***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,

As the heat of summer fades away, we enter the fall and a renewed time of busyness. School, projects, and appointments are some of the extra activities we might engage in. For me, I am going on a new adventure this fall. After twelve years of volunteering in many types of volunteer positions at the Unitarian Universalist church where I am a member, I am attending graduate school to get a Masters in Divinity and become a Unitarian Universalist minister. It’s exciting and overwhelming and scary!

I’m in school to receive the education and training I need to pursue a new career path of parish ministry. There is certainly a lot to learn, but I am also bringing to school all of my life experience, which includes living as a person with a disability. This is the type of knowledge that cannot be learned in the classroom. I bring my developed skills of adaptability, resilience, grit and creativity with me into my ministerial studies and into every aspect of my life. These are deeply honed skills that every person with a disability has developed because of the physical and attitudinal challenges we experience on a daily basis.

I’ll share a secret with you, I actually think of these qualities (adaptability, resilience, grit and creativity) as my disability-generated Super Powers. Superman has his cape. I have my disability, and so do you. Your Super Power qualities may not be the same as mine, so take some time to reflect on your life and identify your unique strengths, skills and abilities. These are your own unique combination of disability-generated Super Powers.

In addition to my disability-generated Super Powers, I also bring business skills which were learned in the workplace and the leadership skills which were developed as a volunteer at my church. It’s not always easy getting out of the house to go to a job or any other type of organization. It takes your own unique combination of Super Powers to coordinate all the pieces needed to support ourselves and to deal with negative attitudes. But, it may be worth the effort it takes so you can offer your talents and abilities to an organization – whether it’s paid or volunteer. The important thing is to say “yes” to something you feel excited about and to do whatever it takes to make it happen. Once you say “yes”, you never know what type of an adventure this path will lead you on. Maybe one day you too will find yourself going back to school in the fall!

Marianne DiBlasi, Editor

**After High School… ??**

**MRC Transition Services**

**By Bill Allen**

What happens after you graduate high school? For many this is a no brainer and off to work and/or college you go. But if you are a student with a disability, the process perhaps is not as easy as it should be. Often times this transition can be daunting. If you were to ask this question of someone with a disability who may have recently graduated from high school, you will receive a myriad of answers and they may feel perplexed as to next steps.

The good news is that the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is working closely with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). Both organizations have entered into an agreement which is basically a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure students with disabilities have access to transition planning and services. Through this agreement, both public organizations “are mutually committed to promoting individualized transitions services for students with disabilities that lead to successful post school outcomes in competitive integrated employment, postsecondary education & training, independent living and community participation”.

The MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Division has developed a comprehensive and strategic guide to assist vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide distinct pre-vocational and vocational services as indicated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This new law has allowed the MRC to enhance services for students with disabilities. Quite simply, the goals are to engage in pre and post-employment services for students with disabilities.

The MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Vision and Mission for High School Students:

**Vision**: Engaging every student in career planning activities that lead to a fulfilling adult life through work.

**Mission**: For every student served, an independent life through meaningful work.

To accomplish our vision and mission, the MRC has developed strategic objectives and we have implemented the following programs to address the needs of students with disabilities:

**Pre-employment Transition Services**

1. **Job Exploration Counseling:** Counseling and guidance will be provided to students with disabilities to assist to identify and learn about job opportunities in particular occupations and industry sectors, including career assessment and planning.
2. **Workplace Readiness Training:**  Workplace readiness services are provided to students with disabilities to assist them in preparing for employment and workplace behaviors while on the job.
3. **Work-Based Learning Experience:** Provide work-based learning experiences to students with disabilities to assist with future permanent employment. These experiences may include in-school or after school opportunities such as internships and other relevant experiences that lead to work.
4. **Counseling on Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition of Post-Secondary Educational Programs:** Assistance and support provided to students with disabilities regarding various opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs at institutions of higher education based on their goals, needs and preferences.
5. **Self-Advocacy / Mentoring Instruction:** Assistance will be provided to students with disabilities to promote self-advocacy and leadership skills including peer mentoring, to assist them in successful transition from school to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.

