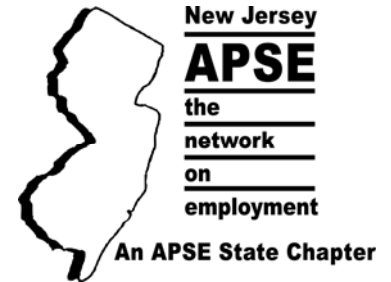


APSE ECHO

Employment Choice Hope Opportunity



Winter/Spring 2007

Double Edition



Jennifer Velez, Esq. Confirmed as Commissioner, NJ Department of Human Services

Jennifer Velez, an attorney with an extensive background in social service issues in New Jersey, was nominated to be Commissioner of the Department of Human Services (DHS) by Governor Jon S. Corzine in February, 2007 and was unanimously confirmed by the NJ Senate on June 21, 2007.

For approximately one year prior to her nomination, Velez had served as Deputy Commissioner for Family and Community Services at DHS. In that position, she oversaw the divisions that administer the Department's largest programs, including Medicaid and public welfare, and which are responsible for two-thirds of the Department's \$9.4 billion budget. She also oversaw the Office of Early Care and Education and the Office of Prevention and Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and was involved in making recommendations for the Commissioner on all aspects of the Department's responsibilities.

Velez came to DHS from the Office of the Child Advocate, where she was named the Office's First Assistant Child Advocate when it was created in September 2003.

From 1998 until 2003, Velez served Governor James E. McGreevey, Acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco and Governor Christine Todd Whitman as Senior Associate Counsel and Assembly Liaison in the Office of Governor's Counsel. There, she was primarily responsible for advising each on legislation and regulations affecting the Department of Human Services.

She also played a significant role in the architecture of several laws that have impacted the health and welfare of New Jersey's children. These include the Homeless Youth Act, the Safe Haven Infant Protection Act, FamilyCare, the creation of a Kinship Legal Guardianship status, New Jersey's implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Before entering public service, Velez was in private practice at the law firm of Pitney, Hardin, Kipp & Szuch in Florham Park, New Jersey. She received her law degree from Rutgers School of Law in Newark, NJ and her undergraduate degree in Economics from Drew University in Madison, NJ.

Kenneth Ritchey Appointed to Oversee Division of Developmental Disabilities



Department of Human Services Commissioner Jennifer Velez has appointed Kenneth William Ritchey, former director of the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, as the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). Assistant Commissioner Ritchey joined the division March 7th.

Ritchey began working with the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD) in March 1999 and guided the department through a number of significant changes and accomplishments. Major initiatives under Ritchey's leadership included a restructuring of the department and the expansion of Ohio's Self-Determination project, where consumers choose the types of services that they want and need. Ritchey also developed critical Interagency Agreements and navigated the settlement of three class action lawsuits.

DHS Assistant Commissioner Ritchey received his Bachelor's degree from Shippensburg University, Pennsylvania and his Master's degree from the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. He has a second Master's in Education Administration from the University of Dayton and participated in the Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government sponsored by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

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From the NJ APSE President

By Jennifer Joyce



As evidenced by this special double issue of the NJ APSE ECHO, the NJ APSE Board of Directors has had a very busy few months.

We began 2007 with our annual retreat. The retreat always provides the Board with the opportunity to reflect on the past year's accomplishments, reconnect with our mission, philosophy and purpose, and plan for the future. The discussions at the retreat led to the Board's decision to develop a strategic plan for the next few years and create a mission statement that is more direct and focused. I am pleased to announce that our new mission statement is "NJ APSE is an association committed to improving equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities in New Jersey through education and advocacy." Look for the strategic plan on our website www.njapse.org once it is finalized in a few weeks.

I continue to hear positive feedback regarding the *Facing the Future XV: Travel the Road to Employment Conference* that was held in March. The Conference Committee in partnership with the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities put together a great two-day event. Once again, thank you to Dan Baker and Glori Bine-Callagy for co-chairing the Conference Committee and to Carol Britton, Robyn Carroll, Wendy Kuziemski, Anthony Camuso and the rest of the staff at the Boggs Center for all their hard work. Many attendees have told me that they felt this year's conference was the best they had attended so your efforts definitely paid off.

