



Welcoming Motivated Workers!

# ABILITIES

*Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities*

November 2008 - Vol 2, Issue 5

## Dear Friends ~ Annual Meeting with Governor Douglas



We are pleased to share that on October 14th, 2008 the GCEPD once again met with Governor Douglas. The purpose of our meeting - per our mission statement - was to advise the Governor on current issues affecting the employment of people with disabilities, and to discuss current and future activities of the GCEPD to encourage and increase such employment. We also solicited the Governor's support for our project activities in the upcoming year.

The meeting concluded with the presentation by Governor Douglas of a proclamation declaring October as Disability Employment Awareness Month.

We are grateful for the Governor's continued support of the GCEPD, and are pleased to provide you with an overview of the projects discussed with the Governor that showcase our work on behalf of Vermont's citizens and employment community.

*(Governor Jim Douglas and Fred Jones, GCEPD Chair, with Disability Employment Awareness Month proclamation)*



Best regards,

**Fred Jones, Chair,**

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

*and*

**Susan Chicoine**, on behalf of the Vermont Business Leadership Network

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## The GCEPD and the federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) is a federal grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to the states to increase work incentives and employment options for people with disabilities. In Vermont, this grant is housed within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Vermont has received this grant since 2001 to support a variety of projects. There are no match requirements, and we have tremendous flexibility on how the funds can be used.

Each MIG grant requires a leadership council to oversee the grant. The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) was reinvigorated to serve this function and has taken a strong action-oriented role in developing increased employment options for people with disabilities. Vermont's GCEPD is one of the stronger MIG leadership councils in the country because it has

- active membership that crosses business, providers, advocates, State leadership and consumers
- strong commitment of members in advancing employment for people with disabilities
- a commitment that extends beyond the MIG and will be self-sustaining long after MIG funding ends
- activities that are closely aligned with MIG priorities and projects.

All of the projects discussed with Governor Douglas were funded in part or in whole by the MIG. They represent the ways that the GCEPD and State government have been working to support employers and job seekers. These projects support employers to hire and retain qualified workers, save energy, and support youth in internships and employment opportunities.

## GCEPD Members Meeting with Governor Douglas



GCEPD member Betty Nuovo, and Jim Dorsey of the Vermont Department of Labor

GCEPD members Linda Carbino, Harriet Hall, and Julie Noel



GCEPD member George Nostrand, Kelli Gould, and member Jim Vynak



GCEPD members Rene Pellerin, Susan Wells, Deborah Lisi-Baker, and Fred Jones



GCEPD member Reg Wakeham

## The Resource Coordinator Project

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant was used in 2008 to fund a caseworker hired by United Way to work on-site at several businesses to assist their low-income employees, including people with disabilities. This Resource Coordinator position is a direct result of a statewide initiative involving Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont Department for Children and Families, The United Way, and others to improve employee attendance, retention, and advancement, based on the Bridges out of Poverty principles promoted by Dr. Ruby Payne. This pilot program is intended to provide intensive support to vulnerable employees who are at risk for leaving their jobs or for who attendance has been a problem.



The Resource Coordinator is currently shared between Rhino Foods, Engleberth Construction, and Fletcher Allen Healthcare and it is expected that two more employers will be added to this pilot. Mr. Ted Castle, President and CEO of Rhino Foods, and Ms. Beth Kuhn of The United Way shared with Governor Douglas their successful experience with this program.

*(Photo left: Ted Castle, President and CEO of Rhino Foods)*

These employers involved with this pilot have initiated a number of activities to support their low wage workers and have already seen a positive effect on their retention rates. There have been a number of very positive stories of individuals who have been helped by the Resource Coordinator to solve problems that could have threatened their employment and several instances of referrals to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for disability services. The employers recognize that in order to sustain the model they will take over the funding of this position over the next two years.

A group of project stakeholders, such as Benefits Counselors and Employee Assistance Counselors in VR, and eligibility staff in Economic Services will provide information and support for the Resource Coordinator on disability and other issues. VR will also evaluate the Resource Coordinator's impact on retention rates and other outcomes to determine how cost-effective the "embedded" coordinator is in helping employees overcome poverty-related barriers that affect their employment.

## The Study of Telecommuting and Telecommuting Opportunities

Telecommuting increases employment options for individuals with disabilities by eliminating many barriers. For example, transportation options are very limited in rural areas, especially if a person has significant mobility impairments. Some individuals experience disabilities that require a more flexible work schedule such as frequent rest breaks or reducing stress, or have a disability that fluctuates, leaving periods of time when the person is not able to work. In addition, with the cost of gas and environmental concerns, telecommuting makes practical sense.

