

**"It's My
JOB
It's My Life!"**

Employment First for Alabamians with Disabilities



Inside Front Cover (Blank)

The Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP) is part of the nationwide federally-funded protection and advocacy system.

Our mission is to provide quality, legally-based advocacy services to Alabamians with disabilities to protect, promote, and expand their rights.

We seek a society where persons with disabilities are valued, exercise self-determination, and have equality of opportunity.

For almost 40 years, ADAP has been in the forefront of legal advocacy for Alabamians with disabilities. ADAP answers all calls for information on disability rights and laws. We investigate complaints that persons with disabilities are being abused, neglected, or mistreated. We provide training on disability rights and laws. We represent persons with disabilities to secure the rights and services provided them under federal and state law.

ADAP is part of the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), headquartered in Washington, D.C.



Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

Box 870395

Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0395

1-205-348-4928 (V)

1-205-348-3909 (Fax)

1-800-826-1675 (for clients - instate only)

e-mail: adap@adap.ua.edu

website: <http://adap.ua.edu>

Content

Alabama
dreams
hopes
employment
choices
work
home
supported employment
friends
what do you want to be when you grow up?
wages
change
encouragement
Alabama
Darren
Matthew
Kelby
Crystal
Jane
Jeff
David
Joseph
Kelsi
Alex

About ADAP

Page 1

Table of Contents

Page 2-3

Letter from ADAP
Executive Director

Page 5

Introduction

Page 7

Personal Stories

8-27

- 8 Darren Morris
- 10 Matthew Foster
- 12 Kelby Godwin
- 14 Crystal Lawley
- 16 Jane Cameron
- 18 Jeff Ridgeway
- 20 David Robinson
- 21 Joseph Hinds
- 22 Lauren Kimbrell
- 23 Josh Echols
- 24 Kelsi Moore
- 26 Alex Clark

The ARC of
Jackson County



The ARC of
Shelby County



Project | SEARCH

The ARC of
Madison County



Project SEARCH

Triumph Services

Full Life Ahead



Q & A

Benefits
Planning



Recommendations

Resources

Provider Stories **28-36**

- 28 Arc of Jackson County
- 30 Arc of Madison County
- 32 Arc of Shelby County
- 33 Triumph Services
- 34 Project SEARCH
- 36 Full Life Ahead

Q & A **37-38**

Benefits Planning **39-40**

Recommendations **41**

Resources **42-43**

Letter from ADAP Executive Director



Ellen B. Gillespie, Ph.D.
Executive Director

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

It is a question we ask children all the time and we get creative answers from "pilot" and "movie star" to "teacher" or "President." Children are free to dream.

Many children with significant disabilities are never asked this question. We don't elicit their dreams or hopes. Maybe we don't want to encourage them to be "unrealistic." Maybe we think we know more about the challenges adults with significant disabilities may face, so it's easier just not to ask.

This report addresses one very important aspect of our lives - work. Studies show people with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, want exactly the same things in life we all want: a home, friends, and work. Jobs enable us to have choices about how we live. Most people find some of life's meaning in a job. In our society, we value productive people.

For too long in Alabama, life for too many adults with significant disabilities has meant going to a full-time segregated sheltered workshop or day program or just staying at home, while being on a waiting list for services that could promote a fuller life, including work. Just as some people lived in segregated institutions like the now shuttered Partlow Developmental Center for 40 to 50 years, there are people in Alabama who have attended the same sheltered workshop or day program, sometimes doing the same activities, for years

on end. Very low wages in sheltered workshops are typical; one large provider reported to ADAP that the average wage for its workers is \$5.00 per week.

In the past year, ADAP staff has visited sheltered workshops across the state. We observed activities and talked with people with disabilities. Over and over, those people told us they want to work. They want real jobs and they want to make real wages. It is time to listen to what they are telling us and put "Employment First."

Alabama is getting a bad deal. We rank last in the nation in providing supported employment to persons with disabilities. We fail to bill Medicaid for services like job coaches or job developers which could place and support people with significant disabilities in more lucrative employment, despite the fact that these services have been available for years. We have paid for the same segregated programs for decades with little to show for them. We need to change so that people with disabilities have a fair shot at making good wages in real jobs. At the conclusion of this report, we identify recommendations to make that happen.

The primary purpose of this report, however, is to share some very real human stories. They are stories of Alabamians who have dreams. These Alabamians happen to be people with disabilities. Now is the time for real work. Real work for people with disabilities and real work by those of us who serve them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen B. Gillespie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Employment FIRST IN ALABAMA

Introduction

Employment First is about people with significant disabilities being given the opportunity to work in the general workforce at or above minimum wage.

It's about public policies supporting community-based, integrated employment as the first option for employment services for people with disabilities.

When ADAP first conceptualized this report on Employment First, we thought it would be peppered with financial data and client statistics.

But such numbers - useful as they are - are an incomplete way of sharing the potential of Employment First in Alabama.

For that, you need to hear from people . . .

- Adults with disabilities working in competitive jobs in our communities...
- Adults with disabilities who are hoping for jobs but, because of a lack of training and support, haven't been able to achieve that goal...
- Youth with disabilities and their families who have dreams and wonder if the future will be ready for them...
- Providers who believe that people with disabilities **can** work in all areas of our workforce and who are creatively rethinking how to address the unemployment, underemployment, and segregation that too many people with disabilities face.

We invite you to listen to, be inspired by, and act upon the stories of these individuals so the employment goals of Alabamians with disabilities can be achieved.

Darren Morris

Darren Morris's next big goals in life are to get a driver's license and buy a car. Knowing Darren, he'll be driving around Montgomery any day now, frequenting his favorite restaurants and visiting friends.

Born in Chicago in 1969, Darren has always been good at setting goals and is not afraid to work hard. After graduation from high school, he worked in food service at a race track and at a popular fast-food restaurant. "I also worked as a school bus aide for more than a year," Darren recounts. "It was my job to help a child with a disability be seated and safe on his ride to and from school."

