

The Newsletter of New Jersey APSE: Advancing Employment. Connecting People.

APSE ECHO

Employment Choice Hope Opportunity



Spring 2010

A Message from the NJ APSE President

By Glori Bine-Callagy

Over the past year, Supported Employment in New Jersey has kept us all busy, it has provided us with many challenges, and most importantly, many opportunities to help people with disabilities to become successfully employed.

On the NJ APSE front, we have been quite busy. Board Member and previous APSE Delegate, Pat Gutowski was elected to serve on the National APSE Board and own Immediate Past President, Jennifer Joyce, was elected as our Region 6 Delegate. We are also pleased to welcome Anthony Camuso, Mary Lopatosky, and Barbara Abrams to the NJ APSE Board. There were four NJ APSE Board Members representing New Jersey at the very successful National APSE Conference last summer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and we expect at least that many to represent us again this year in Atlanta.

There have been several budgetary concerns related to DVRS and Long Term Follow Along. In September, NJ DVRS Acting Director, Brian Fitzgibbons invited NJ APSE and ACCSES NJ to Trenton for an afternoon of collaboration and discussion. NJ APSE continues to meet regularly with Brian and ACCSES NJ to continue to offer some solutions to challenges we have all been experiencing. We look to future collaboration with DVRS and DDD where we can work to resolve challenges that affect Supported Employment.

We had our 5th Annual Leadership Link in October, with an impressive 65 people in attendance. We were fortunate enough to again have Mr. Brian Fitzgibbons, from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), Mr. Steven Fishbein from the Department of Mental Health Services (DMHS), Mr. Robert Haugh from the Department of Education (DOE), and Assistant Commissioner Kenneth Ritchey to speak on behalf of the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD). As always there was a lot of networking, sharing of ideas and an informative Q&A session.

In December, we held our first Community Conversation about Supported Employment in New Jersey. The questions were asked “What time is it?” “What has to be learned, unlearned or relearned?” and “What is your next bold move?” There was a great group of 35 people who participated and who offered their thoughts. We continued that conversation at the Facing the Future Conference held in March.

The 18th Annual NJ APSE Conference entitled Weathering the Storm: Employment in Difficult Times was held on March 21st with close to 250 people in attendance. Conference highlights included keynote speakers Mindy Oppenheim and Rosemarie Poverman in addition to 18 break out sessions. In addition to the annual recognition that is made through awards each year, Ellen Nalven, co-Founder of NJ APSE, was recognized for her 19 years of dedication and ongoing commitment to the work that we do.

As you may have noticed, APSE and NJ APSE have a new look and logo. National APSE has initiated a marketing campaign that includes creating a consistent and cohesive “look” or brand that unifies all APSE Chapters. If you haven’t already, check out National APSE’s website at www.apse.org and keep an eye out for NJ APSE’s new website coming soon.

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The year has a lot in store for us. While New Jersey and our country face difficult times ahead, there are still many jobs out there and good employers who are recruiting quality employees that you are trying to place. We look forward to an exciting year ahead filled with successful outcomes for you and the people we support.

Glori Bine-Callagy
NJ APSE President

NJ APSE Board of Directors

To contact any Board member for additional information call (732) 831-1114 or visit the NJ APSE website at www.njapse.org.

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Transition and NJ APSE

By Kathy Roberson, MSW and Dan Baker, Ph.D.

Many members of NJ APSE are involved in transition in one way or another. In this article, we will briefly define transition and note some of the activities that often occur as part of transition support. Transition, as related to youth with disabilities, generally refers to the process of assisting a student in the process of moving from childhood and school year to adult years. Becoming an adult involves the dropping of childhood roles, and the assumption of adult roles, such as worker, community member, and voter.

Following the adoption of Special Education as a right under 94-142, education was provided to all students regardless of disability. However, professionals and family members noted that many students received good educations, but following graduation from high school, sat at home and did not enjoy the "benefits of citizenship," which President John F. Kennedy noted as one of the desired outcomes of special education for all students. Too many students were unemployed, getting in legal trouble, and watching television. The first National Longitudinal Transition Study, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs from 1984 to 1993, provided valuable information that helped inform federal special education policy throughout the 1990s. This study documented poor outcomes in almost every area of life post-school for youth who received special education services. For a summary of the findings, please consult: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OSEP95AnIRpt/ch3e.html>

As such, transition services were mandated for students with disabilities. Transition services include activities specifically designed to assist students in becoming employed, living independently, participating in post-secondary education, and enjoying recreation as adults (among other pursuits).

As employment is one of those areas, many professionals in APSE, both here in New Jersey and nationally, are involved in transition, whether as educators or community rehabilitation providers. Community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) often work under contract with school districts to take students out in the community for career awareness activities and career exploration activities. This often works out well for schools, as the schools may not have the contacts with community employers that CRPs have, and also do not have to develop the infrastructure to get students out in the community if they pay the CRP to do it. However, many schools prefer to run the community-based efforts themselves, and often express concern that CRPs are not aware of the various regulations that schools must follow.

