

**MPC**  
**DD**  
Missouri Planning Council for  
Developmental Disabilities

STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT OF  
INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

# Real Lives, Real Jobs

They live in large cities with complex transportation systems and in towns too small for a stop sign, let alone a city bus.

Some struggled through basic math and reading in school; others earned college degrees.

Some use the aid of a wheelchair or scooter to get around; others enjoy running and playing basketball.

They are as diverse as the topography from one end of Missouri to the other. Yet all 10 Missourians featured in this booklet have something in common – a developmental disability that posed a barrier to competitive employment.

But it doesn't stop there. Each one also had the desire for productive employment and an employer willing to provide an opportunity. And, most had support services that helped connect them to the job and maximize their success at work.

Their stories are told here as part of the mission of the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities. The council works to increase opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to integrate into their communities. Jobs are key.

Amber, Bobby, Chuck, Gary, Jeni, Lucy, Mary, Pat, Philip and Stewart each in his or her own way show how the work they do enriches their lives, contributes to the workplace and makes the community a better place.

We thank them for sharing their stories.

If you have questions or would like additional copies of this booklet, please contact:

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Jeremiah "Jay" Nixon,  
Governor

August, 2009

I was so pleased to read the success stories presented here in ***Real Lives, Real Jobs***. As a parent myself, I know how having a real job has improved the quality of my daughter's life just as meaningful employment has enriched the life of each individual in this booklet.

These stories show us progress, yet we have so very far to go. By some estimates the employment rate for Missourians with developmental disabilities is a pitiful nine percent, and this represents a drop from 12 percent just a few years ago. It would be easy to throw up our hands and say that, in the current economic climate, community employment is an impossible challenge. I hear many people saying "now is not the time", things are just too tough.

I say "***now is the time***", now is the time to promote community employment as a valued and cost-effective strategy. I am in no way saying that money is the bottom line, but an overwhelming amount of studies clearly indicate that supporting persons with disabilities in community employment makes good business sense. According to a study conducted by Robert Cimmera in 2007, for every dollar spent by Missouri in supported employment for persons with intellectual disabilities, taxpayers get a return of \$1.03. If times are truly tough, why wouldn't we demand that one of our priorities be supporting people with disabilities in community employment rather than in segregated costly programs?

The Missouri Planning Council truly believes that *everyone who wants to work should work*, and that it is the responsibility of the person and the people who support them to have high expectations and make community employment a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joann Noll'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Joann' written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name 'Noll'.

Joann Noll, Chairperson

*"Let People with Disabilities Live Real Lives"*





## **The Missouri Disability Employment Fact Sheet**

Work is a fundamental expectation for all Missouri citizens. Why should that be any different for people with disabilities? Such an expectation alone, however, is not enough. People with disabilities must have opportunities. People with disabilities need access to a full range of employment choices to maximize their talents. With both the expectation and the opportunity, people with disabilities will become full participants in our economy. When people with disabilities contribute their gifts and talents through work, the community becomes a better place for all Missourians to live.

- **Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation reports that the annual income of persons with disabilities who were assisted in getting community-based competitive employment increased by \$46 million in 2008 alone.** *(2008, Missouri State Rehabilitation Council report)*
- **For every dollar spent in supported employment by Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation for individuals with developmental disabilities there was a return of \$1.03 to the taxpayers.** *(2009 Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, Robert Cimmera)*

While these increased incomes are impressive and the costs of supportive employment are negligible, they only represent one calendar year and the long-term benefit of revenue and reduced costs to taxpayers must also be considered. Clearly Missourians with disabilities are contributing to the quality and the economy of our State, but there needs to be a continued push for increased expectations and opportunities to improve the employment rates.

- **Missourians' with disabilities say overwhelmingly that they want to work, but have difficulty finding employment in community settings.** *(MPCDD Statewide Needs assessment: 2006)*
- **Only about 9 percent of Missourians with developmental disabilities are employed in Community settings. This represents a drop from 12 percent just a few years ago.** *(2008, MO Dept. of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities)*

When Missourians with disabilities work in competitive community settings, it's good for the economy, and it improves the quality of life for all of us. It is up to everyone; individuals, families, friends, educators, and legislators to nurture employment expectations and opportunities for Missourian's with disabilities, especially those with developmental disabilities.

The Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities strongly believes that *"all people who want to work can work"*, and it is the responsibility of each person and those who support them to make that a reality.

*"Let People with Disabilities Live Real Lives"*

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## Chuck Comstock

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### A Proud, Taxpaying Citizen

KIRKSVILLE – It was just a small piece of paper, sprinkled with numbers, but when Chuck Comstock saw it for the first time, it made a huge impact.

“In January, I got this thing in the mail showing I’d paid taxes,” he recalls. “That was something to be proud of. In 16 years, I’d never paid taxes.”

His friends told him it was odd to find happiness in paying taxes, but to Chuck it meant something special: “I’m contributing now.”

For 16 years, Chuck was a consumer of government services following an accident that left him partially paralyzed. It happened in the fall of 1992, just after he had returned home to the farm in northeast Missouri. The family’s only son was ready to join his father in his crop and livestock operation. Two years earlier, Chuck had joined the U.S. Air Force, where he was trained to work on weapons systems for fighter jets. Serving at an Air Force base near Las Vegas eventually made him appreciate the quiet simplicity of rural life.