As you know, NJ has had a couple of changes in the Department of Human Services (DHS) within the past couple of months. Jennifer Velez, Esq. has been named the Commissioner of DHS. Commissioner Velez has already shown her commitment to employment for people with disabilities by speaking at this year's Facing the Future Conference, and I will be meeting with her in several days to discuss supported employment. Commissioner Velez also appointed Kenneth Ritchey to oversee the Division of Developmental Disabilities. As you know, this title had previously been Director, but Commissioner Velez has raised the importance of this position to Assistant Commissioner. NJ APSE has sent a welcoming letter to Assistant Commissioner Ritchey and will be arranging a meeting with him shortly. Look for updates on all of these meetings in the upcoming months.

Now that you have a quick update on some of the highlights from the past few months, here is some information about upcoming events. The National APSE Conference "Employment for All – Show Me the Future – It's Bigger than You Think" will be held in Kansas City from July 16-18, 2007. The NJ APSE Board will be well represented at this year's conference. Krystal Odell will be presenting a workshop and Pat Gutowski and I will be participating in the Chapter Leaders Summit to be held on July 15th. To kick off Disability Employment Awareness Month in October, the Communication/Outreach Committee is planning a membership networking event that will be similar to the one NJ APSE held a couple of years ago with representatives from the State Agencies. Invitations to this event will be distributed this Autumn. Also, we have heard a

desire from the NJ APSE membership for additional networking and social opportunities so the Training & Education Committee will be hosting a holiday social and training event this December.

We always enjoy hearing from the NJ APSE members. Please feel free to contact any of the committee chairs, NJ APSE Board members, or myself with any suggestions or ideas you may have for NJ APSE. Our contact information can be found on at www.njapse.org or by calling (732) 831-1114. I hope you all have an enjoyable and safe summer!

Happy Job Coaches

By Dan Baker

Here at the NJ APSE ECHO, we are happy to start a new series that you will see from time to time in our newsletter. We often do not take the time to look at things that are going well in our field. When we do see success stories, the stories always seem to focus only on the person who gets the job (also known as the job seeker, customer, consumer, service recipient, or any number of other words), and only rarely talk about the person who helped find the job and train the individual.

In this series, we wish to change that, and want to turn the spotlight on the person behind the scenes. We want to tell you about some happy job coaches. We will ask about some of the things that help us to love our jobs. In the first installment here, we will talk about two people at Our House, Inc. who just seem to make great things happen. We present to you Ms. Debra Wright and Jesus Monteverde. We thank them for being willing to appear in our spotlight, and also for the time they took in chatting with me about their jobs.

Jesus Monteverde has been a job coach at Our House, Inc. for 17 years. She had prior experience at thrift shop run by a local chapter of The Arc, and prior to coming to the United States was a teacher in Peru. Ms. Monteverde finds that the first thing she loves about her job is having the personal connection with people she supports. Personally, I absolutely agree. Research shows that what keeps people in their jobs in human services are those personal connections. Ms. Monteverde helps people to get their first job, which she strongly feels must be a job the person loves. Unfortunately, in

“I’ll stay in the field no matter what because it is what I enjoy. If you come to work happy and you love what you are doing it makes a difference.”
-Jesus Monteverde

our society, first jobs often are not great work. Ms. Monteverde sees that as a problem, and a problem that she wants to change. She loves to see the change in the person’s life when somebody gets a job they love. She sees that many times there is a tremendous positive change in the person’s behavior. She sees that helping somebody to find the right job is a lot like cutting a diamond, with similar tremendous re-



Jesus Monteverde and Debra Wright,

wards for everybody.

Like any of us, Ms. Monteverde has many stories of success, and she feels personally complimented when she hears community employers compliment the people whom she helps to bring into a workplace. That first hire can open doors for other job seekers as well, so she always makes sure that the first hire works out. Ms. Monteverde enjoys the challenge of working with somebody who either can not express feelings well or does not have a set preference for work. She finds the job sampling stage to often be the most enjoyable

How does Ms. Monteverde stay energized after such a long time in the field? Because every day and every person are different. She said, “I’ll stay in the field no matter what because it is what I enjoy. If you come to work happy and you love what you are doing, it makes a difference.” She feels that she learns as much from the people she teaches as they do.

