

# ABILITIES

*Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities*

February 2007 - Vol 1, Issue 1

## In This Issue

- ~ Casey Black's Story
- ~ Transitioning from School to Work - Issues and Resources
- ~ Who are the "GCEPD" and the "BLN"?
- ~ About "Abilities"
- ~ We Welcome your Feedback!

## Sign Up

SIGN-UP!

## Quick Links

- [The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities](#)
- [Vermont Business Leadership Network](#)
- [Department of Labor Disability Program Navigators](#)
- [Vocational Rehabilitation](#)
- [Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)

## Greetings!



**"Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Abilities***, a bi-monthly publication and joint collaboration of the **Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities** (GCEPD) and the **Vermont Business Leadership Network** (BLN). Our goal is to educate, empower, and inspire employers and job seekers so that persons of all abilities may find success in making a meaningful contribution in the workforce." *Fred Jones, Chair of the GCEPD and member April Tuck*

## ~ Casey Black's Story



***A Successful Transition from School to Career.*** If you were to ask Casey Black, RDH, a 23 year old dental hygienist in Rutland what it means to have her job, this is what she would tell you. "It means the world. It's amazing to have a career. There are many things that can be taken from you, but they can't take away my career and the letters after my name. It's comforting to know that I have a career to sustain me."

Back in high school, it wasn't necessarily a certainty that Casey would find this success. Struggling with a reading and language disability that affects her reading, pronunciation and writing, academic achievement was a significant challenge for Casey. She found support at the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, which purchased a specialized computer for her to scan her books and read them to her. Casey can also talk to the computer and it will correctly type her words. This was a significant aid for Casey; yet she still had to study twice as hard as others.

As she contemplated her future, Casey had an interest in work as a dental hygienist, and Vocational Rehabilitation - working together with the Department of Employment and Training (now the Department of Labor) - set Casey up with a job shadowing opportunity at Family Dental in Rutland. After six months, she was hired on as an assistant. For two years she worked

during the day and took classes at The Community College of Vermont at night until she felt ready for college. Then she transferred to Hudson Valley Community College in Troy, New York to complete her dental hygiene program.

Six months before Casey left Family Dental to head off to Hudson Valley Community College, Dr. Robert Schmidt joined the practice. He recognized Casey's potential and wrote her a letter of reference to get into that program. When he left to start his own dental practice, he had Casey in the back of his mind, and during her senior year in college he offered her a job as a hygienist in his office. Thus, one and a half years ago, fresh out of college, Casey took over a full time position in his office. According to Dr. Schmidt, it's a rarity to find young people with Casey's maturity straight out of school.

Casey's path to this moment in time wasn't an easy one. There were times in college she would call home, upset by the number of new words she had to look up and process. But with the unending support of her family, her specialized computer, and the help of a para-educator in Clarendon who supported her on weekends with writing papers and such, Casey did indeed finish. Ultimately she ascribes her success to her incredible work ethic. As with many individuals with a disability, the work that is needed to overcome the challenges of the disability produces the kind of work ethic that employers such as Dr. Schmidt seek in their employees. As Casey tells it, "when I put my mind to something, I'm going to do it. I won't let my limitations stop me."

When Casey began her job shadowing at Family Dental, they were not aware of her disability, but eventually she told them. Their reaction was one of curiosity without judgment, which allowed them to collectively discuss how they could best accommodate and work around her disability. Success came as a result of everyone's comfort level in having an open dialogue. The accommodations themselves are minor: her colleagues initially helped her with choosing words in her telephone communications with patients, and she often abbreviates her documents.

According to Dr. Schmidt, Casey's disability allows her to relate well to the patients, particularly those who are struggling with dental conditions or maintaining their oral health. She has a wonderful rapport with people, doesn't really need any guidance, and people really enjoy her.

So what's a final message from Casey's story? According to Dr. Schmidt, "disabilities can be overcome and Casey is living proof. She's happy with what she's doing, and I'm happy with her performance." For Casey, she is thrilled to see her parents so happy, and she looks forward to the day she can use her own example to inspire others. It would appear she already has.