We have a dedicated team of vocational rehabilitation counselors, job placement specialists, employment services specialists and administrators to ensure consistent and effective delivery of meaningful programs to move students with disabilities forward with achieving their goals and aspirations.

**Paid Summer Internship Program**

The MRC Summer Internship Program is designed to empower students with disabilities to participate in real-time experiences within the world of work. This robust internship program encompasses all labor market sectors across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The jobs range from customer service and teacher’s aide to police assistant and camp counselor. The employers participating include multi-national corporations and Mom & Pop operations. Each job afforded individuals the opportunity to have a paid work experience while learning valuable soft skills and understanding employer expectations while interacting with co-workers and business customers. In 2015 and 2016 there were over 300 combined paid internships for students with disabilities. Most notable is that several students continued with their employment situation at the end of their internship.

Some of the student and employer testimonials include the following comments:

Students say…

*“Thank you for taking the time to show me new things for me to be ready to move into permanent employment.”*

*“Time flies when you are having fun.”*

*“My favorite part of the program was making new Friends.”*

Employers say…

*“Time and attendance is great, always early.”*

*“Very eager and efficient.”*

*“VERY PLEASED to have him on board.”*

**MRC Job Placement Services**

Coinciding with pre-employment activities is the MRC Vocational Rehabilitation Job Placement Services Unit. This unit is designed to engage employers and qualified MRC consumers seeking competitive integrated employment. For those students seeking work after high school, the MRC Job Placement Services Unit will provide the following:

* Work closely with the vocational rehabilitation counselor to execute the individual plan for employment.
* Provide job search techniques that allows the job seeker to leverage opportunities within the competitive marketplace.
* Attend Business Briefings where employers provide information and recruit for job candidates at local MRC Area Offices.
* Prepare individuals for work through “mock” interviews and other job relevant activities.
* Identify employers through our account management system that are seeking career minded individuals for employment.
* Post-employment and counseling after an individual begins work.
* Engage employers to identify unique training opportunities to include On-The-Job Training and Job Driven Training programs that are customized to the job expectations and needs of the consumer.

Again, MRC is available to serve students with disabilities to achieve economic independence through meaningful work. If you are seeking more information for yourself or someone you care about, you can reach one of the local MRC Area Offices by going to [www.mass.gov/MRC](http://www.mass.gov/MRC), selecting “Vocational Rehabilitation”, “Vocational Rehabilitation Area Offices”. Choose the most convenient office and contact them.

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

**PCAs in the Workplace**

**By Ray Glazier**

*You don’t have to choose between work and your wellbeing just because you have a disability and need PCA services*

There are many ways in which your PCA(s) can help you find and maintain a job for which you are qualified, for example:

* + Help your job search with clerical tasks – resumes, applications, phone calls.
  + Help you get ready (bathed, suitably dressed and groomed) for your job interview or for your workday.
  + Help arrange your transportation to and from the interview or worksite.
  + Help you with personal care (feeding, toileting, getting around the workplace) at the worksite.
  + Help at the worksite with job-related tasks like: readying your work station or desk to start the day, picking up fallen items, tidying up at the end of the work day.
  + Accompany you to provide personal care on job-related travel.

Just to be clear: No MassHealth PCA can provide all these services on the job, even though PCA services are not restricted to the home setting. Medicaid-funded PCA Service Plans will not include extra approved hours for job-related assistance or PCA commuting to get to and from the worksite. That said, your flexible MA PCA Program services can make you more employable in a number of ways, depending on your specific assistance needs and each PCA's particular capabilities.

For assistance with job-related tasks that are necessary for you to do the work you were hired to do, the employer must pay for these as an ADA reasonable accommodation; this also applies to personal care on work-related travel. But you must make these needs known at the outset of your employment. However, it’s best to declare these needs only after the job is offered to you, so this does not affect the hiring decision.

