***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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**From the Editor:**

Dear Readers,

The *Disability Issues* newsletter began its’ roots 38 years ago as an irregularly published *Together* newsletter which evolved into the *Disability Issues* quarterly newsletter.  We have a long legacy of printing and distributing hard copies of this newsletter and yet, the world has become much more online focused so *Disability Issues* wants to keep up with the times!

For readers who have access to email, I encourage you to transfer your print subscription to the email version. The email version is in a format that is easily read with screen readers for individuals who are visually impaired. Receiving *Disability issues* by email provides our readers with the added benefits of being able to forward the newsletter and share articles with others as well as save copies for yourself in an online folder.

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Thank you in advance for helping *Disability Issues* to have a stronger online presence and reduce our environmental impact.

Marianne DiBlasi, Editor

**Governor Baker Recognizes MRC-CVS “Job Driven Training Program”**

**By Bill Allen**

The MRC-CVS unique partnership has set new standards of excellence with evidenced based best practices for the competitive market place. As a result, on May 8th, 2015 CVS and MRC won the John Gould Education & Workforce Development Award from the Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM); and whereby Governor Baker was on hand to present the award that recognized our extremely effective workforce solutions.

Although CVS Health has worked with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) for many years to recruit, hire, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities in all stratified positions; the company recognized an on-going need to fill their paraprofessional openings of pharmacy technicians.

In Massachusetts alone, there are hundreds of open pharmacy technician positions each month. Fortified with the knowledge and positive experience of working with the MRC, Rick Laferriere, Lead Manager Workforce Initiatives for CVS Health, realized that he needed to expand upon the success of an 85% retention rate of MRC candidates.

Working closely with Joan Phillips, MRC’s Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Commissioner, it was determined to build upon this public-private partnership by developing a “job driven” training program”. This innovative approach was designed with a very specific goal—train individuals as pharmacy technicians and hire them into open positions across the Commonwealth.

**JOB DRIVEN TRAINING COMPONENTS**

This collaboration embarked on a comprehensive strategy that involved braiding the CVS pharmacy technician curriculum with direct consultation from CVS registered pharmacists; along with contracted professional trainers from MRC. The 8-week classroom training program focused on identifying MRC consumers that were ready, willing, and able to participate in the classroom training and move forward in the hiring process upon successful completion of the core curriculum. Once hired, MRC consumers and now CVS employees continued their formal training in an On-The-Job Training Agreement.

Through our collaboration, we have achieved an 89% placement rate for our first class and a 62% placement rate (and counting) for our second class. Most notably, these pharmacy technician positions offer individuals the confidence to build a strong and predictable career by achieving state licensure and national certification. This career path also allows individuals to expand their professional growth and development in compounding facilities, hospitals, and pharmacy technician call centers. According to Rick Laferriere from CVS: “*We know that our best and brightest colleagues come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Our partnership with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is not only connecting participants with important career training opportunities, it is also connecting our company with talented individuals who are an asset to our retail pharmacy teams”.*

Former MRC consumers (and now CVS employees) have been able to return to the world of work while creating their own pathway to economic self-sufficiency. At the CVS-MRC March 23rd, 2015 graduation ceremony at the State House, one MRC consumer was elated to share that “this job has given me the chance to return to work and expand my skills for a long term career”. The CVS Store Manager where this individual now works stated: “we are fortunate to have him working here and he is considered a valued team member”. Another MRC consumer is working at the CVS Corporate Call Center and she has commented that: “The Company provides a very friendly work environment and I am a piece of the employment puzzle which is a perfect fit for me”.

Since the inception of the MRC-CVS Pharmacy Technician Training, other employers are signing on to train MRC consumers in other market sectors to include: the automotive aftermarket; healthcare facilities; hospitality; home improvement; and transportation companies. The MRC has incorporated this effective business model to better serve consumers seeking employment. In effect, our employer partners have become “champions for change”.