Another crucial component of transition is related to teaching students how to advocate for themselves. Self-advocacy has a long history in the Vocational Rehabilitation world, as noted in the 1995 book "Operationalizing Consumer Decision Making and Choice in the VR Process. Instruction on self-advocacy can occur in schools, with families, and through CRPs. Knowing how to effectively advocate for him or herself is one of the most important skills a child will ever learn. It used to be accepted practice that someone's entire adult life was built around the "slots" that happened to be available in the disability service system. Today, it is expected that rather than simply telling someone this is where you have to live, or this is what you have to do with your day, each person's own unique dreams, needs, and preferences will determine the choices they make for themselves, and the kinds of supports they receive. This is an exciting change, and one that respects the rights of each person, no matter what their disability, to be treated as an individual and as an adult. As with many big changes, however, it brings with it some new challenges. Defining a vision for one's own life, deciding what kinds of supports will be necessary to achieve that vision, and then knowing how to advocate for those supports are skills that individuals with disabilities and their families are being called upon to learn.

This change in expectations means much more attention must be paid to developing healthy self-advocacy skills *before* students leave school and move into the adult world. Teaching young adults how to define their own likes and dislikes, and strengths and challenges, is critically important as they start choosing goals that are right for them. It is also important to teach students how to figure out what steps are needed to reach a particular goal, which of those steps they can take on their own, which ones they may need help with, and how to go about getting that help. These are problem-solving skills that students will use again and again throughout their lives.

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Your Voices Have Been Heard:

In a year that hasn't exactly provided the best news when it comes to funding for employment services and supports for people with disabilities, NJ APSE is encouraged that the budgets for supported employment services have not been cut in Governor Christie's proposed FY2011 budget. Of course, nothing is guaranteed, and we still have a couple of months before the budget is finalized by the legislature and signed by the Governor, so the NJ APSE Governmental Affairs Committee will continue to monitor things as the legislators hear testimony from the state departments and public. Please continue to check your emails because, if things change, you will certainly hear from us as your action will be needed.

NJ APSE has ramped up our advocacy efforts over the past months. The Governmental Affairs Committee has been reestablished and is meeting regularly. In addition to monitoring the FY2011 budget, the committee is working on establishing an Advocacy Network, comprised of job seekers and employees with disabilities who have benefitted from supported employment services. The committee will be sending letters to Governor Christie and the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Hal Wirths, to arrange meetings and provide information and ideas about employment services for people with disabilities.

NJ APSE has been attending quarterly meetings with DVRS, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), and ACCSES NJ and have been working together to address several areas of concern to NJ APSE members. As a result of these meetings, DVRS has established contracts with providers for Long-Term Follow-Along (LTFA) services. We are continuing to work on the funding concerns associated with LTFA and the budgets assigned to providers and will keep you posted on the subject. DVRS is currently developing a memo on Billable Hours and Best Practices for supported employment services. In an effort to ensure that this memo reflects the application of actual services and supports, employment specialist and supported employment coordinator input has been provided through NJ APSE and will be considered while developing the memo. This group has also voiced concerns with the communication between central and local DVRS offices and from DVRS to supported employment vendors. This concern was also addressed in the NJ APSE testimony provided by Glori Bine-Callagy, NJ APSE President, at the recently held DVRS Public Forum.

Please be aware that DVRS has assured NJ APSE that they would never prevent a placement from happening because of low funds. If supported employment vendors are being told

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that they can't make a placement due to low funds, please contact the office manager at the local DVRS office to explain the situation. If the SE vendor is still experiencing difficulty, DVRS Assistant Director, David Free, has asked that the vendor contact him directly at (609) 292-7959 or David.Free@dol.state.nj.us.

If you your are interested in joining the NJ APSE Governmental Affairs Committee or know someone who would be willing to become part of the NJ APSE Advocacy Network, please contact Jennifer Joyce, NJ APSE Governmental Affairs Committee Chair, at (732) 609-7022 or jjoyce@arcnj.org.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2010 NJ APSE AWARD WINNERS!

Employment Specialist of the Year

Hailey Lormel

Career Facilitator
Bridges To Employment-
A Division of Alternatives, Inc.

Employer of the Year

TJ Maxx

Bridgewater, NJ

Supervisor of the Year

Jill Comman

Job Coach Supervisor
Jewish Family and Children's Service
Of Southern New Jersey

Transition Educator of the Year

Kim Sherlock

Job Coach
Eastern Regional High School
Voorhees, NJ

Rebecca McDonald Award

Kathryn Krepcio

Executive Director
Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ

Honorable Mentions

Betty Cobb

Marge Lenehan

Students With Disabilities Benefit From a Day of Mentoring and Career Exploration

By Alana Gregorio, Allies, Inc.