The employer may choose to put your MassHealth PCA(s), who know your needs, on the payroll as part-time temporary workers rather than become involved in a recruiting and training process. My employer arrived at this conclusion after several unsuccessful efforts to fulfill my office assistance needs with teenage sons and daughters of fellow employees on an after-school basis. These teens were often late or absent, treating the job as nothing but easy money. After that didn’t work out, they tried using an expensive temporary worker from an office staffing agency; she was pleasant, but didn’t want to open my mail because ‘that wasn’t in her job description’ (which apparently did include walking the halls to find better reception for her cell phone).

Another option is for the employer to pay coworkers to be on-site PCAs, but this can readily lead to awkward interpersonal situations; coworkers may not have experience with the Independent Living philosophy. And this practice can lead coworkers to question your competency, as I found out the hard way by overhearing water cooler office gossip.

Before bringing a particular PCA into your workplace, you should consider:

* + Is this PCA totally dependable? You don’t want to be left hanging at work, for example, needing to ask a coworker for personal care assistance because the PCA is late or doesn’t show up.
    - I have experienced some 4:30 lunches long after the office cafeteria had closed and very uncomfortable late restroom visits.
  + Will this person dress in a fashion appropriate to the worksite? Nothing too shabby, nothing suggestive or out of character with your workplace.
    - One teenage guy wore his baggy jeans so fashionably low that his red silk underpants billowed out the top. Another PCA’s low-riders left her butt crack quite visible. Two PCAs often showed up at the office in pajama bottoms; one of them was ultimately banned from the premises due to offensive body odor.
  + Is this person discreet? No gossiping about you at work or about work matters outside the workplace.
    - One PCA bragged about embarrassing details of the home care she provided to me; another gave out confidential company information to friends at a party.

* + Will this PCA’s language be appropriate in the work setting? No slurs, slanders, or curses.
    - I had one PCA whose every utterance was peppered with f-bombs. Another called all women ‘Hos’.
  + Is this PCA also respectful of others? Will not ask personal questions of your coworkers or, worse yet, try to hit on an attractive coworker.
    - One guy flatfootedly told the woman in the next office that she was ’hot’ and invited her out for a drink after work. He got his face slapped by her and was fired by me.

Make certain that your PCA knows the nature of your job, the type of work environment, specific tasks to be performed (on what schedule), and all expectations well in advance. For the PCA the employer pays, be clear that you intend to recruit, select, train, and supervise this person. In other words, arrangements that mirror those of the MassHealth PCA Program. Indicate that you have experience performing these functions with your home PCAs in the consumer-directed PCA Program.

You can always reach out to the Mass. Rehab. Commission (<http://mass.gov/mrc>) to speak about job accommodations and Workplace PCA issues. Your MassHealth Personal Care Management Agency (PCM) can help you with on-the-job personal care issues.

The sidebar provides some helpful current links for further information on this topic. Note that ‘personal assistance services’ (PAS) is now current terminology in the national disability activism and disability policy communities, but Medicaid still prefers ‘personal care assistance’ or PCA.

*Raymond E. Glazier, Ph.D. is a longtime consumer in the MassHealth PCA Program who has for over two decades researched PCA issues for state and federal government agencies in connection with his former employment by Abt Associates Inc. and currently with disAbility Research Associates of Belmont, MA. He has decades of experience using workplace PCA services to help him stay employed.*

SIDE BAR:

**PCAs in the Workplace Resources**

**ODEP’s Job Accommodation Network (JAN):** ([www.askjan.org)](http://www.askjan.org)) or call 800-526-7234 (Voice), 877-781-9403 (TTY)

* Publication developed by JAN, in collaboration with the Center for Personal Assistance Services that includes a section on PAS and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and a list of PAS resources. Visit [www.askjan.org/media/PAS.html](http://www.askjan.org/media/PAS.html).
* A comprehensive discussion of ADA Job Accommodation requirements, including references to Workplace PAS, sometimes referred to as EPAS (Employment-related Personal Assistance Services). Visit [www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org). In the ‘Search’ field, enter *Technical Assistance Manual: Title I of the ADA*.
* Submit specific questions to a Job Accommodation Network (JAN) consultant in several ways, visit [www.askjan.org/links/contact.htm](http://www.askjan.org/links/contact.htm).

