

OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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February, 2003

(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Governor Brad Henry submitted his executive budget to a joint session of the House of Representatives and Senate on February 3, 2003. Within this budget, Governor Henry proposed a budget for the Office of Handicapped Concerns of \$361,542 for the fiscal year of 2004. As a result of the budget shortfall the state is currently experiencing, the agency has had to cut all staff and Advisory Committee travel, cease equipment purchases, make the quarterly newsletter available only on our website, cancel the printing and updating of resource material, and reduce mailing of resource materials most of which is currently available on the website. Dissemination of the results of the agency statewide disability survey has been restricted to the website. We have canceled the statewide ADA Coordinators training for this year and canceled the Early Settlement ADA training conference also.

In this budget crisis I ask you to be aware of the restraints on the service delivery system of the Office of Handicapped Concerns, and I urge you to contact your elected representatives. (You may find out your state representatives through your local County Election Board.) Thank you for your support.

Steve Stokes
Director, Office of Handicapped Concerns

HOW TO TRANSITION STUDENTS

WITH DISABILITIES TO WORK IN 1500 WORDS OR LESS

(A Success Story in
Yukon)

On June 19 of last year I attended a school transition conference at the Westin Hotel in Oklahoma City and heard Georgie Melot and Deborah Newport of the Yukon Public Schools share about what their school system was doing in the area of transitioning students from special education to the real world of work. I wrote down Deborah's name and number and made a mental note that this was something I wanted to write about. By the time I got around to calling Deborah Newport to set up an interview, I

had forgotten exactly what it was that had initially impressed me about the break-out session that she and Georgie Melot had done way back in June. So when I sat down at the table with Georgie Melot, Deborah Newport, and Vocational Rehabilitation counselor Terry Goodson, the questions began very slowly with periods of silence in between answers where I wrote out in long-hand what they were telling me. Then my interest got piqued. My questions became more rapid. I didn't even have to think. One question waved on top of the other as my interest grew to enthusiasm and my enthusiasm grew to fervor. I felt like one of the '49er

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Yes, I'm a senior citizen! The life of the party. . .
even if it lasts until 8 p.m. Anonymous

REFUGE IN THE CITY

In our hearts, we all wish for a very special place where we may heal our broken spirits and find the solace we need to pick up the pieces of our lives and fit them together snugly into the grander scheme of things. One day we wake up and think, “How does this painful piece fit into the landscape of my life?” We need time to sort things out. We seek a refuge so that we may heal our wounds before we once again resume the sometimes heavy responsibilities of life. There really is such a refuge. There is a refuge in the city, and I want to tell you all about this wonderful place.

I came upon it accidentally. I was seeking information about volunteer attendant care services for a person with a disability who felt he was coming out of the hospital unprepared. I began asking questions and the questions lead me in a direction I did not expect. I was looking for a beautiful, polished garnet but instead found a diamond. I called Sunbeam Family Services here in Oklahoma City and stumbled onto a home they had created for people over sixty who had suffered abuse or neglect. But it was also a place which could be home to people under sixty with disabilities—a temporary home while they could feel the pain that had happened to them and then get on with their lives. Coretha Viney is the woman who creates this refuge for her residents while they go about solving their problems.

“Coretha, what prompted Sunbeam to go into residential services for adults?”

“We actually began over 95 years ago providing residential services for children. You may have seen the larger building when you came into our parking lot which served as an orphanage for chil-

dren. Our population is aging and becoming more disabled today, and we are seeing increasing numbers of cases of adults who are victims of abuse, neglect, or caregiver exploitation. Many adults are victims of their own self neglect. They do not take their medication as prescribed. They do not eat properly. They think nobody cares. We want to show them that somebody cares. That’s why we began offering residential services for adults.”



Typical guest room.

their own homes. We typically serve as a home for two to thirty days to give the necessary time to build more long term solutions.”

“Can you serve an adult who is disabled and needs help in managing the disability?”

“We had a woman here who had severe diabetes and needed assistance in managing her symptoms. She had a home health nurse who actually came here to work with her to teach her the things she needed to do.”

“What if I don’t have my own home health nurse through some other program? Can you still help me if I have some kind of medical needs?”

