

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



The Office Of Handicapped Concerns
(The Best Kept Secret In Oklahoma)

Volume 2, Issue 3

July, 2001

THE CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

This afternoon I am visiting with James Sirmans here at the Office of Handicapped Concerns. James is the director of the Client Assistance Program in this office. The Client Assistance Program is federally funded and is something different than what the rest of us do in this office.

“James, what exactly is **CAP**?”

“**CAP** is an advocacy program. It is a service to persons with disabilities who have a case with Vocational Rehabilitation. When these persons have a problem with VR services which they are unable to resolve, they call me for help.”

“You said the Client Assistance Program is federally funded?”

“**CAP** is authorized by Congress to oversee the delivery of Voc. Rehab. services and because of this we receive federal funds.”

“Do all persons with disabilities receive VR services?”

“No. For the most part only persons with disabilities who want to return to work apply for VR services.”

“So how can you help a person who is not satisfied with the services they receive from VR?”

“I can do several things. I can talk with your counselor on your behalf. I can negotiate changes in your



*JAMES SIRMANS
DIRECTOR OF CAP*

written Plan with your counselor. I can request an administrative review if a counselor is not willing to provide certain services and actually present your case at an administrative hearing. Finally, if your case has merit, **CAP** can sue Vocational Rehabilitation. We provide a lawyer for you in this case.

These are levels of intervention taken after you have unsuccessfully tried to get your problem solved.”

“So give me an idea of some typical concerns that you might help me with.”

“Say you are unable to get a meeting to apply for services. You call me to intervene on your behalf. Another frequent problem is that you are not sure why your counselor is asking you for certain information. You call me and I can either tell you why according to their policy or I advocate for you that this information is not really necessary.”

“You mentioned VR policy. What if what I want is not within their policy. Will you still get it for me?”

“VR policy is always the final authority. **CAP** cannot insist a rehabilitation counselor operate outside policy.”

“What if I’m just not happy with VR services?”

“By all means call me. Many times I can give you information which, for whatever reason, your counselor may not have given you. Many

Continued on Page 2 ▶

people are not aware that Voc. Rehab. can pay mileage to and from a school which Voc. Rehab. is paying for in your case. Mileage is a negotiable item and the counselor is authorized to pay for it. Sometimes people do not know that, and they do not receive it because they didn't ask."

"Yes, but I don't know rehab. policy, and I don't know what to ask for."

"You don't have to know rehab. policy. You just have to advocate for what you need. The counselor will tell you if they can provide a service to meet that need. If you doubt the explanation given you, ask the counselor to provide that policy in writing so that you can better understand."

"You're saying I need to do some thinking for myself?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. Each person receiving VR services participates in developing an Individual Plan for Employment. In developing that plan, you consider what your employment goal is and what you will need to reach that goal. Be specific in what your goal is and *ask for what you need* to achieve it."

"What is the standard procedure to report a complaint to the Client Assistance Program?"

"Call, email, or write me. There is no specific form. Just let me know what your problem is, and I'll see if I can help."

"What turnaround time can I look to resolve a dispute with Vocational Rehabilitation after contacting CAP?"

"Simple complaints may be resolved in days. Complex complaints which go through several steps may take several months."

"If I make a complaint against VR, will my services be cut off?"

"Your services will continue as prescribed while your issue is being resolved."

"If I have an active case and move out of state, does my case follow me?"

"No. You must re-apply in the state where you are moving. You can authorize a counselor in another state to get information about your Oklahoma case however."

"If I have concerns about VR services in another state, should there also be a CAP in that state?"

"There is a Client Assistance Program in every state including Puerto Rico, Guam, Washington D.C., and a CAP specializing in Native American issues."

"Do you have any tips for those of us advocating for ourselves in receiving rehab. services?"

"Keep your counselor informed about your changing needs. Your employment

plan can be changed to meet your changing needs. Be polite with your counselor, and keep in mind that the average counselor has a caseload of two hundred. Make your first request verbally and follow up in writing if you are not satisfied with the results. Keep all correspondence from VR and copies of your own correspondence to your counselor. Document your conversations with your counselor and with any other service provider. If you do have a concern with services, you will be able to verify your efforts in writing."

"James, I appreciate your tips. Will you be available to give us more information about Vocational Rehabilitation in future issues of *Will's Corner, Oklahoma*?"

