



# ABILITIES

*Promoting the employment of Vermont citizens of all abilities*

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## Dear Friends ~ Making Accommodations Under the Americans with Disabilities Act



On behalf of the Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities, I would like to welcome you to the latest issue of "Abilities".

Twenty years after the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there continue to be a number of myths about what it means for employers when hiring an individual with a disability. With this issue of "Abilities" we will debunk one of those myths and discuss some simple ways of accommodating a returning veteran with post traumatic stress disorder.

We're also pleased to share the story of a youth preparing to live his American dream.

Thanks for reading on!

Best regards,  
**Fred Jones, Chair**

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

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### **Myth #1 About the Americans with Disabilities Act - *Story Synopsis***

A common concern and misunderstanding about the ADA is that it requires employers to implement expensive accommodations for employees with disabilities.

[click here to read more](#)

### **Dave Lawrence's Story - Accommodating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Workplace - *Story Synopsis***

Dave Lawrence, a 45 year old resident of Eden, Vermont is an experienced soldier, with 25 years in the Army and the Army National Guard. He joined the Army just out of high school in 1983 and was later called to active duty in Operation Desert Storm. In 1989 he transitioned from active duty to the Army National Guard. Yet despite his experience, nothing prepared him for the impact that his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom would have on his life.

[click here to read more](#)



### **Joel Wright - Living his American Dream - *Story Synopsis***

Joel Wright doesn't need perfect 20/20 vision to have clarity about his career aspirations. Diagnosed with glaucoma in infancy, and now a senior at Burlington



(Vermont) High School, Joel feels a calling to the ministry of a priest in order to help others find themselves and find purpose in their lives. He also is drawn to show others what is possible when living with a disability and to increase their understanding around glaucoma - which is why he started Glaucoma Awareness Day at BHS in 2009.

[click here to read more](#)



### **MORE ON Myth #1 About the Americans with Disabilities Act**

A common concern and misunderstanding about the ADA is that it requires employers to implement expensive accommodations for employees with disabilities.

However, according to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the majority of workers with disabilities do not need accommodations to perform their jobs, and for those who do, the cost is usually minimal. In fact, two-thirds of accommodations cost less than \$500, with many costing nothing at all. And available tax incentives make it even easier for businesses to cover accessibility costs.

For more information on myths, and to get the real facts, here is one helpful [website](#).

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### **MORE ON Dave Lawrence's Story and Accommodating PTSD in the Workplace**

The year was 2006. Dave had been working since 2000 at Copley Hospital in Morrisville, Vermont as an X-Ray Technologist. Then he was called back into active duty to serve in Iraq. After some training in Wisconsin and Kuwait, Dave and other members of the 131st unit of engineers based in Colchester were sent to Camp Stryker, just outside of Baghdad while others were sent into Balahad. Their task - clearing roadways and routes of

improvised explosive devices, also known as "IEDs".

Returning to Vermont after a year in Iraq, with a diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) Dave described himself to others by saying, "The old David is dead; a little bit of him may still be in there, but for all intents and purposes, the old David is dead." He was telling them that after having gone through all he went through - and having seen what he had seen - he wasn't the same person.

Dave took just two months off after his return to the States and discharge from the Army. Then he returned to his job at Copley in November of 2007. He tried to fit right back in - which worked well for a little while. At the same time he took proactive steps to see a counselor at the Veteran's Center and get his emotions off of his chest.



After a while, however, Dave began to notice that he was having trouble with anger management, and that at the workplace, anger would come up inappropriately. While he was once quite compassionate with his patients - even those who approached their x-ray procedures in a difficult or disagreeable manner - he was noticing that his ability to be compassionate had gone almost completely away. He found himself thinking, "What do you know of what I've seen? You can't even understand what I've seen." For him, as is the case of many returning veterans, there is anger about the fact that others can't appreciate or understand what they've experienced.

Dave attempted to manage his anger and emotions while dealing with patients for well over a year, putting on his "game face" and "just doing it". He even took a break from his counseling. Eventually, however, things came to a head for him. He had a patient whose commentary on his military service "really pushed his buttons". At the same time, Dave found himself expressing a frightening level of anger towards his young son, which greatly scared him. Dave knew he needed more help and immediately returned to the Veteran's Center for additional counseling and supports.

At the Vet Center, Dave was enrolled in a special 12-week course called CPT, a "brutal course" that helps the soldier focus on his emotions. The course had Dave looking at some of the worst things he had seen so that he could recognize and manage his trigger points. The course forces the individual to break down their emotions. As a part of this, Dave has learned that he has nothing to prove to anyone. If he feels like crying at work, he will and he doesn't care - nor do his colleagues. This is better, he says, than walking around, jaw and fist clenched, while he tries to manage his stress.