“We have a nurse and a doctor available as well as

“Tell me a little about this home.”

“Adult Protective Services of the Department of Human Services receives over 1500 referrals a year right here in Oklahoma County alleging some kind of abuse or neglect of an adult. This safe house is a temporary solution of where that adult may come while their problems are addressed in

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REFUGE IN THE CITY (continued)

a dietician. All serve as consultants. Of course, we also transport people to the emergency room if need be. We are here to meet your needs while you are staying with us.”

“Coretha, you mentioned a person with needs resulting from her diabetes. What if I was diabetic and had no insulin or medication to control my diabetes. Could you help me?”

“We case manage here. We will find you the medication you need from one of the local free pharmacies or the county health department. We want to meet your needs while you are staying with us.”

“Give me some examples.”

“We have a resident psychologist on staff who can counsel with you. We will make you a dental referral if you need that. We will make arrangements for your pets to be cared for while you are with us. We will make arrangements for your bills to be paid during the time you are here. If you need clothing, we will provide you with whatever you need. My main purpose is to help people who are abused, neglected, or exploited to build their self esteem. There is nothing else like this in Oklahoma. Nationally they call this a ‘safe house’.”

“Will you show me around?”

“Sure, come with me. We’re in the office here, but notice the full windows looking out onto the living room, dining room, and kitchen. We have 24 hour staff here seven days a week who are trained in MAT (medication assistance training). You see this large living room with the big screen television. It was bought with monies donated to our program. And the couch and chair here were donated from a person who had won them in a TV game show. The same with appliances in the kitchen and furniture in the bedrooms, all were donated to make our safe house a real home for the people who temporarily come to live with us.”

“How many persons can you serve at one time?”

“We want to show them that somebody cares.”

“We have four rooms furnished for two people and two single rooms. One of our single rooms has a handicapped-accessible bathroom complete with roll-in shower, grab bars near the commode, and a sink which permits you to roll a wheelchair under it.”

“Everything looks so much like a home. Everything is so clean. Coretha, I am impressed with this place. So how do you accept referrals?”

“We have several agencies that refer people to us. You mentioned Adult Protective Services earlier. They often call me. Local hospitals also call me who are discharging patients but may not be able to send them home. We can accept people in wheelchairs, but they must be able to transfer themselves. We also accept people referred to us from local police departments or even the city homeless shelters. We are not equipped to house a family. We work with individuals or, in some cases, couples.”

“What kind of programs do you have?”

“We coordinate with an adult daycare facility locally which provides transportation to and from their daycare program during the week. On week-day evenings and weekends, our guests remain here at home. They do all the things you do in your home. They watch television, play board games, and do their laundry. Weather permitting, they walk in the community. This is a least restrictive environment. If needs are great enough, however,

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HOW TO TRANSITION STUDENTS (continued)

miners who had discovered gold in California—but this time the gold was right here and now in Yukon, Oklahoma.

So what is transition for special education students? Transition is advance preparation for life beyond. When we're in school we are so young and the lazy days pass slowly. We don't have a lot of responsibility, and most of our needs are met—maybe even some of our wants. It seems like this idyllic world will last forever until we find ourselves walking across the stage and accepting that high school diploma. All of a sudden we are in a different world. We may have to take some responsibility for our lives, and we find we have to please a lot of other persons besides ourselves. Self discipline is required. Or maybe we walk across that stage as a person with a disability and no one in our families or even we have ever thought we could do anything with our lives. Keep on living at home. Draw your Social Security. Let family support you for the indefinite future. There has been a tremendous gap between a more academic-oriented special education system and the real world of work and self responsibility which follows the educational years. Transition is bridging that gap. Transition is advance planning for success. Transition is learning how to think for yourself and make some real-life decisions. Let's hear how one school system in Oklahoma and one state agency have decided to tackle this challenge effectively.

Georgie Melot, (Transition Specialist for the Yukon Public Schools) "I think one thing that has really made our transition program here in Yukon work so well is the collaboration we have had with Vocational Rehabilitation, families, and the business

community working together for our students with disabilities."

"How do you mean, Georgie?"