**U.S. Federal Government**: ([www.disability.gov](http://www.disability.gov))

* A guide on finding a workplace personal assistant. Visit [www.disability.gov/resource/finding-a-workplace-personal-assistant/](http://www.disability.gov/resource/finding-a-workplace-personal-assistant/) or in the ‘Search’ field, enter *Finding a Workplace Personal Assistant*.

**Work Support at Virginia Commonwealth University:** ([www.worksupport.com)](http://www.worksupport.com)) or call

804-828-1851 (Voice), 804-828-2494 (TTY)

* A robust listing of information, resources and research about work and disability issues. In particular, visit [www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com), select the ‘Resources’ tab and in the ‘Search’ field, enter *Personal Assistance in the Workplace: A Customer-Directed Guide Manua*l.

**“Ticket to Work” Inspires Ballroom Dancer to Dance On**

**By Kristen Alberino**

Megan Riggs was just like many other people in their late twenties: bright, ambitious, and full of life. She earned Bachelor degrees in Forensic Science and Biology, with a minor in Chemistry. Riggs started working and building her career. In her spare time, she pursued her passion, competitive ballroom dancing.

In January of 2008, Riggs had a major depressive episode. Her illness caused her to lose her job, and financial struggles resulted.  Riggs qualified for Social Security disability benefits.  The monthly payments helped keep her afloat financially, but even then she had the desire to work again. Knowing she would need help returning to work, she looked to Social Security’s “Ticket to Work” program and other work incentives for support on her path back toward self-sufficiency.

Riggs learned that the Ticket program was free, voluntary, and designed specifically for adults who receive disability benefits through Social Security. She decided the program was a good fit for her, as it would help her find a career that could lead to a brighter future.

Once Riggs made her choice to participate in the Ticket to Work program, she decided to work with an Employment Network (EN) that provides employment support and guidance. The EN helped Riggs develop a plan to achieve her work goals and offered advice on career building, job placement, training, and counseling. “I could try work,” said Riggs. “I knew I wasn't going to be on my own.”

Using her Ticket, she was able to test her abilities, build her confidence, and continue to receive her benefits while working toward becoming fully self-sufficient. Through Social Security’s work incentives, she maintained her health care coverage, which gave her peace of mind.

Riggs found stable employment.  As a result of her hard work, she now works as a document control specialist, earning more money than she received on disability benefits.

The Ticket to Work program helped Riggs achieve a more fulfilling life by helping her regain the satisfaction of work. She now enjoys working, reading, spending time with her Cocker Spaniels, and has even been able to return to competitive ballroom dancing.

“With Ticket to Work, I've received the tools to excel and the help of people to keep me going.”

Thousands of Social Security beneficiaries like Megan Riggs have earned more money, begun careers, learned new skills, and met new people through the Ticket to Work program.  If you’re disabled and ready to change your life through work, this program may be the ticket for you, too.

To learn more about the Ticket to Work program, visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work) or call the Help line at 1-866-968-7842 (voice) or 1-866-833-2967 (TTY).

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

**OPINION CORNER**

**Disabilities and the 2016 Presidential Campaign**

**By Mary Jane Fietze**

The video clip of presidential candidate, Donald Trump, publicly making fun of Serge F. Kovaleski, the disabled report- er for the *New York Times*, has gone viral, and now lives on in Hilary Clinton’s Campaign Ads. In a few seconds, it quickly exposes Trump’s insensitivity for the disabled community.

Actress Marianne Leone wrote an opinion piece, *Donald Trump doesn’t have a clue about my son*, which was published in the *Boston Globe* on July 29, 2016. In the editorial, Leone shares with readers that her son Jesse, who died at age seventeen in 2005, lived with the same congenital joint disorder as reporter Kovaleski. Leone states, “It’s painful, not just because of the random cruelty, the dismissal of our Jesse as somehow less than human, the invitation to a jeering crowd to mock someone who is different.” She poignantly adds, “Watching Trump clapping his hands and inviting the world to laugh with derision at our late son’s spastic hands makes my heart sink even 11 years after his death.”