Debra Wright is also with Our House, Inc., and is a Transition Coordinator. She sees her role as working together with the family to create a goal for the student. She considers the primary job of transition services to create opportunities for job sampling so that students can learn about various types of jobs and careers. She keeps many opportunities for students in job sampling.

Like Ms. Monteverde, Ms. Wright used to be a teacher, but now far prefers the role of the job coach. She must love it! She is in her tenth year of it. She often works with a student from the time of freshman to senior years. She wants to have them in a job by senior year, so they say to me, “Ms. Wright, I don’t need you anymore.” That is what she thinks of a success and that’s what keeps her going. Ms. Wright notes that what keeps her going in this field year in and year out is that the students she are working with are fresh. They don’t know the environment, so it is her job to get them ready to go. As long as they are energized, so is she. Also, she gets to be behind the scenes in all sorts of places. There are not many jobs that allow us to do that.

“Ms. Wright loves to connect the person with the place, trying to engage a natural support from day one on the job.”

Ms. Wright loves to connect the person with the place, trying to engage a natural support from day one on the job. Use of natural supports in the workplace allows students to learn to become independent and successful. She shared with me a great image of what we do in transition supports. “[The students] start as a seed and become a string bean.” I often say that management is a lot like gardening. Ms. Wright would obviously say that transition is as well.

Ms. Wright knows that success often does not come on the first try. She gets the students in many different settings, and once they get a good match it becomes a fit, like a hand and a glove. In some programs, Ms. Wright has the students out in community settings five days a week by senior year. She feels that makes for a smooth transition for the students in to adult life.

Are you a happy job coach or do you know someone who is? Share your story with Dan Baker at dan.baker@umdnj.edu.

So we present to you two happy job coaches, Ms. Debra Wright and Ms. Jesus Monteverde. They shared with us the things that keep them going. We know that our jobs can be difficult and challenging, but our happy job coaches

also have found tremendous joy in doing incredible work for adults and youth with disabilities. Obviously since you are reading this, you agree that community employment benefits everyone, but it has to work for us, the professionals in this field, as well. Thank you for reading this. If you would like to see either yourself or a colleague spotlighted in a future installment in this series, please contact Dr. Dan Baker at dan.baker@umdnj.edu.

Facing the Future XV: Travel the Road to Employment

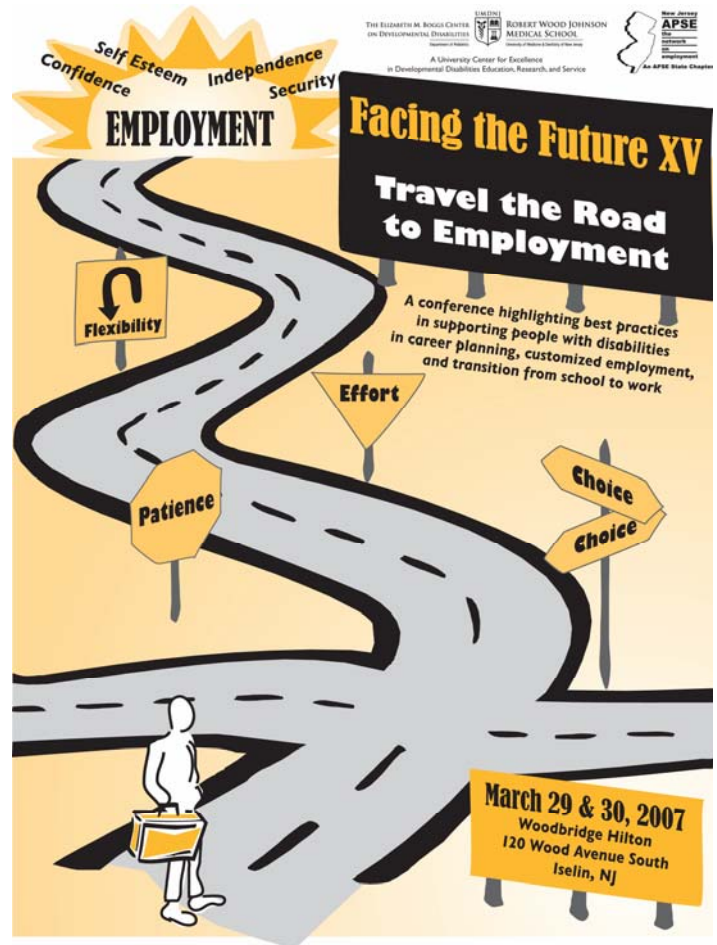
Travelers Came from Across the State to Attend the Fifteenth Annual Facing the Future Conference