Equally important as the support Dave received from the Vet Center and

the CPT program is the support and simple accommodations Dave received from Copley Hospital. He has talked to his bosses about his counseling and the CPT program as well as his efforts to manage his emotions and anger. Despite being short handed in the X-Ray department, his supervisors have worked with him to ensure that his schedule accommodates his regular appointments at the Veteran's Center. In addition, there have been occasional times when he needs to channel his emotions and get rid of excess adrenaline, which he will do by playing a 1st shooter video game on his laptop.

Most importantly, Copley realized that for Dave - as for any veteran - returning to work didn't mean "business as usual". As Dave says, anyone returning from a combat experience won't fit right back in at work. They are a changed person because of what they've seen and experienced, and employers need to understand that. As Dave says, "If the human psyche was meant to deal with the worst aspects of war, we'd have a different wiring system." Copley demonstrated an understanding of his situation, and a willingness to be flexible in order to keep a valuable employee on staff.

When asked what he thinks would have happened if he hadn't had these kinds of simple accommodations, Dave says he feels he most likely would have lost his job and his family by now.

Dave Lawrence wasn't prepared for the manifestation of PTSD at work, but thankfully Copley Hospital was prepared and willing to work with him to find a way to keep a valuable employee successfully employed. This has allowed Dave to remain focused on his recovery and slowly, but surely, "dig back up the old Dave".

April Tuck, Senior Director of Human Resources, shared, "Making the accommodations was automatic; it takes just a little flexibility and open communication. Dave is a valued member of our Radiology team and hospital community as a whole. We appreciate the sacrifice he made and we remain committed to helping him be successful in his work."

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**Post Script: Dave has a particularly personal message to share with other soldiers and their families:** "I implore you. If you or a loved one notices changes in your behavior, get help. Don't blow it off with an attitude that 'I'm fine'. That's just kidding yourself. And to employers and family members, look for little signs of little things that weren't there before one's deployment and encourage - but don't push - the veteran to talk to someone."

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## MORE ON Joel Wright's Story - Living the American Dream

You see, Joel wants to be more than just the blind kid. He knows that oftentimes people feel a bit uncomfortable around him and don't know how to ask questions about his blindness. Glaucoma Awareness Day and the educational materials he shares with his fellow students and teachers at BHS provide an opening for such dialogue while also promoting increased awareness about the various causes of blindness. With such awareness, Joel hopes, will also come increased funding towards finding a cure.

In addition, Joel hopes people will see him as a happy, normal person who contributes to society in a normal way. With the benefit of assistive technologies and other "lifestyle adaptations", Joel knows he can do the same



things as others, just in different ways.

He could have taken 5 years to complete high school, but he insisted in doing it in four. Once he began participating in his own IEP meetings in seventh grade, he began to care greatly about his schooling and to realize he owned his educational success.

He has learned how to advocate for the supports he needs which allow him to be independent. He has also found great support in the teachers who pushed him to work hard and become independent.

He has learned how to advocate for the supports he needs which allow him to be

independent. He has also found great support in the teachers who pushed him to work hard and become independent.

Academically Joel has thrived; he has GPA of 3.8 and is in the top 11% of his class. He now seeks to continue his education by pursuing a Bachelor's in theology, followed by a Master's in divinity, post graduate work in canon law, and then a doctorate in systematic or medieval theology. His ultimate goal is to become a priest at a university and to teach theology at the graduate level. He has been accepted at all four of the colleges he applied to and will be going to a private Catholic college out of state.

Joel feels it is important to have a philosophy to guide one in life. Here's a bit of his, expressed in how he would motivate others with a disability who might lack the kind of supports he has had:

"You have your whole life ahead of you and you can measure success however you want to measure success. But society also measures success, and to accomplish goals as an individual makes you feel good and that you are contributing to society. You should contribute something; even if you can't do much, it doesn't matter. What does

matter is that you are an active participant in our country. It is the duty of Americans to contribute to the American Dream. We all make our American dream. The disabled student doesn't want to miss the American Dream."

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### Seeking Members for the GCEPD

The GCEPD is looking for individuals interested in applying for membership on the GCEPD. Members are appointed by the Governor to a three-year term and are selected to represent one of three groups: 1) the various disability communities; 2) the business community; and 3) providers of services to individuals with a disability.

If you are interested in applying, or in learning more about membership on the GCEPD, please contact Melita DeBellis, Executive Coordinator of the GCEPD, at [melita@gcepd.org](mailto:melita@gcepd.org), or telephone 802-434-6600.

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), or in the [Constant Contact archives](#).

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