"To begin with, my salary as a Transition Specialist is paid half by Vocational Rehabilitation and half by the Yukon Public Schools. Many of the students in our Transition Center are clients of Vocational Rehabilitation and through that we receive some funding from VR. VR is also picking up the cost of some of our instructional materials."

"You mentioned a Transition Center here in the Yukon Schools. What is that?"

(Georgie Melot)

"Our Transition Center is a program of instruction we have for various job categories. We have an Office Unit, a Retail Unit, a Restaurant Unit, and several others. In those units students learn practical skills which would help them to be successful in those types of job categories. For instance, in the restaurant unit students actually have experience clearing tables, rolling silverware, washing dishes, and filling salt and pepper containers. The emphasis in the Transition Center is real work skills that can translate into job activities which would carry on after graduation from the public schools. The Transition Center does not in itself work on academic skills which may be stressed in other special education classes."

"So is everyone in special education in the secondary schools of Yukon involved in the Transition Center?"

"No. Students are involved in the Transition Center who are needing some specific training to get specific jobs in the community. Some students may already have some skills and are ready to test the waters. We have a program called Worksite Learning. Students with disabilities in special education can actually work on a job in the community

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OHC web site:
www.ohc.state.ok.us

HOW TO TRANSITION STUDENTS (continued)

and Vocational Rehabilitation will pay their salary for up to two hours per day. We had a student who wanted to work at our local Hastings and VR began paying his salary for ten hours per week. He did so well that in six weeks' time he left the Worksite Learning program and his employer paid his full salary."

"Georgie, what is the Summer Intern Program?"

"The Summer Intern Program is another program where students who are signed up for VR can participate. The student agrees to volunteer for 115 hours of work during the summer, and after they have completed their 115 hours on the job, VR pays them \$600 for having completed the program. The student is required to write a journal about their experiences on the job at various points through their volunteering. They learn so much from this on-the-job training. One student wanted to work in heating and air conditioning. He soon learned that he had to change his lifestyle. He was used to staying up until 2 a.m. sometimes, and he was not able to continue this when he had to be on the job by 8. It was a learning experience for him."

"Deborah, these practical programs in the schools seem really tailored to transition the student from school to the world of work. How long have you had this emphasis in the Yukon Public Schools?"

Deborah Newport, (Director of Special Education)
 "This is our third year having a Transition Specialist in our employ and having a Transition Center as part of our instruction. Georgie has been a wonderful addition to our services. Previously our regular special education teachers were feeling overwhelmed with all the academic requirements and paperwork coming down from the government. Transition was another thing they had to do on a long list."

"So is Yukon committed to this idea of smooth transition from school to the community?"

Deborah Newport

"Most definitely. One part of our transitioning which has not been mentioned yet is our Mapping. We begin with some special education students as early as the 6th grade and with many more in the 8th grade and the 10th grade. Follow up continues through their senior year. Mapping is something we do in addition to the IEP. In a Mapping meeting we invite the student, teachers, family, neighbors, pastors or anyone who touches the life of the student with a disability. We sit down with everybody and ask some serious life-centered questions. Where will this student live when they graduate from high school? What will they do? We challenge the group to think with a vision. When we come up with some realistic major life goals, we look at things we need to do now to get the student where they want to be."

"Can you give me an example?"

"One of our students had severe disabilities. She expressed a firm desire to live at the Center for Family Love when she graduated. Our Team applied and she was accepted to live at the Center of Family Love during the second semester of her senior year. She actually moved to Okarche, Oklahoma (about 20 miles away) and continued attending high school in Yukon. She was able to keep her familiar school situation while she was actually making new friends where she would be living as an adult. For her, it was a little like going off to college. Her family did a lot of growing too. When she moved, there were seventeen members of her family there at her intake."

"Terry, what does Vocational Rehabilitation think about this program of transition?"

Terry Goodson, (Vocational Rehabilitation counselor)

"We have always served individuals with disabilities who are wanting to work. One thing that is different than before is that I as a VR counselor only

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HOW TO TRANSITION STUDENTS (continued)

have to deal with one person in the school system (the Transition Specialist) rather than many different special education teachers scattered in the three public school systems with which I work. Georgie provides actual job training and job development for us which enables us to serve the school-age population better. Everyone wins.”