In 1999, Darren and his brother moved to Alabama to be near family. For almost twelve years, Darren lived in Tuscaloosa. Like any ambitious young man, he kept his eyes open for good job opportunities and - just like his peers without disabilities - he experienced layoffs during bad times. He worked in industrial, office, non-profit, and retail settings.

Last year, Darren decided to move to Montgomery where he felt there would be more job opportunities. He found a job at Walgreens where he works 20 hours a week stocking shelves and running the cash register. As a Walgreens employee, Darren participates in a retirement savings program. Darren likes his co-workers who, he says, treat him exactly as they do their other colleagues. In the last month, he adds proudly, he received two "Shout-Outs" - outstanding performance awards.

Darren became involved with the self-advocacy group People First after moving to Alabama. He was recently elected President, has attended several national meetings, and is on a planning committee for a national conference next year.

When asked why people have trouble recognizing that people with disabilities can and should work, Darren says more education is needed with potential employers. They need to know that people with disabilities are reliable and can do as good a job as other employees. "My employers at Walgreens have an open mind and that is helping me to be successful," says Darren.

Darren also thinks families need to be better educated about employment and the ways in which disability benefits can be managed even when a person works. "Persons with disabilities may be reluctant to work but it feels great to know I'm contributing to my community and society."

Today, Darren has his own home, a job he loves, and lots of friends. He is known as a leader in the self-advocacy movement. But, Darren is not through. He hopes for full-time employment at Walgreens, maybe in a supervisory role. He also wants to see positions develop with state agencies so he can work to train more self-advocates about their rights and living a full life. Oh yeah . . . Darren wants that license and car too.

"It feels great to know I'm contributing to my community and society."





Matthew Foster

Matthew Foster is an entertainer. Employed at Chuck E. Cheese's in Vestavia, one of his main duties is to play Chuck E. Cheese. He's been performing as Chuck E. Cheese for 14 years, working about 15 hours a week, primarily on the weekends. In addition to entertaining at the restaurant, Matthew performs at children's birthday parties and other special events. Matthew enjoys singing "Happy Birthday" to the kids and dancing around. He proudly notes he can do a split even in full costume, adding, "I love making people happy and making kids happy."

Being Chuck E. Cheese is not Matthew's only job duty. He helps keep the backstage clean and organized and does setup and costume preparation for the shows.

Matthew is saving some of his earnings to buy an

iPad. He also uses money earned from his job to go out with friends, take his girlfriend on dates, and buy his girlfriend presents on special occasions.

When Matthew is not working, he stays busy. He attends a weekly art class, goes out with friends, does chores around the house, and sketches pictures to give to his girlfriend. Matthew has a life coach who spends several hours a week assisting him with budgeting, grocery shopping, and other various tasks. The life coach is funded through Matthew's Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver.

"I love being in the spotlight," Matthew says. When the spotlight shines on Matthew, he definitely knows how to make the most of it and he uses that spotlight to make other people happy. A true entertainer.



Kelby Godwin



Kelby is 21 years old. He did not talk until he was in the fourth grade. But Kelby came into his own; he has worked since he graduated high school and has never contemplated the idea of not working.

With the help of The Arc of Shelby County and the Alabama Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Kelby developed a solid work history. He began working at a grocery store after he graduated high school and stayed there for three years doing stocking work. One of the things Kelby enjoyed the most about this job was the friends he made there. Seeking more hours and more pay, he left that job. Kelby then worked at another grocery store for a year, again stocking shelves. But he had some difficulty at that job because it never seemed that things would go into the same place twice; Kelby has a strong desire for things to be organized.

That desire to have things organized is a strength he plans to use on his new part-time maintenance job at Wal-Mart. He has been working with his People First job coach to get ready for the new job challenges and is looking forward to driving his Honda to work. He will make about \$7.50 per hour and will receive benefits. Kelby's family is pleased with how his job coaches have been so supportive of his goals.

"I have my own car and I can drive to work."

"I like working, I like working with people," says Kelby. "I have made friends at work. I don't mind working hard. I have my own car and I can drive to work."



Crystal Lawley

Crystal Lawley ambitiously pursued not one, but two professional certifications from Shelton State Community College: one in office administration and the second in wellness and personal care. While taking classes, Crystal worked at an on-campus work study job. "As I was growing up, my parents taught me to be as independent as possible," says Crystal, 35, who was born with cerebral palsy.

Despite the two certifications, Crystal struggled to find a job after graduation. Eventually she was hired at a gym as a personal trainer where she also performed computer work and kept the gym equipment clean. When the gym closed, Crystal found part-time employment, first as a secretary and later at a bookstore. But part-time employment at the bookstore wasn't going to cut it for Crystal. She went to the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services and Easter Seals which provided her with job development help.

In August 2010, Crystal took a job at Ability Alliance in Tuscaloosa working fifteen hours a week. In two years, she moved into full-time work there. Crystal's duties at Ability Alliance include case management billing, behavioral therapy billing, and reconciling bank statements. She also works with youth with disabilities under a grant that Ability Alliance received from People First. Crystal's grant duties include making presentations, meeting with the grant team, recordkeeping, and quarterly reporting. "I am proud of what I've accomplished," says Crystal. "I'll share my story with anyone to help other people get a job." Crystal earns \$9.33 an hour and has health insurance through Ability Alliance.





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Jane Cameron

A photograph of Jane Cameron, an elderly woman with short white hair and glasses, wearing a red and yellow life vest. She is sitting on a yellow and blue sailboat, looking down at something in her hands. The background shows the water and the mast of the boat.

Jane Cameron works part time for \$10 an hour plus insurance and paid vacation. In 2011, she was a member of the U.S. Sailing Team at the World Special Olympics in Greece. Impressive accomplishments for a woman who grew up in a nursing home!

Jane has an intellectual disability and was placed in the nursing home shortly after she was born. Now 42, Jane's self-confidence, organizational skills, and can-do attitude have propelled her through her job journey.

Jane's first job experience was working in the laundry of the nursing home where she grew up. She learned to keep the linen closets stocked and organized. When she turned 18, Jane aged out of the nursing home and went to live in a group home. After Jane moved out of the nursing home, the nursing home hired her back in the same job.

