diverse—black, white, Asian, and people with and without foreign accents. I was impressed with the diversity and felt that our readers who want to attend future workshops can feel encouraged that they will fit right in.

Maria began with some definitions. “Dirty talk is anything that excites you and you want to explore,” she explained. “It is different for different people, including kinky, romantic, or playful, but you want to make it fun. Why talk dirty? It is fun to do something you do not get to do in society. Frequently people do not talk dirty because they do not feel confident and they do not feel comfortable.”

As for how to go about your interest in speaking about talking dirty with your partner, Maria advises you to bring it up at a separate time from when you are about to have sex, when you have time to sit and talk about it, and when you are alone together. “Talk about what you are interested in, such as dirty talk during sex or phone sex. If you are both interested, each of you could find a picture in a magazine that you like, and you can identify three things that you each identify as hot, and three things you each do not want to hear.”

A handout of tips for talking dirty was robust, and included the fact that your sexy voice is often your lower and slower voice. An attendee with a British accent spoke up at this point and shared that some people find some foreign accents sexy, and suggested that people might want to try speaking with an accent they do not normally use to converse.

Everyone at the workshop got to practice saying “hello” in unison in their idea of a sexy voice. They also suggested practicing your sexy voice at home in the shower. Maria recommends reading erotica and saying it aloud so you practice saying such steamy lines, but she also recommends you read it together with your partner and then improvise.

Dr. Carol Queen, Good Vibrations’ staff sexologist, wrote the book, *Exhibitionism for the Shy*, which has ideas for dirty talk. Maria encourages people to make up their own language and terms for what each person and their partner find sexy—find the words you would use for penis, breasts, intercourse, etc., and you could vary the chosen words depending on your mood, such as romantic or silly moods. Explore, play and have fun adding a little bit of hot and steamy to your love life!

*The Love and Intimacy Corner welcomes questions and requests for topic areas from readers; please send all suggestions to* *DI.LoveandIntimacy@gmail.com*

**INFORMATION BRIEFS**

**Why Health Care can be so Unhealthy for People with Disabilities**

People with mobility disabilities often do not receive quality medical care because of inaccessible equipment in hospitals, clinics, dentists’ offices, doctors’ offices and other medical facilities. To address this issue, the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) in partnership with the Disability Law Center (DLC) and Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) are involved in a state-wide initiative to promote increased availability of accessible medical diagnostic equipment to Massachusetts residents with disabilities.

As part of this effort, they are interested in talking with **MassHealth members with mobility disabilities who are under age 60** from across Massachusetts who have had difficulties using medical equipment because of accessibility issues, and/or they have avoided or failed to seek medical services due to a past bad experience.

BCIL would like to talk with individuals who have had problems such as the following and would be willing to share them. All responses will be anonymous to protect patient privacy.

* Not being weighed at doctor’s appointments because there are no accessible scales.
* Having to awkwardly use equipment that is designed for someone without a disability, making diagnostic procedures like mammograms and pap smears difficult and painful or impossible.
* Getting examined in your wheelchair because there is no height-adjustable exam table or lift available.
* Having to reschedule appointments because accessible equipment is not available.
* Getting transferred to an exam table by an untrained staff member

If you are interested in participating and you are a **MassHealth member with a mobility disability under age 60,** Contact Karen Schneiderman, Senior Advocacy Specialist at BCIL, 617-338-6665 X216 or kschneiderman@bostoncil.org.



**Discovering Greatness**

Empowering People for Inclusive Community (EPIC) prepares young people with disabilities to be actively engaged community leaders through education, leadership development and community service. EPIC’s vision is for young people with disabilities transitioning into adulthood to be empowered to embrace their abilities and leadership skills, in order to achieve their goals for gainful employment, higher education and to live healthy lifestyles. For more information, visit [www.epicleaders.org](http://www.epicleaders.org) or call 781-388-4340.

**EPIC Community Programs:**



**Boston Serve 2014**

Join EPIC for our 2nd Annual Boston Serve and create double the impact through one event.  Boston Serve is much like a walk-a-thon but instead of walking, we are serving.  Think of it as a serve-a-thon!

By getting friends and family to sponsor your participation in this serve-a-thon you will be raising needed funds for EPIC’s innovative leadership programs for youth with disabilities while transforming the Haley Pilot School, one of Boston's full inclusion public schools.

Our goal is to bring 200 volunteers together in support of young leaders with disabilities for a day of EPIC service.  Will you join us to show that you believe in the power of young leaders with ability?

 **When: Saturday**, November 8, 2014

**Registration:** 9am, Service 10am-4pm

**Where:** Haley Pilot School, 570 American Legion Highway, Roslindale, MA 02131

**Who:** Individuals, schools, community groups, businesses and families can create teams to participate in this event. This is a family-friendly event, for people of all abilities. If you have the desire to serve than we have a task for you!

**For More Information:** [www.bostonserve.org](http://www.bostonserve.org) or contact Jeff Lafata at 781-388-4340, jlafata@epicleaders.org.

**EPIC Youth Night**

Join EPIC and the Multi-Cultural Independent Living Center of Boston (MILCB) for EPIC Youth Night – an evening of fun, games, training & more!! Youth Night Themes include: Game Night, Advocacy Training, Karaoke, and Leadership training. Themes are selected by the youth each month.

**When:** Third Friday of Every Month, 7 – 8:30pm.

**Cost:** This is a free event for youth with disabilities between the ages of 14 – 25.

**Where**: Multi-Cultural Independent Living Center of Boston (MCILB), 329 Centre Street, Jamaica Plain, MA

**To RSVP:** Contact Jeff at EPIC at 781-388-4340, jlafata@epicleaders.org or Tricia at MCILB at 617-942-8060, tariol@milcb.org. Please RSVP at least 24 hours in advance.

**For More Information:** [www.epicleaders.org](http://www.epicleaders.org)

**Vocal Revolution Barbershop Ensemble**

The Special Needs Arts Programs, Inc. (SNAP) is hosting a concert on Sunday, October 26, at 3:30 PM at First Parish in Lexington. The concert will feature “Vocal Revolution,” one of New England’s top ranked barbershop style vocal ensembles, and special appearances by the Sing Along Chorus and Sing Along Singers. Proceeds from the event will support the vital programs that SNAP delivers for disabled residents of Lexington and surrounding towns. For concert reservations, email info@snapsing.org or phone 781-460-3599.

Founded in 1982, SNAP provides people with disabilities opportunities to celebrate each person’s unique abilities while cultivating creative expression, building peer relationships and fostering self-esteem through the arts. For more information about Special Needs Arts Programs and its programs, visit [www.snapsing.org](http://www.snapsing.org/).

"Vocal Revolution"

Sunday, October 26, 3:30 PM

First Parish Church, 7 Harrington Road, Lexington, MA

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