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

**Let It Snow,**

 **Let It Snow,**

 **Let It Snow**

**by Sandy Alissa Novack**

When I was an undergraduate in college, the historic Blizzard of ‘78 tested my emergency preparedness in a way I had never been tested before. I have always been a planner by nature so I wasn’t concerned when I heard the forecast for snow. I had a warm winter coat, waterproof boots, and thanks to the foresight of my father who was a great planner himself; a good flashlight with extra batteries. I lived on campus and ate all my meals in the Dining Hall so there was no need to have food in my dormitory room, except for some hot chocolate packets to use with my Farberware “Two Cupper” mug warmer for a special treat. Being Massachusetts born and raised, I was a hearty New Englander who wouldn’t let a little thing like a Nor’easter prevent me from my getting where I wanted to go. But the Blizzard of ’78 did its darndest to challenge that belief

When the storm hit, the first impact was cancelled classes, followed by my dorm's side of campus losing power, and then the dining hall gave out plastic utensils and asked us to bring them to each meal. I trudged through the mounting snow to the dining hall for food. I trudged through more snow to go to a friend's dormitory on the other side of campus because her dorm still had power and I wanted a shower. Back in those days, I was physically able to trudge. Finally, the snow stopped, roads cleared, classes and electricity resumed.

Every time winter rolls around, I think of that Blizzard, especially last winter. Winter as an able-bodied college student was very different from winter decades later when my body is not able to do what it once could. Gone are the days of dining halls feeding me; now I am responsible for getting and preparing food myself. While I had my moments last winter of looking down my block and gaping in awe at the height of the snow banks, it took using my wits and the help of others to get through this extraordinarily challenging winter.

You know it is a severe winter if you contact your doctors' office, not to ask a medical question, but about their opinion on the likelihood of being able to navigate through the snow to get to the office for an appointment. I did this multiple times last winter before I headed out to my appointments. I learned very quickly that the MBTA's Paratransit Program for people with disabilities, THE RIDE, was running unusually late, so I booked THE RIDE to arrive at medical appointments a lot earlier than the time of my appointment, just to be sure I didn’t miss them.

The MBTA got a lot of flak last winter about subway and bus shutdowns and delays due to snow and cold, but I want to give a shout-out of deep gratitude to THE RIDE program, its dispatchers and drivers because they got me to and from every single one of my many medical appointments. As a shared transportation service, I recall one trip in particular when THE RIDE was picking me up after an appointment at the hospital and bringing me home. Upon arrival, the driver told me that he would be picking up one more customer on the way to my house. I was impressed with the way the driver maneuvered the vehicle masterfully down narrow and often unplowed roads. I was amazed at his fierce determination to drive up a road with an incline to pick up a customer who had a dialysis appointment. In the slippery conditions, the vehicle could not get up the gentle incline. Undeterred, the driver tried a multiple times to get up the slushy-mush on the incline, each time backing down the street when the car slid. Gunning the engine, he finally mounted that incline and the customer was thrilled to see us. Say what you want about public transportation, but I think THE RIDE demonstrated tremendous commitment and did yeomen's work that day and throughout this past winter.

And while I am giving shout-outs, I want to mention the hardiness and devotion of the PCAs and other helpers that some of my friends and neighbors used. Some of them came to work carrying suitcases; they chose to sleep over at their clients' homes rather than let their clients go without needed services during forecasted storms. Like the proverbial mailman, “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

In times of snow or other emergencies, your ability to thrive, and not just survive, can also depend on your relationships, just like when I reached out to a friend across campus in the Blizzard of '78. Who do you reach out to if you lose power, need help, or just want to chat with someone because you have cabin fever? Put a plan in place, and do it now, before an emergency happens. Talk with friends at your house of worship, your fitness center, your social groups, or whatever network of connections you have and agree to check in on each other.

What else can you do to prepare for the upcoming winter? I buy a stash of toilet paper, paper towels, cans of tuna, soymilk in aseptic containers, peanut butter, dried fruit, and crackers to have on hand in the event that I cannot shop for food or if the electricity goes out and I cannot use a toaster or other appliances. Even if you are not able to shovel yourself, keep a shovel in your car to give to someone else that can shovel you out if you get stuck somewhere. Would you consider carpooling to work or to stores since it is so hard to find parking on snowed-in streets? Stuff a warm blanket in the back seat of your car in case the temperature drops. If you don’t already do so, get in the habit of charging your cellphone regularly; it can be a lifeline if you need help.

Do not be shy about contacting your city or town offices about your needs. Last winter, I called my Town's Snow Line to report a business that was not shoveling its sidewalks. As a person with disabilities, I also shared some of my snow concerns for last winter at a Spring 2015 Department of Public Works meeting.

Bad weather can cancel many plans, but people with disabilities have just as much right as anyone else to go out to work, medical appointments, grocery stores, or just outdoors for some fresh air. Ask the network of people in your life for specific help that you need and make sure to thank your PCA, delivery service people, and others who come to you during inclement weather.