So, at the age of 20, he settled in for what he thought would be a lifetime as a farmer. But just two months later, he agreed to help a friend cut down a tree. As he stood watching it sway, he darted to get out of its path. He judged wrong. The tree came down on his head, changing his life

forever.

After months of hospitalization and rehab, Chuck returned home in time for his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. He had no mobility in his legs and only partial use of his arms.



But never disabled was Chuck’s zest for life. After one day of feeling regret that the tree hadn’t snuffed out his life completely, Chuck quickly turned his focus to what he did have to live for – being “Uncle Bub” to his seven nieces and nephews. His positive attitude stumped his caregivers, who insisted he would experience depression once hit with the reality that he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

But, Chuck had already witnessed an uncle waste time being bitter over his own paralysis. He was determined to dwell not on what he could *not* do, but what he *could* do. That’s why he was open to a suggestion from his vocational rehabilitation counselor to consider college and employment.

He enrolled in Northeast Missouri State University (now Truman State University), and his

*“No matter where I am, I’ve never felt like I didn’t belong there. That’s the way anybody with a disability should feel.”*

Chuck Comstock

mother drove him to Kirksville each day, a round trip of 70 miles. After four years of commuting, he moved into his own apartment in Kirksville and began directing his care.

With assistance from a personal care attendant and a van equipped with a lift, Chuck lived independently as a college student. In December 2006, he received a bachelor's degree in English.

When the Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities began hiring consumer advocacy specialists, Chuck had the perfect qualifications. He had self-directed his care, had developed strong community connections and was accustomed to public speaking, notes Linda Bowers, executive director of the Kirksville Regional Center, where Chuck was hired.



It's his job to serve as an independent advocate for the needs of people with developmental disabilities. He is their voice within the agency and on committees. For example, he participates on a committee developing disaster planning for people with disabilities – bringing the perspective of his own near-miss with a spring tornado.

Linda says Chuck's main strength is his attitude. "Chuck has a tremendous personality and a great sense of humor. It helps him engage with people."

He's also an effective role model for people with disabilities. "He's able to talk to them about what he's accomplished. He helps them see what

they can do for themselves and what others can do for them," she says.

Chuck says: "No matter where I am, I've never felt like I didn't belong there. That's the way anybody with a disability should feel."

Chuck helps people understand the value of community – people helping people. He knows that from experience. Following his accident, a prayer group immediately formed on the family's lawn. Area farmers showed up with six combines to harvest the family's soybeans.

The community raised several thousand dollars with a soup and bean supper.

A self-described "social bug," he makes friends easily, whether shopping at Wal-Mart or commuting the three-mile pedestrian trail between home and work in his wheelchair.

Despite his preference for the outdoors, Chuck quickly acclimated to the office, including its social events. For office carry-in lunches, he contributes his famous key lime pie.

"He has no fear of not being accepted," says Deb Wohlers, assistant director/consumer relations.

Working at his computer, Chuck types on a standard keyboard, using the knuckle of his right little finger. Voice-activated software also helps him communicate via computer.

His office contains his Dale Earnhardt racing memorabilia, reflecting his admiration for the late champion racecar driver. In the apartment he shares with his cat, Baby, a large poster of Earnhardt bears the inscription: "looking back, knowing that you gave it your all ... win or lose, you finish a champion."





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## Mary Griffin

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### Her Positive Attitude Rubs Off

HANNIBAL – As jobs go, the differences between office receptionist and rice hull bagger are many.

But, Mary Griffin, who has worked at both, points to the only difference that matters: As a receptionist at NorthEast Independent Living Services (NEILS), she gets to help people.

“Some of the people we talk to need housing,” she points out.

Whether clients call in or walk in to the NEILS office, Mary is their first link to a caseworker, who finds suitable housing or other services for clients with disabilities.

Furthermore, when clients come to the office and see the receptionist in a wheelchair, they just might think a little differently about themselves, Mary says. “If they see me in the position I’m in, maybe if they’re in the same position, they can do the same thing I do.”

As she talks about her role in the organization’s mission, the phone rings every couple of minutes.

“Good morning, NEILS, Mary speaking. Can I help you? ... Do you have a caseworker, honey? ... Is it Stacy? ... Crystal? ... I’m trying to get you to the right person, honey. Is it Betty?”

Mary doesn’t have to put a smile in her voice. It’s been there all along.

“No matter if I’m having a good day or a bad day, I have a smile on my face. It’s better to smile than to cry,” she says.

It’s easy to imagine Mary smiling even while bagging rice hulls. She liked that job, too. It was her first job, and she was glad to have it.



“When I graduated high school in 1992, I didn’t think there were any places disabled people could work,” Mary says. But when her family moved from Arkansas to Kahoka, Mo., a caseworker there connected her with a sheltered workshop, where weighing and bagging rice hulls was her primary job.

She had to leave the job when Mary’s mother was diagnosed with cancer and the family moved to Hannibal to be closer to a cancer treatment center. Mary had her own apartment down the hall from her

parents’ apartment.

That satisfied her independent streak, while being near the two people she loved the most. “They were always there when I needed something,” she says.

Mary was an infant when a test for spinal meningitis injured her spine and severely limited her mobility. But her mother’s spunk helped Mary continue to push the boundaries.



"My mama used to always tell me, 'You can do what you put your mind to.' She never treated me any different than my brothers."