Jane got her breakthrough job experience through a 10-day internship working at Special Olympics. Special Olympics hired Jane and she's been there for 11 years. In her bright office with a large computer and iPhone, Jane performs numerous office tasks including answering the phone, tracking leave time, faxing, and copying.

Jane is in charge of the Special Olympics awards, medals, and ribbons. Because she cannot count much past 10, Jane has a system to count them by counting in multiple stacks. For example, by counting out 2 stacks of 10 and 1 of 5, she counts to 25 to fill an order.

She uses another kind of self-devised job tool when she speaks at public relation events for Special Olympics. Since Jane has a hard time reading, she intersperses picture cues and key words as prompts in the nine-page written speech she uses.

Jane lives in a home with a roommate and her dog, Bambi. She's very active in her church and is an avid fan of Troy University sports ("Go Trojans!"). She regularly attends meetings of the Montgomery County Association of Business Women and one year was voted Business Woman of the Year, adding "I love going to these meetings!"



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.



David Robinson

David Robinson could read by the age of three and had his own library card at the age of five. Born in 1967, David's world revolves around books. After years of concentrating on science fiction, he now prefers to read non-fiction. He likes to donate books to his local library as a way of giving back to the community and is well-versed in current events. His sense of humor is great.

David has autism and after graduating from high school in 1985 he lived in a variety of residential settings around the state. David currently lives in an apartment in Gardendale where he's provided supports by the local mental health provider.

Over the years, David has attended several day programs, including a sheltered workshop where, for six years, he says he folded pieces of paper and was paid at a piecework rate. David later attended a larger sheltered workshop for a few months doing what he describes as repetitive work and was paid \$0.84 an hour. He describes his workshop experience as "hell/purgatory" and quit attending. David has also attended traditional day treatment programs, but prefers not to go to such programs. "My typical day consist of piddling around, answering email in the morning, eating lunch, and waiting for the mail to arrive late in the afternoon," explains David.

David would like to obtain a part time job. His reason is straightforward and understandable: he wants to earn money. His goal is to work around books, in a setting like a bookstore, library, or book warehouse.

To obtain and keep a job, David will need the help of a creative agency and a dedicated job developer and job coach. David is a man with many interests and gifts. If employed, David could enjoy many more activities and a richer lifestyle than he's experiencing now.



Joseph Hinds



Joseph Hinds, 28, lives in a Birmingham group home for persons with intellectual disabilities. Two days a week, he earns \$7.25 an hour at a food bank where he bags and loads groceries. He also helps with stocking groceries and cleaning.

Most people on their days off enjoy hobbies, run errands, or get out in the community. On Joseph's days off, he goes to a sheltered workshop affiliated with the food bank; he can't stay in his group home because it's not staffed during the day. "I would rather be doing something else than being at the workshop," says Joseph. "I'm not learning anything new there."

Joseph has been employed in the past but the jobs didn't work out. He worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant kitchen but he didn't feel like he fit in

well with the other staff. He also worked in a pizza chain restaurant making pizzas. He liked that work, but new management took over and he was moved outside to be a sign dancer. He didn't like that job because it was very hot.

Joseph's dream is to do some kind of work with emergency services, maybe at a fire station or with an EMT service.

When ADAP staff met Joseph, he asked for help with his employment services. ADAP is working with Joseph and his employment service provider to look for additional work opportunities that interest him, are matched to his talents and needs, and where he can earn minimum wage or better.

In the meantime, Joseph waits.

Lauren Kimbrell

Lauren Kimbrell is 30 years old, lives in Birmingham, and has learning disabilities.

When she was a student at Oak Mountain High School, she began working in a sheltered workshop, packaging and labeling parts. Her piece rate pay was well below minimum wage. After leaving high school in 2002, she stayed on at the workshop for a short time.

With support from The Arc of Shelby County and its supported employment service, Lauren got a job with Taco Casa. After her Taco Casa supervisor recognized her potential, he allowed her to take a cash drawer home at night to practice counting money and giving change so she could move into being a cashier.

While this job was a great start for Lauren, she had always wanted to work at a hotel. With the support of her family and with further support from The Arc, Lauren got a job working at the Marriott Hotel located on Highway 280. She just celebrated her eighth anniversary there and makes almost \$10 an hour. Her responsibilities include housekeeping, laundry, folding, and ironing. When the hotel is shorthanded, Lauren works the lobby. Her goal is to be promoted so she can perform more front lobby duties and have more interaction with the public. Her Marriott colleagues are very supportive of her and have helped Lauren grow in her job. The Arc remains involved; an employment specialist checks in with Lauren and her employer on a regular basis to ensure job and performance satisfaction.



Josh Echols

When Josh Echols and his parents attended one of the Family Weekend Workshops run by the Full Life Ahead Foundation, Josh started seeing his life in a brand new way.

A fellow camper challenged Josh to not be timid about his dreams. When Josh learned this young lady was planning on going to college and had very definite plans for her future, he began to seriously reconsider what he was doing with his life and yearned for a career.

When Josh's family returned home, it decided to pull together a H.O.P.E. Team, a person-centered planning team. Facilitated by the Foundation, Josh's family, friends, teachers, service providers and invited community members helped brainstorm and think of solutions for the changes Josh, now 27, wanted in his life. The outcome? Some of Josh's personal goals were achieved. To foster greater independence, his shower at home was redesigned to allow him to care for himself. He started to take swimming lessons for fun and exercise. Job goals were identified and a resumé outlining his skills and strengths was created.

Shortly after, Josh's job coach from the Foundation told him about an open position at the VA Medical Center. After a successful interview he was hired, eventually moving into a full time position where he stayed for five and a half years, serving as a customer service assistant. To this day, his family says they can hardly go anywhere in the community without veterans recognizing Josh and coming up to say hello.

Josh wants to work to support himself and be independent. But the thing that really drives Josh is his desire to help others: "My goal is to be around people and to help them," Josh says. "The more I can do for someone, the better off my life can be."