### **~ Transitioning from School to Work - Issues and Resources**

As Casey's story shows, appropriate supports can make a big difference in helping a youth make a successful transition to the world of work. The transition from school to work includes a set of activities that need to begin well before graduation and continue afterwards. For youth with serious disabilities of any kind (learning, emotional, or physical), the challenges that accompany transition can seem daunting. Of youth in Vermont who receive special education services, only 76% graduate from high school. Nationally, 14% of youth with disabilities enter college, compared to 53% of the general population. However, youth with disabilities will succeed with family involvement and the support of programs that focus on: (a) early involvement; (b) career preparation and work-based learning; (c) opportunities for youth

development and leadership; (d) support for attending college, (e) the acquisition of independent living skills, including financial planning; and (f) transportation.

At the Governor's Summit on Employment of People with Disabilities, held in June 2006, additional factors were identified as crucial to supporting a youth with a disability in making a successful transition from school to work: high quality, standards-based education; information on careers, basic work readiness, and transition plans - all of which are individualized and student driven; the chance to try out different occupations; guidance on how to get and keep a job, including soft skills; exposure to college as an option; information on resources; and housing options. Furthermore, community partners must include employers, schools, community, friends/family, and colleges/universities.

There are many resources available to help youth with disabilities make a successful transition to the world of work. They include: [Vocational Rehabilitation](#), which has a myriad of [programs for youth in transition from school to careers](#), as well as [Youth Specialists](#) within the Vermont Department of Labor. The [Job Accommodation Network](#) can also provide employers with information on accommodating individuals with learning disabilities. Other resources include: [State of Vermont Developmental Disabilities Services](#), [Vermont Department of Health, Mental Health Services](#), and [Vermont Adult Learning](#)

### ~ Who are the "GCEPD" and the "BLN"?

The Vermont Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) is a statewide committee established in 1963 when the Vermont legislature passed a law to create a permanent committee to promote the employment of people with disabilities. We offer outreach, awareness, support and resources to employers and job seekers on the employment and accommodation of people of all abilities. Our membership is broad and unique - as we represent a cross section of disability groups, businesses, and service agencies. Our goal is to offer employers and job seekers with the information and resources needed to allow us to achieve our mission - equal employment for all citizens of Vermont.

The Vermont Business Leadership Network ("BLN ") is an initiative led by Vermont employers to stimulate best practices that encourage employers to attract, hire, retain and promote qualified individuals who have disabilities. Our program relies on a fundamental principle - Success Breeds Success. When employers share the benefits of hiring people with disabilities, other employers are educated, enlightened and inspired to do the same.

### ~ About "Abilities"

Abilities will be published six times per year on a bi-monthly basis. Each issue will address a particular topic. This month's topic is "youth in transition". Our desire is that you will find each issue to be a helpful resource for you. All issues will be stored in archives on our websites, [www.hireus.org](http://www.hireus.org) and [www.vtbln.org](http://www.vtbln.org).

Proposed topics for the coming months include: Accommodating an aging workforce; mental illness; autism and aspergers; hearing impairments; and vision impairments.

### ~ We Welcome your Feedback!

This newsletter is intended to be a resource for employers and job seekers. As such, our goal is to be responsive to your needs. So, if you have a particular topic you would like to see covered - or questions or comments about the topic covered in this edition or proposed for future issues - please let us know by contacting either Melita DeBellis, Coordinator of the GCEPD, at [melita@gcepd.org](mailto:melita@gcepd.org) or 802-434-6600; or Christine McCarthy, Coordinator of the BLN, at [vabirom@aol.com](mailto:vabirom@aol.com) or 802-878- 1107.

Stay tuned, as we continue to show you how to **"Tap the Abilities of People with disAbilities"**.

Sincerely,

Melita DeBellis and Christine McCarthy  
Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, and the Vermont Business Leadership Network, [info@vtbln.org](mailto:info@vtbln.org); 800-639-2909; [www.vtbln.org](http://www.vtbln.org)

email: [melita@gcepd.org](mailto:melita@gcepd.org)

phone: 802-434-6600

web: <http://www.hireus.org>