As I sit here writing this article, I’m listening to a popular country music song, Sam Hunt's “House Party”. I don’t know if Mr. Hunt’s inspiration for the song was because he knows people with disabilities can be homebound due to snow. I choose to think it’s a nice song to play if bad weather, health issues or other reasons should ever keep you home. He sings, “You ain't gotta leave the house to have a good time. I'm a bring the good time home to you. We'll have a house party...”

So, I say let it snow, let it snow, let it snow...but be prepared for it. Plan in advance for what you need and how you will manage if we have another winter of back-to-back snowstorms. Making plans now could help you get out more often, and when you can’t get out, to welcome others in.

*Sandy Alissa Novack is a social worker, and is on the Universal Access Advisory Council at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center-Boston.*

Frequently Asked Employment, Health Insurance, and PCA Services Questions

By Ray Glazier

The following article is a series of employment related questions that are frequently asked by individuals with disabilities who use PCA services. The answers are provided by Ray Glazier, a wheelchair user who utilizes the services of a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) at work and home. His experience includes over twenty years as Director at Abt Associates Center for the Advancement of Rehabilitation & Disability Services.

Q: The accident that paralyzed me also bankrupted me, but at least I have MassHealth coverage for my PCA services and other stuff I’ve finally been offered a job, but not sure I can earn enough to pay my PCAs out of pocket. What can I do?

A: As a working person with a disability, you can still keep your broad MassHealth coverage and participation in its PCA program; you will qualify for the special coverage available through the MassHealth Buy-In program called CommonHealth, provided you work at least 40 hours per month or are self-employed. If you earn more than the MassHealth Standard income limit, you will pay a reasonable monthly premium to MassHealth as a CommonHealth consumer. The good news is that there is no income or asset limit in CommonHealth, so your advancement potential on the job is unlimited and you can save as much as you are able to.

Q: OK. But what is that “reasonable” monthly premium?

A: Your individual CommonHealth premium is calculated according to a sliding scale based on percentage of the federal poverty level, which takes into account income and family size. The two catches are that this is only individual coverage and you must also subscribe to your employer’s health plan if it is offered to you. If you have a family, you’ll want your employer’s health plan’s family coverage anyway.

Q: Why would I need two insurance plans if I don’t have a family?

A: Your employer’s health insurance plan will not cover PCA services no matter how good it is; no private insurance does, nor does Medicare. The only source for PCA coverage is Medicaid (MassHealth here). So you need CommonHealth, unless you are a veteran who qualifies for the VA’s Home Health Aide benefit.

Q: But what about PCA services on the job?

A: For your routine personal care assistance needs like toileting, eating, medication assistance, the source remains your MassHealth PCAs, same as at home. Currently the MassHealth PCA Program evaluation does not take into account employment status. And your employer has only the ADA work-specific personal assistance services obligation as reasonable accommodation under Title I, which must be provided by the employer to enable qualified persons with disabilities to perform job functions, including personal care on required business travel. Job-related assistance might include reader and scribe services for the blind or interpreter services for the Deaf, while a worker with mobility limitations might require help with filing, paperwork, accessing or retrieving work-related items, etc.

Q: I have qualms about asking my new employer for help. I am hesitant to ask for reasonable accommodation due to fear of discrimination.

A: That is why you must know your legal rights and feel confident about asserting them. Your new employer saw your potential value to the organization and wants you to succeed. But you must make your needs clear at the outset once the job offer is made in order to secure ADA reasonable accommodations and protection from discrimination.

Q: But I’m afraid of being perceived as weak, not self-sufficient, or incompetent.

A: Well, if you try to do the job without the assistance you need, that is exactly how you will be seen when your job performance will be sub-optimal..

Q: But this is my first experience of employment as someone with a disability, and I’m not sure about workplace personal assistance needs will be.

A: This is where a vocational rehabilitation counselor from the Mass. Rehab. Commission (MRC) can work with you and your employer to identify potential assistance requirements based on a review of the job-specific tasks in relation to your abilities and limits.

Q: I can foresee difficulty recruiting PCAs for assistance at the worksite during my work hours.

A: True, the PCA who gets you up in the morning and ready for work may not be available to come to the jobsite to help you with lunch. But the free PCA exchange (see sidebar) has many candidates with diverse time and locality availability. You might also be able to recruit co-workers for paid help by enrolling them as service providers in the PCA program.

In summary, MassHealth and MRC have your back. Go for it!