"Sure."

James Sirmans is the director of the Client Assistance Program at the Office of Handicapped Concerns in Oklahoma City. He may be reached by telephone 1-800-522-8224 asking to speak to him. He may be reached by email at CAP@ohc.state.ok.us and by mail at the Office of Handicapped Concerns 2712 Villa Prom, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73107-2423.

Be specific in what your goal is and ask for what you need to achieve it.

You know you're living in the 21st century when you just tried to enter your password on the microwave.

SELF HELP FOR HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

I just don't know. I put it away somewhere. I think it's in the bottom drawer of that old chest in the closet. It's been years. I thought I would use them, but they made a ringing in my ears. The grand kids played so hard, and I didn't realize how much I liked the peace and quiet. Everybody encouraged me, but somehow it didn't work out.

Hey hearing aid owners out there. Sound familiar? Do you know someone who has invested a bundle in hearing aids only to file them away in some forgotten corner of the house? You never really said you weren't going to use them. It's hard to say what happened. They didn't fit like you thought they would. You felt self-conscious. You had grown used to the quiet. But what about that money you invested?

Nancy Landrum, the state coordinator for SHHH (Self Help for the Hard of Hearing) opens up my mind, "Hearing loss is generally a gradual thing. The person makes concessions to the loss and comes to accept it, especially if the loss comes later in life. For the younger person, hearing aids are associated with growing older. The younger person may be ashamed to wear hearing aids in spite of the help they provide."

"Nancy, would you tell me a little about your own hearing loss?"

"I was diagnosed with a severe hearing loss at age thirty three. I have since come to see the beginnings of my hearing loss much earlier and to realize that I was losing hearing long

before I had the courage to admit the problem. Hearing loss runs in my family, but I was not prepared to accept it as a young, single mother. I was afraid that if people actually knew I had a disability that my job



*NANCY LANDRUM,
THE STATE COORDINATOR OF SHHH*

would be threatened, and yet I could not afford to tune the world out because I had responsibilities at my job and with my family."

"Sounds like you were in a dilemma."

"I was in denial, and denial is the worst enemy of the person who is losing hearing. When I finally did get aids, I became a closet hearing aid wearer. I wore my hair long over my ears and never discussed my hearing loss with others. I really feared that if people knew that I had a severe hearing loss they would not accept

me. I guarded my secret with a passion."

"So what changed?"

"I accepted my hearing loss and demonstrated to others that I had accepted it."

"So what happened then?"

"I became confident in myself. I decided to learn about my problem and ways to deal with it. I became involved in this organization—SHHH—and talked with other people who had the same disability. I learned about some of the amazing technology out there to improve the lives of people with hearing loss, and I learned some of the little things I could do to maximize the hearing I did have."

"But you're just one person, Nancy. Do you think you can make a difference in the bigger picture?"

"I'm glad you brought that up. This legislative session, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People became involved in our first legislative effort."

"So how did it work out?"

"We had some things which we felt very strongly about and found sponsors in Senator Glenn Coffee and Representative Ray Vaughn. They had our concerns written into Senate Bill 662 which among other things dealt with consumer protection for persons with hearing impairments purchasing hearing aids."

Continued on Page 4 ▶

“What kind of consumer protection?”

“We feel that persons purchasing hearing aids are entitled to an at least 30 day money-back guarantee if they are not satisfied with their product. At any time during that 30 days, a consumer could return their hearing aid and ask for their money back. Some providers of hearing aids were already providing this, but many were not. SB0662 also stipulates that the provider must offer a written contract in bold print which the consumer can understand. There are a lot of \$5000 hearing aids out there buried in drawers because a consumer was unsatisfied for whatever reason and could not return the product.”

“We feel that persons purchasing hearing aids are entitled to an at least 30 day money-back guarantee if they are not satisfied with their product.”

“So did this bill get passed and signed by the Governor?”

“It did. It is now a part of Oklahoma State Statutes.”

“Nancy, if I were a consumer and were considering the purchase of a hearing aid, what would you suggest I do?”

“Talk to other people who are using hearing aids. Ask about their experience and satisfaction with their aid. Seek out organizations, which work with hearing-impaired persons and ask for information. When you do finally select a hearing aid and provider, do not hesitate to go back if the fitting is not correct or something is defective. It is common for

consumers to go back several times to their provider before they are satisfied with all the adjustments. Of course, people have recourse now in that they may return their aids within 30 days if they still do not have satisfaction. They may seek their money back”

“If I have a complaint about the dealer who sold me a hearing aid, where can I go?”