Once in Hannibal, Mary grew bored staying at home. She began looking for a job, with the help of Learning Opportunities/Quality Works Inc., a not-for-profit community employment service.



Above, Mary introduces her co-workers. Below, she shows off her family gallery.



After a series of job assessments, resume development and interviews, she was hired in April 2007 by NEILS, located just a block from her apartment building. A job coach helped her settle into her responsibilities during the first month. Her job as receptionist also involves distributing paperwork, including time sheets, to the right destinations.

Her new-job jitters evaporated after Mary got to know her co-workers. Soon, she slipped into the office culture as easily as butter melts into warm oatmeal.

Mary's penchant for an occasional prank is well received by jovial co-workers, who playfully describe her as "ornery."

"Everybody knows Mary. She visits with people and makes them feel included," says Polly Nicholson, executive director of NEILS. She rapidly listed Mary's strengths: upbeat, happy, positive, caring, willingness to go above and beyond normal job duties and, of course, her smile.

Co-worker Crystal Hilse, consumer-directed services specialist, says Mary adds a touch of PR to the job. "By Mary being such a happy person, that positive attitude rubs off on other people."

Mary says the job has provided her with income to meet her needs. "Whatever I need – as long as I save – I can afford to buy and not worry about my bills getting paid."

On her days off, Mary often visits the office breakroom to chat and joke. Outside the office, co-workers attend baseball games and other events together.

"We're just like a big ol' family," Mary says.

She also enjoys many activities with her neighbors, reciting her busy social schedule: Monday is bowling; Tuesday is penny poker; Wednesday is Bingo. So are Friday and Saturday. Sunday is church.

"Then it starts all over again," she says, her smile growing wider.

Since moving to Hannibal, Mary has lost both of her parents to cancer. One brother calls her every day. Friends in her apartment building take an active interest in her welfare – and she in theirs.

One is building manager Shirley Bomar. She says she was "tickled to death" when Mary became employed. Having worked for the Hannibal Housing Authority for 28 years, Shirley knows: "When people can work and help themselves, it makes all the difference."



*"When people can work and help themselves, it makes all the difference."*

Shirley Bomar, housing manager

## Those Who Do – Teach

ST. LOUIS – The unusual way she met Pat Hall is lodged in Bridgette Jenkins's memory more than 20 years later.

She was organizing a picnic for freshmen at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. As she was scurrying about making sure all the activities were going as planned, her foot suddenly stuck and she fell. As Bridgette lay on the ground rubbing her leg, a student came up to her.

"She was hovering over me, telling me I didn't fall correctly," recalls Bridgette, a counseling psychologist in UMSL's office of multicultural relations.

The student was Pat Hall, a business major. By the time Pat had reached college, she had become an expert at falling. Cerebral palsy had impaired her ability to walk, but she walked and ran all the same. As a frequent faller, she had learned how to minimize damage.

True to her nature, Pat was sharing the lesson with others.

Pat has been a teacher all her life. She doesn't have a classroom, but she uses opportunities to educate.

Today, she is director of ADA services for the St. Louis Metro. Since 2001, she has worked to ensure that the city's public transportation services are accessible as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Often using her own experience,

she helps individuals learn to use the transportation system to achieve greater independence in their lives.

At the Transit Access Center, she and her staff evaluate how well individuals can access a bus or light rail by using actual bus steps and seats, ramps,

a curb cut, a stoplight and other devices to simulate the experience of a passenger.

The office trains passengers to use the bus and light rail system effectively. If they are not able to use fixed-route services, they may be certified for curb-to-curb van service.

In Pat's job, having a disability is an advantage. "It gives me an understanding. At the same time, I don't accept the excuses."

She believes any client who is able to access regular services, should do so. It's important for people to understand the progress

that's been made integrating individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of life, she says.

"We've come a long way since the ADA. The accessible entrance is now the main entrance, not in the back alley where they throw out the potato peels."

Growing up in a family that never coddled her, Pat was mainstreamed in schools before it was common for children with disabilities. Her awkward gait was a challenge on the playground and ballfield.





"I was obviously very different. I didn't walk normally," she points out. "I learned early on that I would need an education."

Part of her education was learning how to fit in with other children and to find solutions, such as playing tennis on a smaller court.

She now uses a scooter for most outdoors mobility and knows that accessible transportation opens doors.

"I use the Metro system constantly to get around. My mother always complains that I'm never home. I don't let grass grow under my feet."

Pat is active in her church and enjoys going to movies and Cardinals baseball games. She is often on the hunt for a good bargain – with her teenaged goddaughter, who is the daughter of her friend Bridgette – the one who now knows how to fall.

"At Macy's, they know her by name," Bridgette says, adding that whenever she hears a scooter, she expects to see Pat.

"She's been able to make accommodations so her life remains enriched," Bridgette says. "She has not used her disability as any reason not to reach her potential. She has used her disability to help people."

After getting a bachelor's degree in business administration from UMSL, Pat obtained a master's in rehabilitation counseling from Southern Illinois



University of Carbondale. She worked previously at an independent living center and in UMSL's disability access office.

She continues to find opportunities to teach. Instead of taking offense at questions from children curious about her disability, she answers each one.

"Now, this kid won't be so afraid the next time he sees someone in a wheelchair," she says. "Maybe it's not a grand impact, but I can educate one or two at a time."