Have PCA questions or concerns? Email them to: raymondglazier@gmail.com

*Raymond E. Glazier, Ph.D., formerly of Abt Associates Inc. in Cambridge, is an SSDI beneficiary who returned to full-time employment in order to support himself and his family; now semi-retired, he is founder and Principal of disAbility Research Associates, LLC, which provides disability-related research and disability awareness services to public and private clients.*

Employment, Health Insurance and PCA Resources

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC): [www.mass.gov/MRC](http://www.mass.gov/MRC) or call (617) 204-3600 1-800-245-6543 (Voice/TDD).

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB): [www.mass.gov/MCB](http://www.mass.gov/MCB) or call 617-727-5550 or 800-392-6556 (TDD)

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH): [www.mass.gov/MCDHH](http://www.mass.gov/MCDHH)

# Department of Developmental Services (DDS): [www.mass.gov/DDS](http://www.mass.gov/DDS)

Employment Services Program (ESP) if you are receiving services from the MA Department of Transitional Assistance: [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov). Search “Job Assistance”

MassHealth applications and publications, including the *PCA Handbook* for consumers: [www.mass.gov/MassHealth](http://www.mass.gov/MassHealth) or call 1-888-665-9993 or 1-888-665-9997 (TTY)

MassHealth’s CommonHealth program for employed adults with disabilities, visit: [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov). Search “MassHealth CommonHealth” or call 800-841-2900.

Listing of PCA candidates can be viewed for free if you are enrolled in MassHealth: [www.findpca.org](http://www.findpca.org) or call 1-866-212-9675

Independent Living Centers provide information on accessing MassHealth CommonHealth, Personal Care Attendant (PCA) programs and other disability services. To find the Center in your area: [www.masilc.org/findacenter](http://www.masilc.org/findacenter)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) National Network: [www.adata.org/](http://www.adata.org/) or call 1-800-949-4232 (Voice/TTY)

ADA job accommodations and personal consultations: [www.askjan.org/indiv](http://www.askjan.org/indiv) or call (800)526-7234 (Voice)  (877)781-9403 (TTY)

**Social Security Disability Helps People Who Work**

**By Kristen Alberino**

People with disabilities are challenged with both overcoming barriers and with convincing others that those barriers do not define them.

That’s why we wanted to mark National Disability Employment Awareness Month by reminding you that Social Security is an earned benefit for millions of disabled individuals, and we can assist them in going back to work.

The Social Security disability insurance program, or SSDI, is perhaps the most misunderstood program of Social Security. Some people may think that SSDI recipients have never worked and are taking advantage of the system by receiving money for minor impairments.

Nothing could be further from the truth.  First, anyone who qualifies for SSDI must have worked enough to pay into the system and be “insured.” Second, Social Security has some of the strictest requirements in the world for disability benefits. To qualify, a person must not only have an impairment that will last one year or more, or result in death, but they must be unable to perform any substantial work.

Consequently, Social Security disability beneficiaries are some of the most severely impaired people in the country, and they greatly depend on their benefits. You can learn more by visiting the *Faces and Facts* website at [www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityfacts](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityfacts). At the website, you will find many personal stories of those who have benefitted from Social Security when they needed it most.

We also have incentives that give beneficiaries with disabilities — who are able — the opportunity to return to work. These work incentives include continued cash benefits for a period of time while you work, continued Medicare or Medicaid coverage, and help with education, training, and rehabilitation to start a new line of work. In some cases, we may even be able to deduct certain impairment-related work expenses from your countable income, making it possible to earn more and also remain eligible to receive benefits. Examples of these expenses are wheelchairs, transportation costs, and specialized equipment needed for work.

Social Security also offers the *Ticket to Work* program, which gives participants a “ticket” to go back to work while keeping their disability benefits. This program is free and voluntary. *Ticket to Work* gives access to an employment network, which offers assistance with job searches and placement, and vocational rehabilitation and training.

Those who enroll find the *Ticket to Work* program makes it easier to explore whether going back to work is right for them. Some even find that they are able to eventually get back to work and earn far more than the disability payments they once received.

For more information on the *Ticket to Work* program and work incentives, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work) or call 1-866-968-7842 (TDD: 866-833-2967).