“In the state of Oklahoma, hearing aid dealers are licensed through the State Health Department in Oklahoma City. Within the Health

Department, consumers want to talk with Mr. Rocky McElvaney. He may be reached at (405) 271-5217 or rockym@health.state.ok.us by email.”

“Thank you for the good information.”

Nancy Landrum is Oklahoma State Coordinator for Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH). She is willing to travel statewide to demonstrate adaptive equipment for persons who are hearing impaired and to talk about issues affecting this community. She respectfully requests that her hosts reimburse her travel expenses. Nancy is also willing to talk to groups interested in forming a chapter of SHHH in their area of the state. She may be reached at (405) 721-1146 in Oklahoma City or nanlan@flashnet.com by email.

A group of professional people posed this question to a group of four to eight year olds, “What does love mean?” They got some profound answers. See what you think.

“When you tell someone something bad about yourself and you’re scared they won’t love you anymore. But then you get surprised because they still love you, and they love you even more.”

“Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”

Respite Care:

An Innovative Approach

There is hope out there for Oklahomans who are serving as a primary-care provider for family members who are elderly and disabled. We know you are frazzled. We know you are exhausted. We know you may have developed health problems yourself as a result of caring for a family member with multiple physical and mental challenges. But frankly, no options existed. No options unless you are willing to put that family member into a nursing home.

But what if some kind of option really existed? What if you could hire whomever you wanted to care for that family member so that you could go to the grocery store or go to a movie or go to Hawaii? What if you could get this service when you needed it, on your own terms, and with a bare minimum of paperwork at no cost to you? Sound too good to be true? Maybe not. Let's talk.

This afternoon I'm visiting with Rose Ann Percival who works for the Department of Human Services and who has worked hard within her agency and among other state agencies to pool their resources to provide respite care to Oklahoma families who have become overburdened in the process of caring for a loved one. "Rose Ann, what is the *Oklahoma Respite Resource Network*?"

"The respite network is help for families who choose to keep their elderly or disabled family member at home. It is having someone there whom you trust to care for a family member while you take care of other responsibilities. Respite care is simply a temporary break for caregivers. That's all it is. But oh, what a difference it can make."

"Give me an example."

"We recently heard from a mother who had several young children, and one of those children had multiple disabilities. When this woman was able to temporarily access someone to care for her child with a disability, she was freed to

go to her other son's soccer game for the first time ever. She could still be confident that her child with disabilities was receiving the care he needed. Respite care allows the caregiver to take care of themselves while having confidence that their family member is receiving the proper care."

"Sounds good Rose Ann, but our family may not qualify. We don't meet the Medicaid requirements."

"So?"

"So we don't get the service."

There is hope out there for Oklahomans who are serving as a primary-care provider for family members who are elderly and disabled

"If you are the primary caregiver for another family member and your family income is less than \$60,000 per year, you probably qualify."

"So how does the program work?"

"You complete a simple application. We tell you within 30 days yes or no. If you qualify, we send you a voucher for three months worth \$400 if your income is less than \$45,000 or \$300 if your income is up to \$60,000. With your voucher you hire your own provider, you negotiate their wages, and you train that provider exactly how to care for your family member. You have control over the services delivered. Your family member's needs are met while you're caring for yourself. Everybody's happy."

"Rose Ann, I've never been treated that way before by any program. So, talk straight to me. How do you do it?"

"To put it simply, we've built a program which is family friendly. We set out to meet the needs of Oklahomans and to do it in a way they can understand with a

minimum of paperwork and a maximum of services—services where they're needed and when they're needed."

"You said I could hire my own respite provider. Can I hire another family member or a neighbor?"

"You can hire anyone who does not actually live with the person with a disability."

"What if my family member needs some specialized services. Can I go through a home healthcare agency if I choose?"

"We will give you a list of agencies and individuals willing to do respite care if you want it. If you have somebody else in mind, that's OK too."

"You mentioned vouchers. How do I get my provider paid?"

"On your voucher you will have your name, the name of the family member receiving service, and the service provider. You send in that voucher to the address listed, and your provider should receive a check for their services in seven to ten days. It's that simple."

"Where do I sign up?"