On the morning of October 21, 2009, students were excited as they gathered on their buses for a special trip. Teachers scurried to settle last minute details for the day. Business owners, managers and employees eagerly prepared as they awaited the arrival of guests. It was Disability Mentoring Day; and participants throughout New Jersey had the undeniable feeling that it was going to be an exceptional day.

National Disability Mentoring Day, held annually the third Wednesday of October, is a free event that gives students with special needs the opportunity to experience a day at a business of their choice and learn employment options that will assist them upon completion of school. Allies, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment of individuals with disabilities accepted the privilege of being New Jersey's coordinator of the event for the fourth year in a row. Nearly 800 students from over 50 schools participated by visiting upwards of 65 businesses for an incredible day of career awareness. As a key Allies partner, Jewish Family and Children's Services of Southern Jersey successfully connected Cherry Hill students with nearby businesses. Through tours, presentations, hands on activities, job shadowing and introductions to employees, students were encouraged to begin the crucial process of career exploration, goal-setting, and self-evaluation.

An overwhelming amount of positive feedback has been received from students who thoroughly enjoyed the day. A 17 year old student from Horizon High School called Disability Mentoring Day "a great experience." She continued "I've always wanted to be a teacher, and after today, I know I can." A 19 year old South Brunswick student expressed "I don't know what road I'm going to take, so the more I get my feet into all these doors, the better it will be when I do know."

Some students from Millburn High School and Rutherford High School visited Giants Stadium. Transition Coordinator Karen Bonislowski from Millburn High School said "What a great day we had at Giants Stadium! The students are still talking about the trip and all that they saw and learned. When they wrote in their journals about their visit, they said that they particularly enjoyed riding on the elevators, walking on the field, seeing the locker room, talking about the football games, and talking about hot dogs and popcorn...It was exciting for the students to see the inside workings of the stadium, and relate what they saw to different occupations. We talked about the many jobs that are needed to make sure that the stadium runs smoothly."

Employers were able to tap into a pool of potential interns and future employees while discovering the many ways people with disabilities can contribute to the workforce and the community. Employers raved about the amazing day they had. Kate Bostian of Down To Earth Landscaping, Inc. in Jackson, New Jersey said "Thanks for letting us be a part of such a great program!" Giovanna Psolka of Ernst & Young, LLP in Secaucus, New Jersey said it was a "real pleasure" to host students from A. Harry Moore School. She continued, "It seems like they really enjoyed visiting us."

Allies staff members helped to facilitate the event at New Jersey worksites. Throughout the day, these members were able to engage employers and highlight how diversification of their personnel through the hiring of people with disabilities is a benefit to all. Through interaction with students, Allies was able to outline a variety of services and supports available to them as they transition from school to the work world. Darren Garansi, Director of Supported Employment Services at Allies said Disability Mentoring Day was "truly amazing." Darren, who went to Ernst & Young, LLP added "Every student was enthralled and I was able to observe the spark ignite in each person's mind. Ernst & Young does a fantastic job with hiring people who have disabilities and people who are deaf and hard of hearing."

Allies, Inc. is proud to be a part of such a vital day in the lives of students across New Jersey. As preparations begin for next year's National Disability Mentoring Day, all are welcomed to get involved! For more information, please contact Alana Gregorio at (609) 496-0145 or agregorio@alliesnj.org.

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Are We Making Progress on Transition? The simple answer is "yes." Things are getting better, but not quickly enough. The second National Longitudinal Transition Study currently underway, funded by the [U.S. Department of Education](http://www.ed.gov), is documenting the experiences of a national sample of students who were 13 to 16 years of age in 2000 as they move from secondary school into adult roles. It will involve approximately 6000 students, and will last 10 year. The website for the study (www.nlts2.org) contains all reports generated in the project. Working for pay outside the home was an aspect of the early post-high school experiences of a majority of youth with disabilities. Seventy-two percent of youth with disabilities out of high school up to 4 years reported having been employed at some time since leaving high school, holding an average of two or three jobs. Among youth with disabilities who had been out of high school 1 to 4 years, 58 percent worked full time at their current or most recent job. Wages of working youth averaged \$8.20 per hour in 2005, and 44 percent received at least one of the benefits investigated in NLTS2 (paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits). These findings are a significant improvement over what was seen in the first National Longitudinal Transition Study, and are far better than the rates of employment seen among adults with disabilities. It will be interesting to see what happens to employment rates as these youth age. Will their rates of employment stay high, or will they exit the workforce, frustrated by barriers they face?

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Submit articles to LLash@ourhousenj.org

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SAVE THE DATE

Stay tuned for more information about
NJ APSE's Annual Conference

Facing the Future XIX

Friday, March 25, 2011