*Kristen Alberino is a Social Security Public Affairs Specialist at the Social Security Administration office in Quincy, MA*

**Love and Intimacy Corner**

**Same-Sex Marriage: Talking About Love and Marriage For People with Disabilities**

**By Ms. Love**

Recently, someone asked me what I was going to be writing on in my next column. I replied that I was planning to write about the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling which allows for federal recognition of same sex marriage and the impact on same sex couples when one or both has a disability. Per the HIPAA Privacy Rule, one important provision allows family members, including spouses, the right to receive information about the patient’s care in various circumstances. If a person is hospitalized, being legally married gives their spouse the right to talk with the medical team on their spouse’s behalf. I went on to say that in my book, this alone makes marriage priceless to any couple because having someone who lives with you and knows you best involved in making important medical decisions is especially important for people with disabilities. I heard an “uh-huh” on the other end of the phone line. I continued on saying that if a marriage is not legally recognized, loving couples are left to pay higher health care costs, higher taxes, and would receive less Social Security income. “Oh?” I thought the person on the other end of the line was a well-read, educated individual who may just be unaware of these issues.

I went on to say that maybe people with disabilities, whether same-sex as their loved one or not, could be next in getting more attitudinal equality for dating, sex, and marriage. Well that did it. I seemed to have crossed some invisible line in the sand. “Now wait a minute, people on public assistance shouldn't expect taxpayers to pay for their children.” What? I wasn't talking about public assistance; I was talking about things like holding hands, emotional connection, and love. But now she had my dander up and your Ms. Love swam into deeper water. I pointed out that some people with disabilities earn very decent salaries and could be earning more money each year than she is. “Oh, well that is different,” she said. On the other hand, I said, many with disabilities are unable to work but that has nothing to do with their capacity to love and be loved.

The caller responded saying she should not be expected to support people getting married and having children if they are on public assistance. And then your normally patient Ms. Love felt sickened by this conversation and lost her patience. I reminded my caller of a time not so long ago when people with disabilities were sterilized so they would not have children. I went on to say that I believe, we as a society, now have a more enlightened view of people with disabilities and same-sex couples, but we obviously still have our work cut out for us for full acceptance.

Dear readers, we indeed do have our work cut out for us because while federal recognition of same-sex marriage shows how far attitudes have come toward accepting same-sex couples, people with disabilities continue to be thought of as everything from less attractive to even asexual. I feel people have a right to choose to socialize, date, have sex, make a commitment, and marry.

So people, strut your stuff! You are each the love-equal of anyone else, with or without a disability. In fact, I could make the argument that you are more of a catch than many people who are able-bodied. Oh wait, I guess I just made that argument already by telling you this story.

For more on the topics of socializing, dating, and sexuality as a person with a disability, I offer you the following articles:

***“Dating in Wheelchair: Your Problem, Not Mine”***

<http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld> Search “Dating in a Wheelchair”

**Amherst author Katherine Duke offers insight with, *‘Kissability: People with Disabilities Talk About Sex, Love and Relationships’***

[www.masslive.com/living](http://www.masslive.com/living) Search “Katherine Duke”

**ADA 25 Boston Celebration July 22nd on Boston Common**

**By Tim Sullivan**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is one of the most transformative civil rights laws in US history. Its mandate has created equal access and opportunities for millions of persons with disabilities across America. To commemorate the historic 25th anniversary of its signing, the ADA New England Center with cooperation of state, city and area organizations held the official “ADA 25 Boston” celebration on Wednesday, July 22nd on the Boston Common. This free family-friendly event welcomed over 2,000 people who enjoyed a march, speeches, music, demonstrations, education booths, music, games and much more.

The event started with a rousing march from the Boylston MBTA Stop to the main stage on Beacon and Charles Street. Approximately 1000 people of all abilities with banners, flags and songs were led by “Youth of the ADA”, “Pioneers of the ADA” and the “Hot Tamales” Brass Band. Speakers and dignitaries for the day included, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, Attorney General Maura Healey, US District Attorney Carmen Ortiz and the keynote speaker Dr. Cheri Blauwet, Multi-Time Paralympian and two-time Boston Marathon Champion. Performances by poets Lewis Morris, Colin Killick, Kythrne Aisling, author Remon Jourdan and music by guitarist Noé Socha and The Berkshire Hills Music Academy Troupe added energy to the day.

To learn more about the ongoing work by the New England ADA center, the events sponsors or see more photos and videos from the day visit [www.ada25boston.org](http://www.ada25boston.org)

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

**INFORMATION BRIEFS**

**ADA Compliant Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Cabs in Boston**

The Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities has compiled a list of fully ADA compliant WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) taxis in Boston. WAVs operate as regular taxis and can be hailed on the street or requested directly though taxi dispatchers. All Taxi Companies use Toyota Sienna Vehicles

**Contact Info:**

Metro Cab 617-782-5500

Boston Cab 617-536-5010

Iota Cab 617-268-1313

City Cab/Top Cab 617-536-5100

For more information, visit <http://www.cityofboston.gov/Disability/>

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