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Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 11 (1998) 177-178

JOURNAL OF
*Vocational
Rehabilitation*

Editorial

There are millions of people in the world with mental, physical, sensory and health-related disabilities who would like the opportunity to participate in the community and the workplace, but are being denied the opportunity. Some of the reasons for this discrimination included the limited expectations and attitudes of professionals in the field, lack of sufficient funds for training and placement, and government disincentives to work. Businesses need to access the best ways to train and retain employees with disabilities as well. Despite these obstacles, in many parts of the world there is a civil rights movement occurring for adults with disabilities who have historically been either unemployed or grossly underemployed. In the United States the ADA enactment and implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) takes a major step toward securing these rights and correcting these injustices.

Since the ADA is such a broad-ranging legislative mandate for civil rights and equal opportunity for persons with disabilities, it is very tempting to assume that this historic law can 'right all wrongs' that have occurred in the lives of many persons. Unfortunately, the ADA cannot right all the wrongs, although it will have numerous positive implications. The ADA does imply that greater employment should occur in better-paying jobs; that mobility within and throughout communities should be achieved with greater ease, that more people with disabilities should have access to public and private transportation; and that telecommunication options and alternatives should be greatly improved. Overall, increased access to facilities throughout the world will allow

for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities into the mainstream of society than ever before.

The opportunity to make choices concerning life, work, and recreation has been limited or non-existent for individuals with disabilities for many years. It has become increasingly evident that the powerlessness and lack of self-direction often felt by people with disabilities are more frequently related to the attitudes and practices of care givers, service providers, funding agencies, social institutions, and society, in general, rather than to any limitations or impairments resulting from the disability itself. For example, some individuals may never have been provided with more than one choice, decision making skills may never have been taught, adequate information about alternatives may never have been available, decisions may have been made by professionals who feel they know best, or capabilities and self-assertions may have been ignored or underestimated.

Choices made by persons with disabilities have often been based upon the avoidance of undesirable alternatives or upon the acceptance of the available rather than on true preferences. Decisions have also frequently been restricted by other external forces, such as agency regulations, lack of accessibility, inadequate supports, or stereotypical attitudes. For example, to avoid sitting at home or attending a sheltered workshop, an individual may agree to work at a particular job that he or she does not really enjoy. An individual may also take a job because the employer was the only person to hire him or her. In other cases, the rehabilitation professional may have recommended the job as the 'only job he or she could

do', or it was the only job opening of which the individual was aware, or it was the only job for which the agency could provide the needed assistance and support. With the passage of laws like the ADA, it is hoped that many of these external factors will be eliminated.

Individuals with disabilities in all segments of the employment sector need to be included and given an opportunity to work in open markets. Previous employment initiatives have not been able to erase high unemployment experienced by people with disabilities. Change can occur through the involvement of key stakeholders in planning and education. Utilizing the provisions in laws such as the ADA in order to reverse the high unemployment rate will enhance participation by people with disabilities in all aspects of community life. Altering the pattern of unemployment to

productive work is important to the growth of a strong economy. As we approach the year 2000, the workforce is caught in a cycle of rapid change. This has been fostered, in part, by a world rather than single-country economy and the advent of easily operable technology which has created new jobs and industries. Technological advances have made it possible to accommodate individuals with significant disabilities in the work place. The general public values thriving businesses in their communities. Individuals with disabilities have much talent to offer. The exciting issue which follows shows how some of these initiatives can be implemented in Spain. Dr Miguel Angel Verdugo has done an outstanding job of pulling together this important issue.

Paul Wehman, PhD