She also participates in sensitivity training to help adults understand the perspective of individuals with disabilities.

She explains that some people quickly make false assumptions when they see a person with a disability. A grocery store clerk once rang up her purchase assuming she was using food stamps. At times, fellow bus passengers have tried to hand her money.

Pat tells a nondisabled person: "You'd be considered a slouch if you weren't working. For me, it's a pat on the hand (for working). We've got to get past that."

Bridgette is pleased that her daughter has learned about issues surrounding disabilities from the best of teachers. "I don't think I could order a better godmother, and I don't think you could get a better friend."

*"We've come a long way since the ADA. The accessible entrance is now the main entrance, not in the back alley where they throw out the potato peels."*

Pat Hall



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## Stewart Strong

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### Meeting an Employer's Need

JEFFERSON CITY – With 12,000 personnel files to keep up to date for both active and retired employees, it can be easy to fall behind. That's what the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) was facing five years ago just as Stewart Strong was entering the job market.

Through Job Point, an employment center that prepares individuals for jobs in demand by local employers, and a grant from the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, Stewart was placed in MoDOT's human resources department.

Today, Stewart keeps the department's personnel records up to date. With the push of a button, an automated filing system rotates to the appropriate row of files, and Stewart finds the correct file and drops in the latest employment verification form, address change or other document.

The filing system adjusts to table level, just right for working from a chair – in this case, a wheelchair.

After five years, Stewart's co-workers no longer see the wheelchair – if they ever did. They just see an active young man with a variety of interests.

When Monday morning office chatter turns to "how I spent my weekend," it's likely that Stewart has the most to report – between hunting, fishing and working on cars.

"He probably has more of an active life than I do," says Kim Hickey, the department's employment manager.

Spina bifida took the use of Stewart's legs, but he still pursues many interests. He hunts deer, squirrel, turkey and dove, and he fishes – "anything that will bite the hook."

"I stay outdoors all I can," he says.

A love of outdoors is the family's lifestyle, led by Stewart's father, Jim Strong. They often spend weekends on a family farm.

An all-terrain wheelchair and an amphibious vehicle help Stewart get up close and personal with the wildlife he hunts and photographs.

He mounted a special camera on a tree in the woodsy backyard of the family home to automatically snap a photo of anything that moves



by. He is hoping to catch coyote or fox that have been spotted in the neighborhood.

"So far, it's gotten only a squirrel and Dad cutting the grass," Stewart laughs.

He and his father also like to spend time working together on vehicles. Cleaning the rust and grease off a front and rear axle counts as a good Saturday afternoon in Stewart's book.

"My dad has always worked on vehicles for fun. By helping him, I liked doing it. You find out how things run by tearing them apart," he explains.

Stewart hopes to get a license to drive vehicles eventually. For now, he uses the city's bus service,

*"He always has a positive attitude. He's just like working with anyone else, but he has a wheelchair. Everyone has some kind of barrier – his is just more apparent than others."*

Kim Hickey, supervisor

which includes a van equipped for wheelchairs, to take him to and from work.

"He's very reliable. He very rarely misses work," says Kim, his supervisor. "He always has a positive attitude. He's just like working with anyone else, but he has a wheelchair. Everyone has some kind of barrier – his is just more apparent than others."

Through his job, Stewart has been asked to help educate people about employment and disabilities through question-and-answer sessions with other division supervisors at MoDOT and through a panel discussion for employers at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He also served on a MoDOT team to identify barriers to accessibility at highway rest stops.

Stewart has grown beyond his initial discomfort with an advocacy role.

"Until I started working for MoDOT, I hated talking in public. I basically just made myself do it," he says. Now, he says it's an interesting aspect of the job to advise people to treat co-workers with disabilities "like everyone else."



When Stewart occasionally encounters a challenge at work, such as reaching or lifting something out of his range, he merely asks a co-worker for help.

Otherwise, Stewart's only need was a way to get through the door. The department's previous office had a step at the entry that was difficult to cross before it was replaced with a ramp. At the new office, level ground all the way makes it easy for a wheelchair.

Kim says Stewart adds a dimension to the staff. "It makes people more aware, more understanding that folks with disabilities are just like anyone else if given the opportunity for gainful employment. It makes people aware that you can work and have a disability at the same time. We treat him as we'd treat anyone else."

And now that Stewart is keeping the personnel records up to date, new responsibilities are coming his way.

**A fall hunting trip was successful.**

## Believing is Seeing Beyond the Disability

MARSHFIELD – If there's any doubt that encouraging words from one person can dramatically alter the course of another person's life, look at Bobby O'Dell.

Growing up, he was often teased by other children and underestimated by teachers because of his learning disability and low vision.

"It was hard to convince teachers that a person with a disability could do much. One said she didn't think I could be productive," Bobby recalls.

As a teenager, he looked for respect in the wrong places and bumped up against the law.



Finally, Bobby met someone who could see beyond his disability. His vocational rehabilitation counselor, John Patterson, saw abilities.

"He said I had more on the ball than a workshop," Bobby says. "I learned to speak up."

He's been speaking up ever since – not just for himself, but for other people with disabilities as well. Because friends told him he'd be good at it, Bobby began speaking on panels for People First, a

self-advocacy movement for people with developmental disabilities.