During the past year, in an effort to learn more about the potential for telecommuting within state government, the GCEPD met with the following Commissioners to discuss telecommuting opportunities.

- Commissioner Tom Murray, Department of Information and Innovation
- Commissioner Bonnie Rutledge, Department of Motor Vehicles
- Commissioner Pat Moulton Powden, Department of Labor
- Deputy Commissioner Ellen Tofferi, Department of Taxes

The outcomes from these meetings were discussed with the Governor. In addition, GCEPD member Barbara Doherty, representing Green Mountain Coffee Roasters (GMCR), shared the positive experience GMCR is having with



*(GCEPD members Liz Kafer of Middlebury College and Barbara Doherty of Green Mountain Coffee Roasters; Hugh Bradshaw of Vocational Rehabilitation)*

its telecommuting program. We are heartened that the Department of Information and Innovation (DII) is initiating a pilot to explore the possibility of adopting policies that enable some of the workforce to work at home one or two days per week. DII is working with the Department of Human Resources to work out the details to try this on a limited basis to determine what issues, if any, might arise regarding management of the work.

## The Creation of Job Developer Coalitions

The Agency of Human Services Employment Task Force utilized funding from the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant to support five Job Developer Coalition pilot projects in Vermont. These pilot projects supported local efforts to better coordinate communication and collaboration between the various agencies and staff providing job placement and support services for individuals with a variety of barriers to employment.

The goal of these pilots was to support the formation of local Job Developer Coalitions in order to streamline services to the "employer customer". By fostering an environment of cooperation, information sharing and collaboration, these Coalitions have offered employers a seamless avenue for recruitment, while at the same time offering community placement staff the benefits of networking and enhanced agency coordination.

### **Benefits to Employers:**

By offering a single point of contact for employers seeking candidates, the Job Developer Coalitions have streamlined the referral process while at the same time offering a wider, more diverse candidate pool as represented by the various programs and partners. Employers have also benefited from the shared expertise and resources of the various Coalition members.

### **Coalition Locations:**

- Addison County
- Rutland
- Lamoille County
- Springfield
- St. Johnsbury

### **Coalitions Under Development:**

- Burlington
- St. Albans
- Brattleboro
- Newport
- Bennington

## **Workforce Preparation and the State of Vermont Internship Program**

During 2008, the GCEPD met with Tracy Gallo from the Workforce Development and Wellness Division of the Vermont Department of Human Resources. During that meeting we discussed the possibilities for supporting the exposure of persons with disabilities to employment opportunities within state government through the development of an internship program. Following our meeting, an internship program was developed, capped by the hiring of a program

coordinator during the same week as our presentation to the Governor. Tracy Gallo attended the October 14th meeting with the Governor to discuss this program with Governor Douglas.

Preparation of our workforce is an important part of sustaining a strong Vermont economy and is important to employers to remain competitive. The State of Vermont Internship Program is a collaborative effort with the Community College of Vermont (CCV), the Division of Workforce Development and Wellness within the Department of Human Resources, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to develop internship and work experience opportunities within state government for college students, including youth and adult students with disabilities. Interns will be recruited through the State college system and through Vocational Rehabilitation.



*(Jennie Masterson of the Division of Disability and Aging Services, and Tracy Gallo of the Division of Workforce Development and Wellness)*

Procedures will be developed and training provided to managers and supervisors on how to successfully use an intern. Initially, a couple of departments will be used while developing the program, with additional departments added after the first phase of development. Additionally, departments will receive support through VR's Assistive Technology Program and VR staff about how to accommodate and support individuals with disabilities. This will dovetail with plans for Assistive Technology courses through the Summit on how to retain older workers and basic disability information and accommodation options.

Each intern will have an education plan to develop skills that fit with the person's chosen career path. This program provides opportunities to experience working within state government, offers job try-outs within a field of study, and assists department managers to assess potential job candidates for future openings.

Thanks for reading this issue of "Abilities". We welcome your comments, feedback, and suggestions for future issues. Copies of past issues may be found on our website - [www.hireus.org](http://www.hireus.org).

**Melita DeBellis,**

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities  
[melita@gcepd.org](mailto:melita@gcepd.org); 802-434-6600; [www.hireus.org](http://www.hireus.org)

and

**Christine McCarthy**

Vermont Business Leadership Network

[vabired@aol.com](mailto:vabired@aol.com); 802-878-1107; [www.vtbln.org](http://www.vtbln.org)

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