By Carol Britton and Dan Baker

The 2007 Facing the Future Conference “Travel the Road to Employment” was held on March 29 and 30 at the Woodbridge Hilton in Iselin, NJ. More than 300 of us traveled roads such as the Turnpike and I-80 to come to exit 131A on the Parkway to make the conference a great success. The event was hosted through a partnership between the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities and the New Jersey chapter of APSE, the Network on Employment to highlight best practices in supporting people with disabilities in career planning, customized employment and transitioning from school to work.

In planning the conference there was many things to consider. First, we had to find the right location. Based on the success of the 2006 conference, and its centralized location in the state, the event was again held at the Woodbridge Hilton. With 280 people in attendance on Thursday alone, we just about filled it to capacity! Second, we need to bring you speakers who will be both entertaining and informative. This year our keynote presenters were Erin Reihle and Victoria Maxell. Ms. Reihle spoke to us from the point of view of the employer, and delivered a wonderful, educational keynote. One conference attendee wrote: “The keynote on Project SEARCH was wonderful! Finally someone with practical experience to inspire us and show us practical applications.” In addition, we attempted to bring you speakers who offered their expertise in employment for people who experience mental illness, and the capstone of that effort was Ms. Maxwell’s presence at our conference. Ms. Maxwell is known internationally for the one-woman plays in which she describes her life and her experiences. Her keynote presentation *Funny, You Don’t Look Crazy* which described her journey to employment following a mental illness was described by attendees as “excellent”, “motivational”, and “a true inspiration”. Our roster of speakers at breakout workshops included the keynote presenters, speakers from around the country and our local heroes. The 24 workshops offered over two days included topics which ranged from employment law, to work incentive programs, to ethical dilemmas, to functional behavior assessment, and motivational interviewing techniques. Attendees wrote: “This was the best APSE Conference. Very knowledgeable and dynamic presenters who projected enthusiasm for their field”, “Fantastic day”, and “I loved the fact that different points of view were shared whether from a person with a disability, business or organization helping those with disabilities.”

Our thanks go out to all of you for attending the event and to the Conference Committee for all their hard work in making it such a success. Conferences give us a chance to learn, network, and reinvigorate ourselves. If you did not make it this year, we hope to see you next year. We believe it is worth the time to come, and we believe it was worth our time to make it happen.



2007 Facing the Future XV Conference Attendees

Facing the Future XV: Travel the Road to Employment



Alan Casset, Employment Specialist of the Year, with Wendy Manganaro

Let's Take a Bow!

By Anthony Camuso

*A*pproximately 10 years

ago, while working as a job coach for a community service provider, I was asked to participate in a person centered planning meeting for a young woman. For purposes of this article, I will refer to her as "Sara". During our initial meeting, Sara addressed a variety of topics that were important to her including

current living arrangements, social network, and various recreational and leisure activities. However, Sara and her family made it clear that obtaining a job was one of her primary goals, just below going on a cruise to the Caribbean. Sara told me that she did have some past employment experience but both she and the others present almost simultaneously responded, "...things just did not seem to work out with those jobs".

Sara and her family not only stressed the importance for her to find the right job but also emphasized the significance of my role as her job coach in this process. As I intently listened to Sara and her family passionately explain why she needed to work, it became increasingly aware to me that this needed to be more than just another job. It needed to be a place where Sara felt welcomed, recognized, and appreciated. It needed to be a workplace where eventually her colleagues and co-workers would become friends and trusted acquaintances. It needed to be a place where her employer valued Sara just as much as she valued her job. Helping Sara find that ideal job would not be an easy task, but as her job coach it was one that I embraced. It was at that moment, more than ten years ago, that I had that so-called "Ah Ha" moment. It was then when I truly realized that my role as a job coach was so important to so many people for so many different reasons.