"Oasis in Oklahoma City is handling this respite service. Oasis' toll-free number is **800-426-2747**. In the Oklahoma City area call **(405) 271-6302**. Ask for Janice Winters or Madalyn McCollum."

"Thanks for the info Rose Ann."

Folks, I've been in the social service arena for many years, and this sounds like one of the best things coming down the pike in my time. If you use the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network, let me know what you think. Is the service really family friendly? Does your family member receive the care they need during your absence? Call the Office of Handicapped Concerns at 800-522-8224 and ask for Will. I'd love to hear about your experience.

Will's Corner

Come Go With Me

Now listen, you have been cooped up in that house way too long. You never go anywhere except to the doctor or to the grocery store. There's a whole world out there. And, besides, this is the perfect time. The weather will be pleasant although they can have rain over there with little notice. It never lasts long, but it's still good to bring an umbrella. What do you say? Our plane leaves at 11:11 a.m. Pack simple.

Ya know, I've always traveled alone because I didn't have anyone else to go with me. And you haven't traveled at all because of your disability. Let's help each other. I'll help you and you can be company to me. This trip is going to open up a new world for both of us. I'm ready if you're ready.

(Will Rogers World Airport, Oklahoma City: 11:11 a.m. Saturday)



I've been waiting for this so long. Mr. Stokes at the Office of Handicapped Concerns has

given me two weeks of annual leave. We won't be able to see everything, but there's always another trip. I know you're curious about what things will be like over there with your disability. Do they have the same issues that we do here? How does life compare in another part of the world? Well, we're going to find out real soon. Look at those clouds down there. We'll be in Dallas before you know it. I can't believe they still use prop planes with these connecting flights. At least they sent an attendant to lift you up the stairs in boarding the plane. We've got some connections to make in Dallas. I hope your wheelchair got checked OK!

This Dallas Airport is huge. Hey, there's a wheelchair we can use. Get in. Look at those stairs we've got to go up. Thank goodness there's an elevator. The plane leaves in less than an hour. Here's our departure gate. What do you

Will's Corner

mean you can't find your ticket. I saw you put it in your carry-on bag. We're just excited. This is really happening.

I just went back to talk to the flight attendant. She says we're over Buffalo, New York now and will be landing in Boston in an hour. By the way, one of the bathrooms on board is marked with a wheelchair Charlie. The attendant says if you need to use it, someone will get a narrow wheelchair for you and escort you. You're on your own after that until she takes you back to your seat. OK, wait till Boston. We've got a couple hours layover anyway. Look, over there, you can see the Atlantic. We're almost landing in it! The skyline is beautiful, and the weather is gorgeous. Lots of big, two-story homes everywhere on tree-lined streets. Just wait till everybody else gets off and an attendant will help us off the plane.

This place is crowded. Let me ask someone where the Aer Lingus terminal is. OK, this is our action plan. Grab a bite to eat from the food court and head for our departure gate. The airport bathrooms are accessible. What do you think? Calm down. This is really happening. Boston, Massachusetts and heading east over the North Atlantic for an evening flight. I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight. Are you comfortable? Put on your seatbelt. Five hours flying time.

(Dublin, Ireland—dawn Sunday morning)

Did you get any sleep? I know I didn't. There's our bags on the conveyor belt. They all made it including your chair. Let me get a cart. Get out your passport. Don't ask me. I didn't pack your stuff. We're not going anywhere till you find it. Sir, we'll be in Ireland about a week and then on to the U.K. We fly back to the states from here in two weeks. That was easy enough. They didn't even open our bags!

It's so cool outside. Still dark with a low glow on the eastern horizon. The buses to the city center don't run till 7 a.m. I know. I want to call it downtown too, but when in Ireland do as the Irish do. Sorry Charlie, these buses are not lift equipped. Let's take a taxi, and I'll help you in. Do you have any idea how much we're paying for this? I just gave him ten Irish Punts, and that could be \$6 or \$60 for all I know. So this is it. This is that expensive hotel with accommodations for people in wheelchairs. It's expensive, but unfortunately our rooms are not ready yet. Give 'em the bags. Let's explore Dublin.