Kelsi Moore

Nineteen year old Kelsi Moore had her first work experience in the employee medical clinic at ACIPCO in Birmingham. She and her classmates cleaned the waiting room as part of a work readiness class run by her school. Her mother, Tammy Moore, credits that experience with opening up Kelsi's eyes to the possibilities of working.

"That job at ACIPCO is what made her want a real job," says Tammy. "On the days her class went to work, she'd come home from school exhausted but saying she wanted a real job and she wanted to get paid."

A high school senior living in Jefferson County, Kelsi has Costello's Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that affects multiple organ systems of the body. Only 4' 8" in height, Kelsi has had almost a dozen neurologic and orthopedic surgeries and receives special education services to address significant learning challenges.

Despite the positive experience at ACIPCO, Tammy reports that Kelsi's road to employment and independence hasn't been trouble free.

"People have had terribly low expectations for Kelsi, saying she'd only ever be able to live at home and attend either a day habilitation program or a sheltered workshop."

To help Kelsi achieve her job goals, her family helped her learn the power of networking. "We are always reminding Kelsi that when she meets someone, she should politely ask them how they are," explains Tammy. "Then, when they ask how she's doing, her response should be, 'I want a job.'"

The technique worked.

Kelsi networked herself into the part-time job she has today at Taziki's Café near Children's Hospital in Birmingham. There, Kelsi cleans tables and chairs. Her next goal is to learn how to roll silverware and do other prep work in the dining room. Tammy credits Taziki's owner Keith Richards for seeing Kelsi's potential and working with his staff to develop the natural supports and readily-implemented accommodations that enable Kelsi to perform her job duties.

In some respects, Tammy says it was harder for her to get used to the idea of her daughter working than it was for Kelsi: "Given her size, her disability and her trusting nature, Kelsi is vulnerable. The first few times I took her to work, I was nervous. But, with lots of prayer and careful planning, this has been a success."

Kelsi will stay in school through 2015 - her last year of school eligibility as a special education student. Tammy believes that extra time is vital to ensure that Kelsi gets prepared to be as independent as possible in the community and at a job.

But no day habilitation or sheltered workshops are in her future. "Kelsi has bigger goals for herself and she has already proven she can have competitive employment. We're not going backwards."





Alex Clark

If you ask 11 year old Alex Clark what kind of job he wants when he grows up, he's likely to tell you he wants to be a boss. And his mother, Ree Clark, isn't going to sell him short. Indeed, Ree has spent Alex's childhood reminding others to not pigeon-hole Alex by his disability.

Alex has a rare chromosomal disorder that causes orthopedic and cognitive issues. Ree says: "I know the challenges Alex faces; I'm not naïve. But let's talk about his strengths - that's where the opportunities lie."

A charismatic boy who's never met a stranger, Alex loves computers, movies, and social studies. One of his favorite things to do is to visit museums.

Ree sees Alex living independently as an adult, pursuing the job and home life that he envisions for himself - though Ree says she might counsel him about his hopes of having not one but two wives!

When it comes to helping Alex achieve his job goals, Ree rejects the paternalistic attitude she sees when it comes to employing persons with disabilities. "We need to get away from the mindset that we're doing people with disabilities a favor when we hire them. As long as we think we're doing people with disabilities a favor by hiring them, we're going to think it's ok to pay them pennies. We're going to think it is ok not to pay them a competitive wage."

"We have to encourage children to dream in a way that's not colored by people's perceptions of them," states Ree. "When we support those dreams with inclusive experiences, we can have more children growing up to be independent in our communities."





"As long as we think we're doing people with disabilities a favor by hiring them, we're going to think it's ok to pay them pennies. We're going to think it is ok not to pay them a competitive wage."

Arc of Jackson County



Sara Haynes
Administrator

Can supported employment services be developed and sustained in a rural county?

The answer is "yes" if you have the vision and determination of the Arc of Jackson County, an early adopter of supported employment in Alabama.

Sara Hayes, an administrator with the Arc of Jackson County, has some advice for other rural programs looking to expand supported employment opportunities.

"A couple of strategies have worked for us," says Sara. "First, we like to draw in volunteers who have links to employers in our community." The current Board President, Larry Bailey, has served with the Arc for 12 years and is the plant manager at Maples Industries, a rug manufacturer. Board member David Holder works with Sanoh America, Inc., an automotive supplier. Both companies have hired persons with disabilities over the years.

Sara stresses that public and private employers need to be educated about what persons with disabilities have to offer: "It's a continual education process that you have to stick with."

"We were lucky enough to get two grants from the Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities which helped us with our education and outreach efforts," recounts Sara. The first grant, a community inclusion grant, provided funds for the

Arc to educate small groups of people with disabilities about employment opportunities in the community and, at the same time, gave community employers an opportunity to learn about the Arc and how it supports its clients. The second grant, a volunteer program at the county courthouse and a couple of other locations, allowed Arc clients the chance to "showcase" their skills. When the grant ended, the three individuals working at the courthouse were hired; two of them shred paper and the other scans documents. All three work part-time and earn more than minimum wage.

Individuals who attend the Arc of Jackson County also may choose to participate in Milestones, a vocational program that partners with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. Eleven persons successfully obtained employment through the Milestones program in FY13.

Sara notes that success at work means more choices in other areas of life. One person who has worked in the community for 12 years has been able to buy his own home. Another individual moved from a group home into his own apartment. A third individual will soon move to an apartment from a group home. Owning a home, or even leasing an apartment, would have been impossible without supported work.

Doing supported employment isn't without challenges says Sara, noting that the greatest barrier to successfully placing more people in jobs is transportation. Nonetheless, she and her colleagues at the Arc are optimistic about the possibilities for supported employment. "Every person wants to be as independent as they can be," says Sara. "Having your own job is a big part of that."



Mattie Allen works part-time at J.C. Penney in Scottsboro, AL. A client of the Arc of Jackson County, her goal is to move out of her group home and into independent housing.