This past March, the New Jersey APSE: The Network on Employment, held their fifteenth annual conference, "Facing the Future XV: Travel the Road to Employment". Throughout the conference there were numerous times where I once again had that "Ah Ha" moment. The first and perhaps the most profound was when our closing keynote speaker, Victoria Maxwell, shared so openly and honestly with conference attendees, her struggles and triumphs with mental illness. During her keynote, Victoria stressed the importance of so many others in her life during these trying and difficult times including her family, friends, employers, co-workers, and yes her job coach.

Another "Ah Ha" moment for me was the announcement of our award recipients. The first was for Employment Specialist of the Year, awarded to Alan Casset, an Employment Consultant at Career Quest. One of the quotes from Alan's nomination form written by his supervisor stated, "Alan has shown the ability to think outside of the box when matching employment candidates with the needs of employers. He has proven to be a valued and exemplary employee that

NJ APSE Board Honors 2 Significant Leaders

By Jennifer Joyce

*E*very year the NJ APSE Board of Directors honors 2 leaders who have made a difference in employment opportunities for people with disabilities with the Rebecca McDonald Leadership and Special Tribute Awards.

The Rebecca McDonald Leadership Award is presented to someone who works within the field of disability and makes every effort to ensure that employment is the first option for all people with disabilities because he/she believes that all people with disabilities should have the opportunity and do have the ability, right and responsibility to work competitively in integrated settings. Like Rebecca McDonald, the award recipient is someone who inspires and moves people and systems through one's actions in his/her personal life or in his/her role as a leader in this field and has a vision of community inclusion for all people with disabilities with a particular emphasis on employment.

The NJ APSE Board was proud to present the 2007 Rebecca McDonald Leadership Award to Deborah Spitalnik, Ph.D, Executive Director at The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Spitalnik's leadership, advocacy efforts, influence on public policy, and ongoing commitment toward ensuring that persons with disabilities have the same opportunities available as all citizens have helped continue the efforts of Rebecca McDonald and keep employment a priority throughout the state.



Dan Baker congratulates Deborah Spitalnik

The Special Tribute Award is presented to someone that the NJ APSE Board wishes to recognize for his/her contribution to employment of persons with disabilities or to NJ APSE. The recipient of this honor also inspires and moves people and systems through his/her actions in his/her personal life or as a leader and has a vision of community inclusion for all people with disabilities with a particular emphasis on employment.

The NJ APSE Board was honored to present the 2007 Special Tribute Award to Governor Richard J. Codey. Governor Codey's history of advocating for people with disabilities, particularly focusing on people experiencing mental illness, made him an obvious choice to receive this prestigious honor.

Congratulations to all of the 2007 Award Recipients! Your passion, dedication, enthusiasm, and hard work has inspired us all.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)



Michael Cestero accepts the Transition Educator of the Year Award

is respected by consumers, colleagues, and families alike.” The second award was given to Michael Cestero, Transition Counselor at Allies Inc., for Transition Educator of the Year. One of his colleagues was quoted as describing him in the following way, “Michael has a specific way of connecting to the students and making them feel comfortable with him and most importantly the students feel they can trust him. If I had to describe Michael in one word it would be “infectious”. He brings great ideas to our agency and the students we serve.”

The last award, Employer of the Year, was given to Joseph O’Donnell, Supervisor at Herr Foods located in Egg Harbor Township, NJ. A Supported Employment agency that worked with Herr Foods and Mr. O’Donnell summarized their role by stating, “Herr Foods and Mr. O’Donnell has provided a work environment that is supportive of all employees. He is accommodating, flexible, and provides positive feedback to all associates for a job well done. He is an exceptional supervisor for an exceptional employer.”

