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ALABAMA DISABILITIES ADVOCACY PROGRAM  
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The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) is part of the nationwide federally mandated protection and advocacy (P&A) system. ADAP's mission is to provide quality, legally based advocacy services to Alabamians with disabilities in order to protect, promote and expand their rights.

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## Employment First for Persons with Disabilities

### Did you know?

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) must presume all individuals with disabilities, otherwise eligible for its services, are capable of working in an integrated setting.

This presumption applies even to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

For more information about ADRS and how it must work with clients to plan and support their work goals, see:

- [Protecting Eligibility for VR Services: Clear and Convincing Evidence Requirement](#)
- [ADRS Consumer Guide](#)
- [Getting the Most from the Public Vocational Rehabilitation System](#)

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*In a [report](#) released in December 2012, ADAP called for Alabama to phase-out public support for segregated sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities and to enact "Employment First" policies that support employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred employment outcome for people with any type of disability. The report offers cost-efficient, proven policy steps that can be taken to improve employment opportunities for Alabamians with disabilities so they can better achieve economic independence and self-sufficiency. Below is one of the stories that was included in the report.*



## Jeff Ridgeway

Jeff, a well-known advocate in our state, was born in Athens, Alabama in 1964. He was born with a heart defect and other disabilities and, as Jeff puts it, "people didn't know what to do with me." Although he graduated from West Limestone High School in 1983, his family did not view working as an option for Jeff and he lived at home for eight years after he graduated.

Jeff and his sister, a teacher, moved to Mobile a year after his mother died. After unsuccessfully searching for an appropriate day program, Jeff began work at Goodwill. At first, he says he was

identified as a person who could not succeed in competitive employment which, he adds, "just made me mad." Within two years Goodwill staff determined Jeff was, in fact, employable.

Jeff was hired on at the Azalea Road Bruno's in Mobile in 1995. He ended up working in two Bruno's locations for 15 years, starting at \$4.45 per hour and ending at \$10.65 per hour. Jeff performed every job task except working the register. He bagged groceries, cleaned, stocked shelves, loaded and unloaded trucks, and handled special events such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. He especially enjoyed his working relationship with his bosses and loved helping Thanksgiving shoppers find what they needed because it reminded him of home. He hated cleaning bathrooms.

While working at Bruno's, Jeff was an especially dependable employee, often being called in to substitute for workers who did not report for work. He eventually worked up to being full-time before having to reduce his hours for health and other reasons. Eventually, and reluctantly, Jeff had to leave his job when his physician advised he could not continue his manual labor because of his increasingly frail heart.

After a long bus ride to and from Montgomery recently to advocate for increased work opportunities for persons with disabilities, Jeff settled in his apartment for the evening to catch-up on his favorite NCIS characters. Jeff concluded: "Everybody deserves a shot at a real job. I don't care if it's three hours a day, 40 hours a week, or some rich guy in New York working 90 hours a week."

"A person with a disability will give you an honest day's work for an honest dollar," states Jeff. "Everybody deserves a shot."

Amen to that, Jeff.



### HAVE PRESENTATION. WILL TRAVEL

Are you a member of a group that needs a speaker for an upcoming meeting? If so, ADAP can fill this need. ADAP staff provides education/training sessions on a wide variety of disability-related topics including, but not limited to: the Americans with Disabilities Act, Medicaid waivers, guardianships, special education, general disability rights, and transition services for youth who will soon become adults. We will also speak on specifically requested, disability-related topics. If you are interested in making arrangements for ADAP to come speak at one of your meetings, please contact Anita Davidson, one of ADAP's Legal Assistants, by calling 205-348-5107, or emailing her, [akdavidson@adap.ua.edu](mailto:akdavidson@adap.ua.edu)



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