Arc of Madison County



Susan Klingel
Executive Director

Susan Klingel, Executive Director of the Arc of Madison County, is excited to see individuals who never even dreamed of having a job being employed in integrated settings and making good pay. "As soon as an individual contacts this agency for services, we begin to plan for their employment and less dependence on segregated services," explains Susan.

The Arc's Recycling Program is one of its successful strategies to put people with disabilities to work in the community. Employees working in this program travel to more than 100 local businesses and schools collecting material to be shredded. Customers include major aeronautical, manufacturing, and nonprofit businesses. Much of the shredding is done on-site in the business locations with state-of-the-art shredding trucks.

Changing society's opinions about people with disabilities is another goal pursued by Susan and her Arc colleagues: "We have been able to change ideas about people with disabilities working in our community," Susan says. "By going into businesses and performing excellent service, we have demonstrated that people with disabilities can work and contribute to society." Susan says that many employers find that workers from the Arc's supported employment program (MASE) become their hardest working employees.



Jeffrey Barton, an employee of The Arc of Madison County Recycling program, collecting shredding from a major aeronautical business in Huntsville, AL

Marcelus Briggs unloads a recycling truck for The Arc of Madison County Recycling Program where he is employed full time.



Arc of Shelby County

Achieve with us.



Susan Ellis
Arc of Shelby County

"The Arc is committed to helping people with disabilities reach their job goals."

The Arc of Shelby County currently provides long-term employment supports to 40 individuals with disabilities who have jobs in the community. All are paid at minimum wage or higher. Many have had their current jobs more than 5 consecutive years.

"Anyone can work," says Susan Ellis, who created The Arc's employment program in 1999 and is now a Community Living Specialist. "You just need to match up the individual with the right job and the right supports."

The process for success begins with a good assessment of the skills and interests of the jobseeker. Next, a good job match has to be made. Once the person is hired, the agency assists the employee to meet the expectations of the employer. After the employee is stable in his job performance for 90 days, the agency continues to follow up with both the employer and the employee to ensure job satisfaction.

"There are really two customers who must be satisfied with the working relationship," explains Susan. "It has to work for both the employer and the employee with a disability."

As time passes, The Arc remains available as a resource, providing ongoing job supports as needed by the individual for the life of the job. The Arc's job coaching rule is "as little as possible and as much as necessary." While the goal is to enable the individual to be weaned off long-term supports, the job supports are in place if necessary.

In addition to its supported employment program, The Arc serves about 60 additional youth and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities in other employment programs, all overseen by Arc supervisor Heather Bell-Lawing.

"The Arc is committed to helping people with disabilities reach their job goals," said Susan. "All it takes is matching a person's interest with an employer's unmet need."

Note: As this report went to press, ADAP learned that Ms. Ellis has taken a new position with People First of Alabama. Inquiries regarding the Arc's employment programs should be directed to Ms. Bell-Lawing.

Triumph Services



Brooke Stephens
Executive Director

The closure of the UAB Lifelong Coordination Clinic in 2007 left 16 individuals needing help to find and keep supported employment. Triumph Services, located in Birmingham, opened in response to the closure of the Clinic and the needs of those first 16 persons.

Today, Triumph serves more than 250 persons with disabilities in the Birmingham area. Ninety three percent of the individuals served by Triumph Services work in supported employment with an average wage of \$8.40 per hour.

People with disabilities are supported at Triumph Services with a life coach. Life coaches focus on individual gifts and strengths and identify positive employment environments where the individuals will thrive. Executive Director of Triumph Services, Brooke Stevens, says life coaches interact with individuals in the community and "provide all instruction in the natural environment where learning takes place." The only service provided in a clinical setting is counseling. All other services provided by Triumph Services occur in natural settings in the community.

Triumph Services also sees community outreach and engagement as a mission of its agency. Triumph feels it is important to spend time educating the community to value and embrace individuals with disabilities. That philosophy is part of Triumph's holistic practice model to engage the community and the individual.

Triumph Services approaches supported employment from the perspective of "social role valorization." The term, coined some years ago by disabilities expert, the late Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger, should replace the overused term "normalization." Using this approach, Triumph staff recognize that society historically devalued and marginalized people with disabilities. Interventions are designed to counter that devaluation by supporting people with disabilities to be appreciated as valued and contributing citizens.

Triumph Services reports that 92% of customers prefer companies that hire people with disabilities. Triumph puts its sound philosophy into practice by working with those companies that hire persons with disabilities and helping them achieve employment success in the Birmingham area.



Project SEARCH

In January 2012, several hundred stakeholders gathered in Alabama to learn about a promising approach for employing young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Project SEARCH.

Erin Riehle, a nurse/administrator, developed Project SEARCH. She wanted her employer, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, to reduce turnover and find jobs for more people with disabilities. The hospital had several jobs requiring very specialized training and attention to detail. Ms. Riehle thought there might be employment opportunities for students with disabilities who were exiting high school. Project SEARCH, founded in 1996 to meet this need, has grown to over 200 sites across the country.

Inspired by the 2012 training, several Alabama stakeholders worked to bring Project SEARCH to this state. Two pilot sites were chosen for the initial year of implementation: Montgomery and Shelby County. Initial partners included the Alabama Council for Developmental Disabilities, the Alabama Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, and the two local-site school systems.

Other partners included Easter Seals and United Cerebral Palsy of Birmingham. Byron White, of DMH, was named Project SEARCH coordinator.

Valerie Johnson is the on-site coordinator of Project SEARCH at Baptist Medical Center South .

In the first year of Project SEARCH in Alabama, two dozen students spent their last year in high school working in three ten-weeklong internships at the Shelby Baptist Medical Center and Baptist Medical Center South (Montgomery). They served in administration as greeters, sterilized equipment, delivered and stocked material around the hospital, and provided food service.

The Project provided positive work experiences for students who liked their jobs, did excellent work, and became much more confident and outgoing as they became more skilled at their job tasks. The students made friends with other hospital employees and hospital administrators were impressed with the students' work.