As I listened to the award recipients so appreciatively, yet humbly accept their awards, I could not help but realize the significant roles they played in certain people’s lives, lives like Sara’s, the young woman that I job coached more than ten years prior. You might be wondering whatever happened with Sara. Similar to our honorees’, with some due diligence, hard work, and dedication from everyone involved, employment was achieved. Ideally, I would like to say she obtained the perfect job and was employed there happily ever after, but that was not the case.

However, she did work there long enough to further grow and develop both professionally and personally. She did work there long enough so that colleagues soon became her friends and “buddies”. She did work there long enough so that her employer valued her as much as she valued her job. She worked there long enough to understand and appreciate my role as her job coach. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, she worked there long enough for me to realize and respect her role as an individual traveling the road to employment.

Whether you are a job seeker looking for your first job or a new job, a job coach or a job developer, a transition coordinator or a paraprofessional, a large corporation or a small employer, take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate the roles of everyone involved in Supported Employment. However, most of all appreciate your own role because you really do make a difference. So, much like our award recipients, take a bow, you definitely deserve it!

Tribute to Dan Will

By Jennifer Joyce

On Sunday, February 25, 2007 the Supported Employment Community lost a dear friend when Daniel V. Will died after a battle with cancer.

In addition to being a great husband, father, grandfather, brother, and friend, Dan worked for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for 36 years as a counselor, supervisor, manager, and ultimately as the Chief, Community Rehabilitation Programs for 15 years until his retirement in 2004. He was a significant supporter of integrated employment at competitive wages for people with disabilities and strongly advocated for supported employment services.

Due to his great support of NJ APSE: The Network on Employment, the Board of Directors honored him with the *Special Tribute Award* at the Facing the Future XI Conference in 2003. The program for that event noted that Dan “...works tirelessly to improve communication and coordination between the systems that provide employment services to people with disabilities. He listens to complaints when things are not going well and he works to fix them. He acts as if all things are possible and all problems can be solved. Dan is accessible and responsive to VR counselors, SE providers, people with disabilities and NJ APSE. We honor Dan for his commitment to quality integrated employment for people with disabilities and his on-going support of NJ APSE.”

On a personal note, gaining Dan Will’s respect remains one of the highlights of my career. I will always remember his advice, his great sense of humor, his never ending passion, his modesty, his kindness, and his laugh. He continues to be one of the greatest influences on me professionally and one of the kindest men I’ve ever know. He is truly missed.

APSE ECHO is produced by the
Communication/Outreach Committee of NJ APSE.

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Jennifer Joyce, Editor
Glori Bine-Callagy, Co-Chair
Rebecca Shulman, Co-Chair
Frank Adu
John Rose

*Please submit articles to
Jennifer Joyce at jjoyce@arcnj.org*

Jeff's Success Story

By Debbie Sennholz

Jeff is in his mid 20's. As a young man, Jeff was in a motor vehicle accident and acquired a Traumatic Brain Injury. He went through difficult rehabilitation and lived in a facility with extremely small rooms that he believed were not appropriate for a young man in his 20's. His roommate was a very shy and quiet man. Jeff, being very outgoing, was miserable and wanted OUT.

Project HIRE helped Jeff secure a job at Lowe's. At the time he lived in Edison, and the Lowe's he needed to train at was in Old Bridge, quite a distance, but Jeff was there every day as a Greeter. He then went to his permanent store in Woodbridge only to find out in a month that they were eliminating greeter positions. He was offered the only job available, Switchboard Operator, on a whim. Jeff is now the person that you first speak to when you call Lowe's.

Jeff worked Part Time for a while and his work was so impressive they wanted him to be there Full Time. Upon approval from his dad to make sure he could afford to lose his SSDI, Jeff took on the Full Time job. Along with that Full Time position, came the desire to live on his own.

With a few letters to the Woodbridge Public Assistance Office from the Project HIRE Job Coach to ensure he would have continued support at the job, Jeff moved into his own apartment in Woodbridge. Now, when you ask him how he is doing, Jeff will tell you that he struggles, but he isn't getting help from the government and is doing it all on his own.

Do you know someone who would like to share his or her Employment Success Story? Share these stories with Jennifer Joyce at jjoyce@arcnj.org.

Jennifer's Success Story

By Maddi Sink

In 1996 I met Jennifer. Jennifer was a young lady straight out of high school who wanted to work in daycare. At the time (and still today) it was very hard to get into the daycare field without the appropriate credentials.