Continued on Page 7 ➤

Page 6

The city is waking up on a beautiful Sunday morning. The city center is not like an American city with tall skyscrapers. The buildings are three or four stories, exactly like the surrounding residential neighborhoods except it is all commercial here, and there are many public buildings as well. The River Liffey bisects the city from west to east through the main commercial area with stone bridges every couple of blocks in the most congested areas. O'Connell Street is a principal central thoroughfare north and south across the river. What's strange is that many streets change names more than once in their weave through the city. This is a maze of twisting roads with everybody driving on the wrong side. (They do this in Ireland as well as Great Britain.) Crossing the street on a corner can be a real hazard in that traffic is turning into your pedestrian way from a direction you're not expecting. Driving on the left is even more problematic, but that comes a little later in the trip when we rent a car.

St. Stephen's Green and Trinity College are beautiful on the south side of the Liffey. Ponds and ducks and bright flowers everywhere amidst bright green spacious lawns, arching trees, and public monuments. Dublin is not as congested as some areas of Europe, but even suburban areas are filled with row houses built close to the street with heavy traffic. Neighborhoods have local shopping with small grocers and pubs nearby on the corner. Let's get back to the city center and check out the train for Belfast.

Dublin has several train stations. If you're going west, you'll probably depart the Heuston Station. In Texas they spell it Houston, but it is pronounced the same. We're going north and will depart the Conolly Station on the 7a.m. train filled with businessmen traveling the north/south corridor between a divided Ireland. This train is very modern with floors level with the platform and readily accessible to wheelchairs. There are even areas of the car for a wheelchair to tie down, and these areas are near handicapped-accessible bathrooms with wide doors which slide open automatically. Quite convenient.

I'm reading the *Irish Times* about a reporter who had made

inappropriate remarks about people with disabilities. The reporter was back-pedaling and apologizing for any way his remarks had been misread. Attitudinal barriers exist on this side of the Atlantic too. The countryside is delightful. The border with Northern Ireland is low mountains filled with grazing sheep with a lush green backdrop. These same low mountains fall to the southwestern outskirts of Belfast close to the Irish Sea. Belfast is a short stop waiting for the ferry for Scotland. No bombs or threats. People are going about their business, but it seems they speak a different language here! We've gone 107 miles but the English accent here is totally different. I am amazed. I can understand these Northern Irishmen, but I have to look at them

straight in the eye while speaking and be in a position where I can hear them very well. Even so, I will miss a word here and there. They at least appear to be able to understand me fine.

So are you ready to catch the ferry? Can you believe it's only 16 miles to the Scottish coast? That guy back there who held open the elevator door for us to board was really nice. This ferry is huge with outside decks for travel in good weather, fastfood restaurants, duty-free shops, everything. Can you believe that our rail passes included ferry passage too? Nice. Now I didn't tell you it wouldn't be crowded in here. So what if the food court is several steps above the inside lounge. I'll go get our food. Relax.

When we get to Scotland, there are problems with the rail line under water between the ferry and Glasgow. They put us on a bus with a warning that we may have to detour to the south and east before actually reaching the city. There is also a problem with flooding of highways. Everyone says this is quite unusual weather. You did bring your umbrella didn't you?

Join us in the next issue of *Will's Corner, Oklahoma* as we talk with Mrs. Dorothy Hamilton, a disabled woman living in Edinburgh, Scotland. She can tell you about her disability and a little about what it's like to live in her country with a disability. See you in the October issue.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

August 22-24

Third Annual American Indian Elders Conference, Clarion Meridian Hotel OKC. Health care for American Indians. Contact Lisa Jones at (580) 581-2852

August 25, 26

Bikers for Babies (to fight birth defects) sponsored by March of Dimes, entry fee \$35 for bikers or spouses, call (405) 848-4351 for more information.

October 19, 20

Family Perspective Conference for families of people with special needs. For more information call Sally Selvedge at 1-800-426-2747

Will's Corner, Oklahoma was printed by Department of Central Services, Central Printing, 2900 copies at a cost of \$1102.40. Copies are on file with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries.

*IF YOUR ADDRESS OR OTHER INFORMATION HAS CHANGED, LET US
KNOW SO WE MAY BE ABLE TO SERVE YOU BETTER.*

THANKS,

WILL

The Office of Handicapped Concerns
2712 Villa Prom
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73107-2423

Web page: www.state.ok.us/~ohc.

E-Mail: william.ginn@ohc.state.ok.us

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT # 932
OKLAHOMA CITY,
OKLAHOMA