School children, Boy Scouts, church members, conference participants and others gain a greater understanding of disabilities when described firsthand by Bobby and other panelists. Bobby's messages are clear: "Treat us like a person first. Making fun of people does hurt. All disabilities are not the same."

Just as encouraging words changed Bobby's life, he's now using words to change others. "One girl said she never made fun of people with disabilities, but regretted that she had never stopped others from doing it."

People First has taught even Bobby a few lessons about disabilities. At one conference, a woman with hearing loss spoke with the aid of an interpreter. When Bobby responded, he directed his remarks to the interpreter – and the woman objected. "She called me on it. She said, 'You talk to me, not the interpreter.'"

As he broadens his experience, Bobby continues to speak up for people with disabilities as a member and past chair of the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities and as an advocate before the Missouri Legislature.

His volunteer advocacy work is in addition to his full-time job at Walmart Super Center in Marshfield.

He has worked there for 15 years, handling a variety of jobs, including stocking shelves, replenishing sack supplies, retrieving shopping carts, unloading trucks, watering plants, recycling materials and performing general maintenance.

"He's eager to help anywhere he's asked to help or anyplace he even remotely thinks is in need of assistance," says store Manager Tim Slavens.



Early in Bobby's employment, he occasionally was placed with a co-worker who helped clarify his





duties for the day. "We haven't done that for a number of years. He's been self-sufficient for some time now," Tim says. "We're just proud to have Bobby. He's good for us, and we're good for him. It's a good fit."

Previously, Bobby had worked at a flea market booth, but decided to pursue more substantial employment. Supportive Employment helped him develop job-interview skills and provided on-the-job training once he was employed by Walmart.

With the help of a caseworker, he continues to identify educational opportunities to expand his skills in public speaking, communication and computer technology.

His disability does create challenges, but he makes adjustments as necessary. He sets an alarm on his cell phone to keep himself on schedule. When his low vision made it difficult to read product bar codes, he acquired a magnifying glass.

His biggest challenge continues to be transportation, since Bobby doesn't drive. He paid neighbors to drive him to work, but the 14-mile trip became burdensome, especially when he

worked a late shift. He recently moved closer to his job and rides a bicycle to work. The approach of winter, however, will present another challenge, as public transportation in Marshfield is limited.

A person once suggested that "it would be easier" for him to live on disability payments and not work. Bobby doesn't receive disability assistance.

"I think if you can work, you should, and not be a drain," he says. "A lot of people can get out of workshops with supports. I think it has to be a shift in thinking from employers' standpoint that a person with a disability can learn and be a part of the community."

A regular paycheck has enabled Bobby to pursue numerous interests. He likes to travel to St. Louis Cardinals baseball games, play slot machines at the casino, bowl with friends and eat at his favorite Chinese restaurant. He also enjoys playing cards, collecting bells, listening to Christian rock music and writing poetry.

If he ever writes his autobiography, he has the title: "Beyond My Disability."

### People with Disabilities

By Bobby

When we are treated the same, that is sad.  
I wish people wouldn't treat us the same.  
When they do, it makes me mad.  
Treating all disabilities the same is lame.

Some people move slow.  
Some can go fast.  
People's abilities can grow.  
Please don't judge the past.

Some people don't work; that is sad.  
Some people work; that is sweet.  
When they don't get a chance, that is very sad.  
Working with different people is a treat.

## Coached Through the Challenges

SPRINGFIELD – Jeni Peterson escorts two visitors into the hospital elevator and pushes the button to the lowest level. She moves with the ease of someone who has been on the job for five years.

But a few years ago, that routine act was anything but easy.

“She was petrified of the elevator,” says Lori Pace, director of Employment Solutions, a subsidiary of The Arc of the Ozarks, which helped Jeni obtain the job at Cox Medical Center South.

Jeni was hired to work in the sterile processing department, a massive operation in the basement of the 11-story hospital, where supplies are thoroughly cleaned and redistributed to hospital departments around the clock.

“Part of her job was to deliver supplies on various floors,” Lori explains. A job coach helped Jeni, step by step, conquer her fear of becoming stuck in an elevator. First, the coach rode the elevator with her. Then, Jeni rode alone, knowing the coach would meet her when the elevator doors opened. Soon, Jeni was able to ride the elevator with ease.

During Jeni’s first month on the job, the coach also helped her overcome her shyness in order to interact with co-workers. “She was so nervous at first, meeting new people, that she would completely clam up,” recalls Lori. “We worked with her on how to get to know her co-workers and show that she has a nice personality and is fun and friendly.”

Quick with a smile and a giggle, Jeni says her favorite part of the job is talking with co-workers.

The department manager, Alona Bennett, says Jeni’s strengths include her “great attitude” and willingness to take on new tasks. “She has become more versatile. There are many things she can do.”

Jeni demonstrates how she washes carts and bins and sorts sterile pans into their proper places on the shelves.



Before she was offered a job at Cox, Jeni volunteered there for a year. “I like the atmosphere here,” she says. “You are moving constantly.”

She’s happy at work, but several years ago she had to get over her disappointment at not being able to follow her dream job as a child care provider. She was told she would not be able to become certified for daycare work.

“She regrouped,” says her mother, Judy Peterson. Several family members work in the health care field, so Jeni was drawn to that as a second choice.