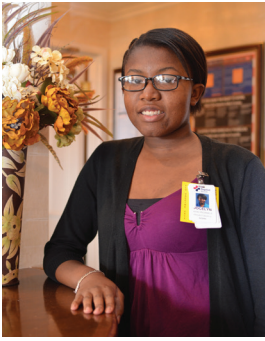
The students graduated in May 2013. At the Shelby graduation ceremony, Shelby Baptist CEO David Wilson said, "Project SEARCH is a fantastic idea and a fantastic program." Both hospitals chose to participate in Project SEARCH for a second year and four more sites have been added: Baldwin County Schools, Birmingham City Schools, Huntsville City Schools, and Mobile County Schools.

At the time of this report, all of the Shelby County interns were employed and all but two of the Montgomery interns had jobs. (Project SEARCH staff members are working with these two individuals to help them secure jobs.)

Jobs gained through Alabama's Project SEARCH provide good examples of supported employment because the new employees work alongside other persons who do not have disabilities and they earn minimum wage or higher.

Project SEARCH in Alabama is delivering excellent employment outcomes for young people with disabilities and for their employers.





Jocelyn Daniels
Human Resource Assistant
Jocelyn's duties include: filing, putting together orientation packets and birthday mail outs.



Ashley Stone
Tower Pharmacy- Sales Associate
Ashley's duties include: stocking the shelves with merchandise, filling the soda cooler and putting up the candy.



Trevelyan Jenkins
Central Transport-Transporter
Trevelyan's duties include: transporting patients to and from different areas of the hospital.



Garrett Cox
Central Transport-Transporter
Garrett's duties include: transporting patients to and from different areas of the hospital.



Britney Ross
Neuroscience Science-Hostess
Britney's duties include: answering the call light, preparing the rooms for new patients, refilling the ice pitcher and serving juice.



Ashleigh Palmer
NICU- NICU Assistant
Ashleigh's duties include: cleaning the isolates, making the baby beds, stocking and cleaning.



Kawaski Nelson
Materials Management - Supply Tech
Kawaski's duties include: pulling the stock from different areas and traveling around the hospital to deliver it.



Maxi McCain
Central Sterilization Department- Decontamination Tech
Maxi was the first Intern to be hired out of Project SEARCH.



Jonathan Johnson
Baptist Cafe'-Cafe' Attendant
Jonathan's duties include: stocking and maintaining the kitchen areas.



Martavery Grandison
Baptist Cafe'-Cafe' Attendant
Martavery's duties include: stocking and maintaining the kitchen areas.



Andrew Hall
Cath Lab Tech
Andrew has been hired by the host site to work in the Cath Lab.



Ricky Blackmon
Respiratory Tech
Ricky has been hired by the host site as a respiratory tech.

“I enjoy seeing how everyone involved especially the employers, get attached to the students so quickly. They can no longer see their disabilities, but just the abilities they had all along.”

-Valerie Johnson

Full Life Ahead



Judy Barclay
President

Henry and Judy Barclay of Mountain Brook heard the words "no," "impossible," and "unrealistic" too often as the parents of a daughter with disabilities. Together with Jan Cobb, a friend and fellow parent of a child with a disability, they started an organization to help people with disabilities live a rich, full life. The Full Life Ahead

Foundation uses the term disAbility to stress the many abilities and gifts of the people they support.

The cornerstone of the non-profit organization's work is the Helping Other People Envision (H.O.P.E) team, a person-centered planning team of family, friends, and professionals which comes together to translate the dreams and unique gifts of an individual with disAbilities into reality, including his or her goals for employment.

" Life is not about what someone can give you. It is about what you can achieve yourself," states

Judy. "Through our H.O.P.E. Teams, we're able to work with individuals, their families, and community members to set the wheels in motion for individuals with disAbilities so they can hope, dream, and plan for a full life, including a job."

In addition to setting up H.O.P.E. Teams and training persons in the H.O.P.E. Team process, the Foundation provides families with its popular publication, "Full Life Ahead Workbook," and hosts Family Weekend Workshop/Retreats at Children's Harbor on Lake Martin. The Workbook allows families to explore every aspect of adult life in order to support an individual in being as independent as possible. The Workshop/Retreats provide training in goal setting, employment, community supports, and self-advocacy. The Workbook has been widely distributed over the past 12 years. More than 850 family members have benefitted from the learning opportunities shared at the Workshop/Retreats.

The Full Life Ahead Foundation remains dedicated to providing people with disabilities and families the tools they need to create a future with flexibility and freedom for all.



" Life is not about what someone can give you. It is about what you can achieve yourself."

Q & A

Q. What is "Employment First"?

A. Employment First policies help create job opportunities for persons with disabilities where few such opportunities existed before.

Employment First means that employment in the general workforce, earning at or above the minimum wage, is the first and preferred employment outcome for adults with disabilities, regardless of level of disability. While Employment First policies create opportunities, they do not mandate outcomes.

Q. How is Alabama doing in employing persons with disabilities?

A. Alabama is dead last on three national measures of employment of persons with significant disabilities. Alabama lagged most other states, squeaking by in 47th place, on a fourth measure. That's the sobering result revealed in an analysis of employment outcomes compiled by the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration (ICI).

Q. How would Alabama adopt Employment First policies?

A. States that adopt Employment First policies ensure that all public agencies providing support to persons with disabilities prioritize competitive and integrated employment as the first option for working age adults. State statutes, regulations, policies and procedures are refined to ensure that employment receives priority for any state-funded services or goods.

Q. How many states have adopted Employment First policies?

A. Twenty six states have adopted Employment First policies and 16 more are moving towards it.

Q. How is employment defined?

A. "Employment" means working in a setting where people with disabilities work alongside other employees who do not have disabilities and where they have the same opportunities to participate in all activities in which other employees participate. Employment also denotes working for at least minimum wage or being self-employed.

Q. What changes will occur when a state adopts an Employment First policy?

More Alabamians with disabilities will obtain jobs that pay minimum wage or better.

Q. How does Employment First work for a person with a disability who wishes to work?

A. Established methods of job placement include vocational discovery, job matching, employment specialists, and supported and customized employment. Mentors and co-workers help reduce impediments to employment and contribute to increased wages and benefits.