Jennifer shared the following with me. While in high school, she tried to get into the local Vo-Tech for their Child Care Program. She was turned down and offered Health and Resource Class. She was trying to get into the Child Care Program at her own high school and, although most of the child study team felt she wasn't ready, Jennifer was finally accepted her senior year. The issue was that there were two Child Care Courses. Child Care I and Child Care II. The teacher who taught Child Care I had a reputation for not working well with individuals who were receiving special education services. So, arrangements were made for the teacher of Child Care II to teach both courses to Jennifer. Jennifer did not give up, and she passed the courses and graduated.

Jennifer searched on her own for jobs in childcare. She did not have any luck and was turned down by many places. She connected with Supported Employment and together they searched. Finally, through a family friend, they were told about the owner of a daycare who would be willing to talk about having her as a teacher's aide. After the interview and promise of supported employment services, she was hired part time.

Her ultimate goal was to work full time. She was told that in order to work full time, she would need First Aid and CPR for adult and children. She tried taking it at the daycare with the other staff but failed. Once again, she connected with the SE provider who found an agency that works with people with disabilities and had a First Aid and CPR trainer. Jennifer attended the class with her employment specialist, who also took the class. She passed with the assistance and accommodations (specifically an oral test) of the coach and trainer.

Jennifer continued renewing CPR and First Aid at the same place on her own after that until she eventually had the confidence to attend at the daycare with her co-workers.

Jennifer has successfully been a full time teacher's aide for the past 9 or 10 years and is trusted with the teaching responsibilities in the absence of her class' teacher. She has been filling this shoe for about a year.

She is now determined to get her Child Care Certificate and applied to her County College and asked for assistance (it is a program to assist people with disabilities). She wanted someone to help her with her reading and to tutor her but was turned down and instead given a calculator and a notebook. This assistance did not provide the help she needed, and she had to drop out. More recently she learned that the assistance program at this school has been redeveloped. With the assistance of her SE provider, she is going to look into the changes and see if she can get the accommodations necessary to complete the course.

She is a very accomplished person with an ongoing dream.

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEW JERSEY APSE: THE NETWORK ON EMPLOYMENT

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Movie Review—SNOW CAKE

By Rebecca Shulman

SNOW CAKE is a UK-Canadian co-production produced by Gina Carter and Andrew Eaton from Revolution Films and Canadian based Producers Niv Fichman and Jessica Daniel from Rhombus Media. The script is by first-time UK screenwriter Angela Pell and Directed by UK based Marc Evans. It stars Sigourney Weaver (Linda) and Alan Rickman (Alex).

Unlike many films about people who have disabilities, Snow Cake presents Linda as a feisty, independent woman who happens to be autistic. She doesn't have any special talents, she doesn't need healing, she just has some different behaviors. Alex has been emotionally shut down for a long time and is quite like her, just less extreme.

SNOW CAKE is a film about friendship, trust, snow, acceptance, obsessive behavior, a dog called Marilyn, and about the power of friendship, no matter how eccentric, to change our lives and heal our hearts. Beautifully filmed in the real town of Wawa, Ontario by the shores of Lake Superior, the town symbol is a giant sculpture of a Canada Goose.

Prior to the start of filming, Ms. Weaver worked a great deal with individuals who have autism as well as professional organizations and support groups to make her portrayal of this lead character realistic. There is some adult content but overall this is a great movie. It is very hard to find but should be out on video soon. Keep an eye out for Snow Cake.

Include Your Stories in Upcoming Newsletters.

Are you an employment specialist who really loves your job and wants to share information about what has led to your success? Contact Dan Baker at (732) 235-9325 or dan.baker@umdnj.edu to share your "Happy Job Coach" story.

Do you know an individual with a disability who has experienced employment success? Contact Jennifer Joyce at (732) 246-2525 ext. 32 or jjoyce@arcnj.org to share his/her "Employment Success" story.

NJ APSE is always looking for writers for the newsletter. If you are interested, please contact Jennifer Joyce at (732) 246-2525 ext. 32 or jjoyce@arcnj.org.