On August 3, 2016, Leone was a guest on WGBH’s *Greater Boston* — a local daily news show. Leone explained to the show’s moderator Jim Braude, “I think the one good thing coming out of the Kovaleski debacle is that people are discussing disabilities more, in this election, than ever before, and that is a really good thing.” Braude responded with a question to Leone, “So, Trump is not a setback, but an opportunity?” She replied, “In one sense.” and added, “It’s horrifying, but at the same time people are talking about disability.”

Leone is the author of *Jesse: A Mother’s Story of Grief, Grace and Everyday Bliss*, which is a tribute to her disabled son’s short life. She is married to fellow actor Chris Cooper and takes advantage of her venue to be a disability advocate. She explained to Braude, “After seeing Anastasia speak at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, my husband and I were both just blubbering and weeping tears of pride and joy to watch her. I thought, I’m going to use my ability to write to speak out.” Leone was referring to Disability Advocate, Anastasia Somoza, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and spastic quadriplegia at birth. Somoza, an eloquent, and expressive disability advocate for Learning and Developmental Disabilities, was a featured speaker at the Democratic National Convention. Somoza expressed her concern, “I fear the day we elect a president who defines being an American in the narrowest possible terms, who shouts, bullies, and profits off of vulnerable Americans. Donald Trump has shown us who he really is, and I honestly feel bad for anyone with that much hate in their heart.” Somoza added, “Donald Trump doesn’t hear me, he doesn’t see me, and he definitely doesn’t speak for me.” In her speech, she also said “56 million people with disabilities so often feel invisible.”

We, the diverse faces of the disabled, represent the nation’s largest minority, may indeed feel invisible; but we need to speak out against ignorance. Trump wants to build a wall, while we are constantly fighting to break down barriers, and not just physical barriers. We strive to eradicate stereotypes that prevent equal access to opportunities, while he preaches isolationism and xenophobia.

Where is the outrage over a campaign full of insults, bullying, and racism? Trump has repeatedly called Elizabeth Warren “Pocahontas”, referring to her Native American heritage. This is racism! He is attacking someone’s heritage. I am not shocked anymore because each week is a new low as Trump lashes out at a new segment of society.

Trump has demonstrated that he is not in tune with a plethora of differences, diversities and disabilities which define Americans. Don’t we deserve better? Be a disability advocate. Take a stand against intolerance.

*Mary Jane Fietze has been living with Multiple Sclerosis for 24 years. She writes for* The Burlington Union *about disability topics. Mary Jane has won several awards in hand cycling and enjoys demonstrating her ability to kids as part of BDAC’s “differently-abled talks” to schools.*

SIDE BAR

**Article Reference Sources**

Marianne Leone’s Boston Globe opinion piece can be viewed online at [www.bostonglobe.com](http://www.bostonglobe.com). Select the ‘Opinion’ tab. In the ‘Search’ field, enter *Donald Trump doesn’t have a clue about my son.*

Marianne Leone’s WGBH *greater Boston* interview can be viewed online at [www.news.wgbh.org](http://www.news.wgbh.org). In the ‘Search’ field enter the title, *Actress Marianne Leone On Why Donald Trump Doesn’t Have A Clue About Her Son.*

Anastasia Somoza’s speech can be viewed on YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). In the ‘Search’ field, enter the title, *Anastasia Somoza Speech – DNC 2016.*

**LOVE AND INTIMACY CORNER**

On July 20, 2016 the Boston Globe published a story about a Massachusetts delegate who proposed to a Rhode Island alternate delegate during the Republican National Convention. On July 27, 2016, an Arizona news outlet published a story about two Arizona delegates who got engaged during the Democratic National Convention. None of this surprises your Ms. Love, as people can meet and fall in love when they share interests, in this case shared political views and shared political action.