Q. What about employers and providers of employment services?

A. Providers who receive public funding to provide traditional services like sheltered work or day habilitation programs will need to develop new service delivery models that support people with disabilities who seek to obtain competitive, integrated employment.

Q. How does Employment First work for business and taxpayers?

A. Employing people with disabilities is good for business and the economy.

Helping people with disabilities gain competitive work has a significant return on investment. According to a recent report issued by the National Governors Association, providing supported employment services to persons with disabilities to allow them to work in the competitive labor market yields a \$1.21 benefit to taxpayers for every dollar spent. Similarly, the Association reports that Social Security Administration disability beneficiaries who are employed through vocational rehabilitation support provide a return on investment of \$7 for every dollar spent.

People with disabilities in the U.S. have \$175 billion in discretionary spending, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

People with disabilities make quality, committed employees: the turnover for employees with disabilities is 8% compared with 45% for all other workers.

Q. Why is Employment First so important now?

A. As state and federal tax dollars are reduced, Employment First becomes more and more important. Integrated community jobs show a greater rate of return on investment when compared with traditional, more costly programs that segregate individuals with disabilities in unproductive day-habilitation and sheltered work programs.

Q. What does the law say about Employment First?

A. Since the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, one of the goals of our country has been to provide individuals with disabilities the tools necessary to achieve equality of opportunity, full inclusion and integration in society, employment, and economic and social self-sufficiency.

A federal court in Oregon declared that the integration mandate of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Olmstead* decision applies to employment services in a 2012 case called *Lane v. Kitzhaber*. The court said the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the state to provide employment services, including supported employment programs, to individuals with disabilities.

In 2013, the U.S. Department of Justice entered into an agreement with the state of Rhode Island and the city of Providence that addresses the rights of people with disabilities to receive publicly funded employment and day services in the community, rather than in segregated sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs. This agreement also addressed how high school students were being funneled into such workshops and not provided opportunities to experience or prepare for real jobs in the community.

The Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services has issued recent guidance regarding the provision of employment services to persons with disabilities.

Citing to these developments and others, early in November 2013 Massachusetts announced it was ceasing new admissions to sheltered workshops as of January 1, 2014 and it released a plan for increasing integrated employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

For more detailed information see the *Legal Documents* section under Resources.

Benefits Planning for SSI and SSDI Recipients Who Want to Work

Introduction

An individual who receives Social Security benefits based on his disability may fear that working will immediately cause him to lose cash benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and health insurance from Medicaid/Medicare.

This common misconception should not prevent a person with a disability from seeking work. The SSA has created several programs called work incentives that allow beneficiaries to test their ability to work and not immediately lose their benefits.

These work incentives provide a safety net for beneficiaries as they try to work and move from benefit dependency to independence. In many cases, people with a disability can work, make extra income, and still keep some or all of their cash benefits and health insurance depending upon their earnings.

To begin planning for a transition to work, a beneficiary must first determine what kind of benefit he receives: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). The type of benefit an individual receives determines the employment supports and work incentives for which he may qualify.

SSI

There are many employment supports and work incentives that can assist SSI recipients who want to return to work, including the \$20 General Earned Income Exclusion, the \$65 Earned Income Exclusion, Impairment Related Work Expenses, and the Student Earned Income Exclusion.

In Alabama, for 2013, Medicaid continues until an individual earns above a threshold of \$25,783.

SSDI

In general, SSDI employment supports provide help over a long period of time to allow beneficiaries to test their ability to work or continue work, and gradually become as self-supporting and independent as possible. Generally, an SSDI beneficiary has at least 9 years to test his ability to work. The 9 year period includes full cash payments during the first 12 months of work activity, a 36 month re-entitlement period during the extended period of eligibility, and a 5 year period in which cash benefits can resume without a new application. A beneficiary also may receive Medicare coverage during the 9 year period and possibly for longer.

Initially, SSDI beneficiaries are allowed a 9 month trial work period (TWP) to test their ability to work. The 9 months of the TWP occur (not necessarily consecutively) in a rolling 60 month period.

In many cases, people with a disability can work, make extra income, and still keep some or all of their cash benefits and health insurance depending upon their earnings.

Conclusion

These are just a few highlights of the employment supports and work incentives available through the SSA. Admittedly, benefits planning can be complex and usually requires the help of professional benefits planners. Ala-WIN, administered by Disability Rights and Resources in Birmingham, provides free benefits planning services in 38 central and northern Alabama counties. The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) provides free benefits planning services in 29 counties in south Alabama.

Remember:

- Gaining employment does not mean the automatic loss of SSI or SSDI benefits. Individuals who want to work often can make more money in the community than in sheltered work settings before it will affect their level of SSI or SSDI benefits.
- Start benefits planning early.
- Report earnings to the SSA.

Benefit Planning Resources

"Red Book" - a comprehensive guide published by the SSA on employment supports for persons with disabilities

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/redbook>

Ala-WIN

<http://www.alawin.org>

ADRS

<http://www.rehab.alabama.gov>

Recommendations

Enact into law Alabama’s Employment First Bill, which would mandate that:

- all public agencies supporting persons with disabilities make competitive and integrated employment the first option for the clients the agencies serve; and
- all policies, procedures and funding are aligned with the goal of employment as the first option for persons with all types of disabilities.

Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH)

- Any new ADMH client who is served through the Intellectual Disabilities (ID) or Living at Home (LAH) waivers should be served first in a supported or similar work arrangement, not a segregated day program.
- ADMH should certify only new providers who provide supported employment services. Any pre-existing day habilitation service programs would be grandfathered in, but no new day habilitation programs would be certified.
- ADMH should change its waiver rate structure to provide financial incentives for pre-vocational and supported employment services and reduce financial incentives for traditional day habilitation (maintenance and retirement level) services.

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)

- ADRS should place counselors in each sheltered workshop around the state with over 50 employees in segregated, subminimum wage jobs. The counselors’ jobs would be to find supported work for those employees.

