

FROM THE EDITOR

There are millions of people 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 this opportunity. Some of the reasons for this discrimination include limited expectations and attitudes of professionals in the field, the unwillingness of business to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, lack of sufficient funds for training and placement, and government disincentives to work. Despite these obstacles, in the United States today there is a growing civil rights movement for adults with disabilities who historically have been either unemployed or grossly underemployed. Karen Flippo, the guest editor for this special issue on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) notes in the following pages that people with disabilities are finally beginning to assert their rights to be included in society. People with disabilities do not just want a job, they want a career. The enactment and implementation of the ADA represent major steps toward securing these rights and correcting these injustices.

Because the ADA is such a broad-ranging legislative mandate for civil rights and equal opportunity for people with disabilities, it is very tempting to assume that this historic law can right all the wrongs that have occurred in the lives of many people. Unfortunately, the ADA cannot do this, although it has numerous positive implications. The ADA implies that people with disabilities should achieve greater employment 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 United States will allow greater inclusion of people with disabilities into the mainstream of society than ever before.

Although the ADA cannot legislatively "make" all of these positive implications realities, it provides a legislative vehicle that will unleash many rehabilitation and behavioral technology advances

into the hands of motivated people with disabilities, advocacy organizations, and concerned service providers and families. It is hoped that the technological advances and improved attitudes toward people with disabilities will take effect in the context of a positive national mandate.

If individuals with disabilities are to experience personal satisfaction and quality of life, it is critical for them to have the right to make choices, express preferences, and exercise control in their lives. For people without disabilities, the ability to make life choices free from discrimination was established with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This same right to choice was recently extended to individuals with disabilities with the passage of the ADA. Although the ADA provides a mechanism through which individuals can accomplish their goals, many people with severe disabilities may still depend on professionals to inform them of the alternatives available to them and assist them in achieving their desired goals.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to make choices concerning life, work, and recreation has been limited or nonexistent for individuals who have disabilities. 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 caregivers, service providers, funding agencies, social institutions, and society in general than to any limitations or impairments resulting from the disability itself. For example, some individuals may never have been given 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 people with disabilities have often been based on the avoidance of undesirable alternatives or 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 who would 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 else 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 the ADA, it is hoped that many of these external factors will be eliminated.

The ADA lays a foundation for increased physical as well as attitudinal accessibility in the United States for people with disabilities. This accessibility will manifest itself with increased mobility throughout the community and the right to a fair chance at a decent job. The ADA will help to

galvanize society in the empowerment of people with disabilities as they seek their rightful place in the community.

There is little question, then, that with the passage of the ADA and recent documentation of attitudes of the general population toward people with disabilities, the opportunity for inclusion is greater than ever before. A discrepancy remains, however, between societal attitude and action. As noted above, the ADA will be the force to move ideas of equality into action. The material in this special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* will help to outline several key issues—legal implications, physical accessibility, transportation options, and employment opportunities within the context of the ADA—to stimulate community action for full inclusion.

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