“With Jeni, it’s a self-esteem factor. Working at a hospital has really been good for her,” explains Judy. “If she wasn’t working, she’d sit at home all day. The job gives her a chance to be with people. She’s always up and ready to go.”



Since Jeni does not drive, transportation from her home in Nixa is a challenge. Her parents, who live nearby, take her to and from work as it fits with their work schedules. A community integrated services aide also assists in transportation from work and to the grocery store.

Judy explains that Jeni was diagnosed with mixed cerebral palsy, which affects both her muscle and cognitive functions mildly. At school, she was integrated into regular classrooms, with accommodations, and her mother believes that helped Jeni adapt more easily to the workplace.

Despite her first-choice vocational setback, Jeni focuses on what she can do: She bought a house of her own and manages her own finances. She works out daily at a fitness center in the

*"The job gives her a chance to be with people. She's always up and ready to go."*

Judy Peterson, mother



Above, Jeni and her mother, Judy. Below, Jeni at the fitness center.



hospital complex. She organizes activities for her close-knit group of friends, including ballgames, movies and barbecues at her home. She sews. She takes care of her cat.

Jeni also provides leadership for a group known as the Ladies Job Club. Organized by Employment Solutions, the group brings together

Springfield-area women with disabilities to have fun and to problem-solve work issues. The women have a variety of jobs, including food service, industrial laundry and office filing.

"Regardless of the job, there are always similar issues that come up, things that we might take for granted, but if you have never worked before, you have not experienced," Lori says. The group has discussed issues such as time management, holiday stress and dealing with difficult customers or co-workers.

It was Jeni's idea for the ladies to become involved in community volunteering, specifically with the local organization, Newborns in Need. Jeni supplied sewing tools, fabric and patterns, and the group made bibs, blankets and layettes for babies born into hardship circumstances.

"She helped some of the ladies who had never held a pair of scissors," Lori notes.

Whether volunteering or working, Jeni is never far from her first love – babies. Recently, when her cousin gave birth at Cox Medical Center, Jeni was able to visit the nursery four times – just an easy elevator ride from her work station.



## Support Services Make Work Workable

BOONVILLE – The daily taxi fare of \$10 to go to work and back takes a big bite out of a paycheck for someone like Gary Appleberry working for minimum wage.

So, when a new city bus service cut his transportation costs by more than half, Gary had more money in his pocket for other basic needs, as well as the occasional night out with friends singing Karaoke.

Now, he calls the dispatcher for the Katy Flyer to book a ride to work.

“The cab is high. The Katy Flyer is reasonable,” says Gary, who doesn’t drive. “I know a lot of people take the Katy Flyer. They get you to work on time.”

The service began operating in October 2008 after Unlimited Opportunities, Inc. (UOI), working with the City of Boonville, secured a \$75,000 grant from the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities. The city was one of three in Missouri to receive the grant to develop public transportation that is accessible for anyone, including persons with disabilities.

Boonville contracted with OATS for the 15-passenger van equipped with a lift, and it now operates three days a week. The cost for a rider to go anywhere in the city limits is \$2. In its first eight

months, the van provided 889 rides, of which 274 were for people going to work.

“Public transportation has been sorely needed in Boonville for a long time,” says Vicki McCarrell, UOI executive director and a member of the local transportation steering committee.

The committee’s chief mission in developing public transportation in Boonville was to increase access to employment for persons with disabilities.

Despite his learning disability, Gary has always worked. When the little town where he once lived didn’t have a job for him, he left to go find one. He started at a sheltered workshop, but later worked in food service, which gave him an advantage when a job became available at the Isle of Capri casino boat in November 2008.

He started there as a dishwasher, and after only three months he was promoted to food runner. It’s his job to make sure the hot food, salad, bakery and dessert bars are continuously stocked. He also carves meat and helps clean the food bars at the end of the night.

His supervisor, Patrick



**BOONVILLE'S**  
**KATY FLYER**  
The Original Little Bus Line

*“We have had people not take jobs because of transportation issues. It’s tough in a rural community, but we’re getting there.”*

Carol Ries, UOI community employment

O'Blennis, says Gary is dependable and eager to work, and his outgoing, cheerful personality is an asset.



Above, Shirley Dilse, a job coach with UOI, discusses the buffet line with Gary. Below, Gary carves meat for a customer.



smile.' She said, 'I just won \$500,' and I said, 'Well, you have something to smile about.'"

A job coach initially helped Gary adapt to his job responsibilities. When Gary had mastered the basic skills, the coach came only on certain occasions. For example, special promotions at the casino – such as surf and turf night – draw larger crowds. The coach came to ensure Gary could keep pace with the greater demand.

"A lot of (job) performance is interaction with guests to give them a good experience here so they will come back and visit us," Patrick explains. "We're very picky about who we hire. We have an extensive interview process."

A disability is not a disqualifier at the Isle of Capri. "We work with a person's disability," Patrick says. You have to see from their point of view where they would fit in. Gary works very well right here."

Gary especially likes the friendly contact with customers. "They come first," he says.

"One woman last night was smiling, and I said, 'You have a nice

Gary also has learned from his own experiences working at various jobs – even the negative experiences. He shares one lesson: "If you've got a problem, go to the supervisor. When people talk about you behind your back, you have to learn to walk away from it and not react to it, not let it ruin your day."