- ADRS should develop an order of selection policy (as many other states have done) to ensure that people with the most complex needs are served more effectively.
- ADRS and other providers, like those identified in this report, should engage employers and employer groups to develop employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)

- Working in competitive, integrated employment, with or without supports, should be the presumed post-school transition employment goal for students with disabilities. The ALSDE should require students and their families to provide informed written consent to opt out of this first choice to pursue more restrictive employment outcome options.
- The ALSDE should incorporate the comprehensive NSTTAC I-13 checklist into its federally required monitoring of how schools implement the IDEA’s transition planning requirements for students with disabilities.
- The ALSDE should develop a specialist teacher endorsement in transition services and transition planning.

Alabama Medicaid Agency (Medicaid)

- Use Medicaid funds, e.g., Money Follows the Person, for Employment First initiatives to help individuals with disabilities find work in integrated employment environments at comparable wages.
- Provide information regarding federal work incentives to all Medicaid waiver recipients.

Resources

Reports, Technical Assistance and Press

"A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities – Blueprint for Governors"

The National Governors Association provides policy options to support the employment of people who have significant intellectual and developmental disabilities.

<http://ci.nga.org/cms/home/1213/index>

"Employment First Across the Nation"

A survey of state Employment First efforts compiled by the Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota (updated on 10/1/13).

<http://www.apse.org/employmentfirst/activity.html>

The Arc Position Statement on Employment

The Arc, the largest national community-based organization serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, believes they can be employed in the community alongside people without disabilities and earn competitive wages.

<http://www.thearc.org/page.aspx?pid=2369>

Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Dept. of Labor

ODEP's mission is to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including Employment First.

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Employment-First.htm>

"Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts"

A plan created in collaboration by the Association of Developmental Disabilities, The Arc of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services to increase integrated employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

<http://www.addp.org/images/Nov2013Conference/blueprint%20for%20success%20full%20version%20final%2011.6.13.pdf>

"A Review of Commonly-Used State Employment Measures in Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services"

The University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration summarizes data about the employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

<http://ici.umn.edu/products/prb/221/221.pdf>

"Segregated and Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work"

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) exposes the lack of meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities and the service delivery system that perpetuates sheltered workshops.

<http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Segregated-and-Exploited.pdf>

"Beyond Segregated and Exploited"

A follow up report to NDRN's earlier study.

http://www.ndrn.org/images/Documents/Resources/Publications/Reports/Beyond_Segregated_and_Exploited.pdf

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

APSE is a national organization whose exclusive focus is on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

<http://www.apse.org/employmentfirst/>

Southeast TACE

A technical assistance center emphasizing employment to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

<http://www.tacesoutheast.org/index.php>

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC)

Provides capacity building services to state and local school agencies to improve transition services that enhance post-school outcomes for youth.

<http://www.nsttac.org/>

Walgreens Inclusive Workplace

Walgreens, a pioneer in employing persons with disabilities.

http://www.walgreens.com/topic/sr/disability_inclusion_workplace.jsp

"Providing Quality Services to Customers with Disabilities"

Study by the U.S. Dept. of Labor
www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/ek98/provide.htm

"Sheltered Workshops Offer Little Benefit, Studies Find"

<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2012/02/21/sheltered-workshops-benefit/>

"Some workers at Goodwill paid as little as 22 cents an hour"

An exposé by NBC Rock Center reporter Harry Smith on sheltered workshops.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/video/rock-center/52257275#52257275>

"Americans with disabilities may be the best workers no one's hiring"

An editorial by the Christian Science Monitor.
http://www.salon.com/2013/08/07/americans_with_disabilities_may_be_the_best_workers_who_cant_get_jobs_newscred/

"My Word: Disabled (sic) workers are ideal employees"

Op-ed in the Orlando Sentinel, October 22, 2013
http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2013-10-22/news/os-ed-disabilities-jobs-my-word-102213-20131021_1_developmental-disabilities-economic-incentives-ideal-employees

Alabama Providers and Advocacy Groups

- Arc of Jackson County
<http://arcofjacksoncoal.com>
- Arc of Madison County
<http://www.hsvarc.org>
- Arc of Shelby County
<http://www.thearcofshelby.org>
- Project Search
<http://www.projectsearch.us>

- Triumph Services
www.triumphservices.org
- Full Life Ahead Foundation
www.fulllifeahead.org
- People First of Alabama
<http://peoplefirstofalabama.wordpress.com>
- Alabama Chapter of APSE
<http://www.al-apse.org>

Legal Documents

Federal court ruling that the integration mandate of *Olmstead* applies to employment services, *Lane v. Kitzhaber*

<http://www.droregon.org/results/lane-v.-kitzhaber-class-action-lawsuit-seeks-an-end-to-segregated-sheltered-workshops>

U.S. Department of Justice settlement in Rhode Island on segregated sheltered workshops

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2013/June/13-crt-674.html>

EEOC Publications on the Employment Rights of People with Specific Disabilities

<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/5-15-13.cfm>

U.S. Department of Labor: "Real People, Real Impact"

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/2009-2012Accomplishments.pdf>

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee: "High Expectations: Transforming the American Workforce as the ADA Generation Comes of Age"

<http://www.harkin.senate.gov/documents/pdf/52446704c3501.pdf>

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Informational Bulletin: Updates to the Section 1915(c) Waiver Instructions and Technical Guide regarding employment and employment related services

<http://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/CMCSBulletins/downloads/CIB-9-16-11.pdf>

ADAP's Mission

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.

ADAP's vision is one of a society where persons with disabilities are valued, exercise self-determination through meaningful choices, and have equality of opportunity.

ADAP's advocacy efforts are governed by these values:

Persons with disabilities should have the same opportunity to participate in the community as persons without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have the right to reasonable accommodations that are needed for full participation.

Persons with disabilities have the right to be afforded meaningful choices and to make informed decisions.

Inside Back Page/



Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

Box 870395

Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0395

1-205-348-4928 (V)

1-205-348-3909 (Fax)

1-800-826-1675 (for clients - instate only)

e-mail: adap@adap.ua.edu

website: <http://adap.ua.edu>