Perhaps a bit more food for thought is Eitan Hersh's June 28, 2016 online article (www.fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-many-republicans-marry-democrats). The author analyzes the data for mixed-partisan marriages. He has found that 30% of married households involve a politically mixed couple. Yet, people married to someone of the same party voted at much higher rates than people married to those of the opposite party or to independents.

My favorite election news story comes from reporter Lauren Appelbaum of the RespectAbility Report. In her July 28, 2016 post, she cites Illinois Representative Tammy Duckworth who indicated that “Voter turnout of people with disabilities was lower than the national average in 2012, in part due to the fact that just 27% of polling places as of 2008 are accessible.” Discouraging news. But Appelbaum also reports that 400 delegates with disabilities attended the 2016 Democratic National Convention, which she writes is a 35% growth since the 2012 convention. Times are changing for people with disabilities who are politically active and vote; times are showing some change for the better.

In closing, you can be a person with disabilities who loves your politics and potentially meet others just like you with whom you can share interests. If you’re interested in politics, consider getting involved in a candidate’s election campaign. And while you are there, it’s possible that the person stuffing candidate information packets next to you may become your future love interest.

Exercise your right to vote. Your vote counts now more than ever. Don't stop being politically active once the new President is chosen. Get active in your local Democratic or Republican ward and town committees. Local town and city governments need you, too. And, don't feel that you can only vote or support campaigns for others. Get active and run for office yourself!

Run for school committee, library trustee, or any other position where you feel you can uniquely contribute.

Your Ms. Love is voting by absentee ballot this year. Mark your calendar to vote in-person or by absentee ballot. Flex your voting rights muscle by voting every time a ballot question is on the ballot. Stand up for candidates who stand up for issues people with disabilities care about, including jobs, housing, and transportation for people with disabilities.

*The Love and Intimacy Corner welcomes questions and requests for topic areas from readers. Please send comments, questions and suggestions to Ms. Love at* [*DI.LoveandIntimacy@gmail.com*](mailto:DI.LoveandIntimacy@gmail.com) *Questions chosen to be featured in the Ms. Love column will appear under a pseudonym to protect privacy, and may be edited.*

**INFORMATION BRIEFS**

**Register Today for the Work Without Limits Annual Conference & Career Fair!**

Learn how you can raise the bar higher to advance the employment of people with disabilities in Massachusetts.

Day 1 (October 25) is a full day conference featuring keynote addresses, exhibitors, networking and breakout session providing attendees a day of learning, sharing and engaging with industry leaders.

Day 2 (October 26) is a half day career fair for job seekers with disabilities to meet with some of Massachusetts’ leading employers.

Location: Four Points by Sheraton

1125 Boston-Providence Turnpike (Route 1)

Norwood, MA 02062

For more information, visit [www.raisethebar2016.org](http://www.raisethebar2016.org)

**Touch the Future – Career Exploration for Blind Youth and Their Parents**

The mission of Our Space Our Place, Inc. is to prepare blind youth for their future as productive and successful adults by promoting their self-confidence, determination and social and independent living skills through activities which support self-exploration, social integration and the investigation of college and career opportunities.

For years, there has existed a 70% unemployment rate within the blindness community. Our Space Our Place, Inc. offers a career exploration program for blind youth ages 13-18.

**Topics Covered will include**:

* Identifying interests and skills and matching those with future career options.
* Meeting professionals in ones interested field and touring companies.
* Role of parents.
* Practicing interviewing, creating a resume, writing cover letters and thank you notes.
* Using resources at school and at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.
* Enhancing interpersonal skills.

**Program Days and Location**

* Date: The program begins Saturday January 16, 2010 and meets once a month on the third Saturday of each month.
* Time: 10:00 AM - 12 Noon
* Location: The Tobin Community Center, 1481 Tremont Street, Roxbury MA.

Transportation is available. For more information, visit [/www.ourspaceourplace.org/career.php](http://www.ourspaceourplace.org/career.php) or call 617-459-4084.

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