Just as Gary has grown on the job, he also has grown in his independence. He previously lived in a supervised group home, but now lives in his own apartment, part of UOI's Individual Supported



Living. The program provides training in certain life skills, such as cooking and budgeting. Gary cooks his own meals, noting that meatloaf is his specialty.

He and his girlfriend, Tracy, are able to enjoy the community more now that public transportation has expanded their options.

"If me and Tracy want to go to the park, we call ahead and tell them we need a ride at this time," Gary says.

He hopes the service eventually will expand beyond three days a week.

"We tried for years to get some type of public transportation for Boonville," says Carol Ries, UOI's manager of community employment. "We have had people not take jobs because of transportation issues. It's tough in a rural community, but we're getting there."

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## Lucy Spare

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### Volunteer Steps Up to Employment

KANSAS CITY – There are points in every child's life when a parent recognizes that a milestone has occurred and the child is ready for the next step.

With Lucy Spare, that point came suddenly.

She was at her volunteer post in the lobby at Children's Mercy Hospital. Several months earlier, during her senior year in high school, she had begun volunteering there as a "pathfinder." With assistance from her job coach, also a volunteer, Lucy delivered flowers and mail to patient rooms within the large hospital.

"One day, Lucy just took off on her own when she had a delivery to do. She didn't need her job coach," says her mother, Diana Spare. "That's when we realized, okay, she's ready to wing it on her own."

And wing it she did.

After serving three years as a volunteer, Lucy was hired by Children's Mercy for a paid position within the hospital's human resources department. Three days a week, she scans documents into electronic personnel files.

"It's a wonderful service for us to make sure our records are up to date," says Pamela Williams, director of organizational development. "It requires great attention to detail, accuracy and high-level computer skills. It didn't take long at all for Lucy to learn the job and become quite proficient at it."

That's a milestone some never expected Lucy to achieve. She has Down's syndrome, which makes some concepts difficult for her to grasp.

But after hands-on training and job coaching, Lucy learned to recognize types of documents and their proper scan destination.

Now, she does the job in an office cubicle while enjoying her favorite music through headphones.

"It helps me scan fast. I get excited," Lucy says, as she prepares to listen to the Jonas Brothers.

Unofficially, Lucy is also the office recycling advocate, making sure cans and cardboard are discarded properly.

"One of Lucy's passions is recycling," Pamela says. "She reminds us if something is not in the right place."

Lucy is one of eight employees working for Children's Mercy Hospital as part of Project RISE (Reaching for Independent Successful Employment). The hospital initiated the project to create employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities who are former or current patients of the hospital. RISE employees receive additional support to learn job tasks.

They work part-time or full-time in various areas of the hospital, including hospitality, infection control and clerical support, explains Kathy Smith, RISE program manager.





Lucy's father, Ken Spare, applauds the hospital for initiating RISE. "Their embracing of the program is, in itself, a marvelous thing."

He points out that hiring individuals with disabilities is a win for everyone. For Lucy, he says, "it's essential to her happiness. It gives her some direction, something to do every day."

Her employment also provides an enlightening experience for co-workers, Ken says. And, even more importantly, it has a positive impact on the hospital's patients and families. "In an environment like Children's Mercy Hospital, it is the hope and encouragement it gives the general people who come into the hospital for services."

Ken volunteered at the hospital's information desk during Lucy's early volunteer period. "Many times, people in the hall and in the cafeteria stopped to say how seeing Lucy work and volunteer there was an inspiration to them. Often times, it was parents who were there with their own special-needs babies."

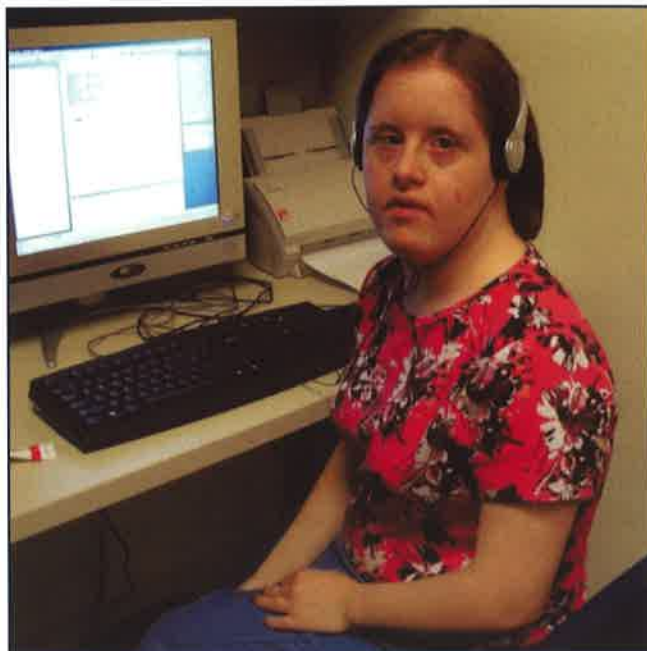
He adds that it shows how far we have advanced in integrating people with disabilities into the community.

"This is a profound change," Ken says. "When we were new parents with a special-needs child only 20 years ago, I don't remember ever seeing any (people with disabilities) in the work environment. Such a glimmer of hope would have been priceless."

In addition to working three days a week in the human resources office, Lucy still volunteers one morning a week as a "pathfinder," making deliveries and escorting guests throughout the hospital.

"People get lost easily," she points out. "The signs tell me where to go."

She also volunteers another



morning a week at the library, assisting the children's librarian with story hour.

Lucy says her favorite part of working and volunteering is socializing with co-workers. She and other RISE employees often have lunch together.

Outside of work, Lucy enjoys swimming, exchanging e-mail, talking on the phone, watching science and nature shows on television and playing with her cat, Blackout.

She has taken classes at the University of Missouri-Kansas City – yoga being her favorite. "It helps you to relax, to relieve stress," she says.

Ken says Lucy helps demonstrate that people with disabilities can be a valuable part of the community. "Virtually everybody can be a contributor, if they get assistance that can level the playing field."

*"Virtually everybody can be a contributor, if they get assistance that can level the playing field."*

Ken Spare, father



**Lucy and her supervisor,  
Pamela Williams.**

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## Philip Brooks

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### Unique Skill is an Athletic Fit

COLUMBIA – What does it take to audit line after line of numbers, through page after page, stack upon stack?

It takes a knack for data and a devotion to MU Tiger athletics.

Philip Brooks has both, which makes a winning combination for a job with the University of Missouri Athletic Department. Philip works in the compliance section with a staff that makes sure coaches follow strict NCAA rules at all times.

It can be a daunting task. Mitzi Clayton, assistant athletics director for compliance, notes that in one recent month alone, coaches sent 40,000 text messages. “It’s our job to make sure those text messages aren’t sent to recruits,” she says.

She knows she can count on Philip. “He does a phenomenal job. He’s just so keen on lists.”

Philip went to work for the MU Athletic Department in the summer of 2008, with the help



*We know his strengths lie in logical tasks. Philip is our go-to guy whenever it relates to data entry.”*

Mitzi Clayton, supervisor

One of his tasks is to scrutinize monthly telephone records to ensure that the only students receiving text messages from coaches are those who have already signed to attend the University of Missouri. Text messages to prospective students are forbidden.

Philip understands the importance of the task he performs in an office cubicle at the Mizzou Arena: “We try to keep everybody out of trouble.”

of the MU Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, which provides diagnostic, assessment and treatment services for children, youth and young adults.

Dr. Cristi Ford at that time was coordinator of Integrated Support Services for Young Adults at the Thompson Center, working with clients and university departments to find good employment



matches. After discerning Philip's interests and skills, she contacted the Athletic Department.

"I reached out to them and said, 'Hey, I have this really phenomenal client. Let me tell you about autism and more about him.' They were very open to it."

Six months of successful volunteer work evolved into a paid, part-time position.

Philip explains that his challenge lies in understanding certain nuances of communication, especially the use of idioms. "You might say something, and I can give you a confused look," he says. But, if he asks for further explanation, he can comprehend quickly.

Mitzi says the key is giving Philip very clear directions on the job. "We take the time and go through an example or two. We know his strengths lie in logical tasks. Philip is our go-to guy whenever it relates to data entry."

In addition to auditing text messages, Philip works with data involving student academic records, complimentary admissions to football games and use of the athletic department's dining hall.

A self-described "computer nut," Philip says a computer class in sixth grade sparked his interest. He had two years of vocational training in high school and has earned credit toward an associate's degree in applied science at a community college.

He explains that he likes working on computers because, "You can mess up and then fix it."

Perhaps that's also why Philip loves the game of bowling. If he fails to bowl a strike the first time, there's always the opportunity for a spare. He bowls in a youth league and competes in several tournaments a year.

"I bowl every Saturday except Thanksgiving and Christmas," he notes.

Growing up in Columbia, Philip has always followed MU sports. "I'm the biggest Mizzou fan you've ever seen," he says, listing the various games and events he attended in the past year. The occasional contact with Mizzou basketball and football players is a perk of the job.

Black-and-gold team colors dominate his wardrobe, as well as his bedroom in the home he shares with his parents and sister.



Philip works at the office 16 hours a week, which leaves time for his other job tending lawns and gardens. That satisfies his love of the outdoors, as well as the old John Deere riding lawnmower his grandfather gave him before he died last year.

Philip appreciates the fact that his bosses are flexible. They allowed him to take time off to help his grandmother following a recent surgery. But mostly, he likes the office camaraderie, such as a little "trash talk" with a co-worker prior to a two-on-two basketball game after work.

"I enjoy working with these guys," he says. "They're a lot of fun."

"We just love having Philip here," Mitzi says. "I can't express enough what a pleasant surprise it was when we embarked on a relationship with the Thompson Center. They brought some of their folks to our work arena, and it worked out so well. Philip is a special guy."





## The Council's Mission:

***"To assist the community in their efforts to include all people with developmental disabilities in every aspect of life."***

The council believes that mission will be achieved when people with developmental disabilities:

- make informed choices about where they live, work, play, and worship;
- receive individual and family supports which are flexible, based on need, and provided in a culturally- sensitive manner;
- have the opportunity to engage in productive employment and meaningful retirement;
- experience continued growth toward their full potential;
- live in homes with the availability of individualized supports;
- are treated with dignity and respect;
- attend school with their peers in regular class rooms in neighborhood schools; and
- are members of powerful advocacy networks made up of individuals, parents and family members.

*The council also believes that individuals, parents, and family members are the most powerful forces in forging a responsive and flexible support network for people with developmental disabilities.*



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***"Let People with Disabilities Live Real Lives"***