(Will)

I have always believed that when various public and private groups collaborate together that individuals with disability benefit tremendously. In my opinion, this is another example. Education and Vocational Rehabilitation are working together in Yukon. Local businesses and the Chamber of

Commerce have also bought into this idea of transition into the community for special education students. Students and families which have many times had low expectations for themselves and their loved ones are becoming open to new ideas. Look at your school system. How is public education preparing your son or daughter to be successful when they graduate? Don't let these ideas die. You may want to visit with Deborah Newport at 405-350-1341. You may want to contact Len Tontz (Educational Consultant at Vocational Rehabilitation) who has helped develop some of these collaborative efforts at 405-522-6528. How may we work together for a better future for students with disabilities?

Keeping Oklahomans Warm

Many of you may have received an enclosure in your gas utility bill for February letting you know about the Share the Warmth program of Oklahoma Natural Gas. This month marks twenty years of the program where Oklahomans voluntarily contribute to help their fellow citizens through increasing their utility bill payments. Oklahoma Natural Gas Company sends these “extra” contributions to your local Salvation Army who in turn help those Oklahomans who need the assistance in paying their own utility bill. In the last twenty years you have contributed nearly \$5 million to assist over 40,000 fellow citizens. Many of those who received assistance were Oklahomans who were elderly and disabled. You may consider sharing your warmth with those who need it the next time your utility bill rolls around. Your contributions would be greatly appreciated—especially in these cold, winter months.

REFUGE IN THE CITY (continued)

persons might be better served in a nursing home. We want to meet the needs of persons we can serve and are qualified and certified to serve.”

“Who are you qualified and certified to serve?”

“We do not lift individuals, although we do serve persons in chairs who can transfer themselves. We do not give baths. We can assist you in the care of your room, and we do prepare a common meal for all our guests. We maintain a license from the State Health Department to provide temporary residential care. The first thing we'll ask you when you come in is if you are hungry. We'll get you a hot bowl of soup, a sandwich, and a hot shower. Only then will we start asking you questions which

will help us to meet your more long term needs.”

Sunbeam Family Services provides all of this with contributions from individuals and agencies such as the Department of Human Services and the City of Oklahoma City. Guests are only asked to learn how to take care of themselves so they may return to their homes. This safe house runs on love—love for the vulnerable adults in our community who need a helping hand. It is a blessing to know that this place exists. It is a real refuge—a refuge in the midst of a city which can be very uncaring and even hostile. For more information, contact Coretha Viney at 405-528-7724, ext. 110. I think she would love to talk with you.

VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Who is Mary Ann Williams? Why am I reading this? OK, give me a chance here. Let me tell you who she is and you can be the judge if this is worth your time reading about her. At various times we've talked to you about individuals with disabilities. Do you remember way back in October of 2000 when we told you about Jim Stovall who went on from deteriorating macular degeneration to blindness to founding Narrative Television Network? And he lives right here in Oklahoma. Well, Mary Ann Williams lives in our own Tulsa, Oklahoma and on November 21, 2002 was inducted into the Volunteer Hall of Fame of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society at their annual convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

“So Mary Ann, tell us a little about your disability.”

“Way back in 1974 I was having double vision. It was actually my ophthalmologist who made my diagnosis of multiple sclerosis after ruling out other possibilities. (It is strange, but many times a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis comes from your eye doctor.) There was no definitive test for MS back in 1974, and doctors had to check out individual possibilities off a list of causes. I was referred to a neurologist for a second opinion.”

“Were you employed at the time?”

“I worked in the Tulsa Public Library and continued working there until the early '90's.”

“Can you tell me a little about your type of MS? I know there are different manifestations of the disease.”

“I have what is called secondary progressive, lapsing and remitting type of MS. That means I can have periods of symptoms followed by periods when I am symptom free. I receive my medication directly from the drug companies which manufacture it because of the expense involved.”

“Are your medications expensive?”

“Last year alone I had medical costs of \$14,000 most of which was involved in medication costs. The three new drugs for MS called the ABC drugs typically cost between \$1000 and \$1200 per month. There is a new MS drug on the market called Rebif which is also very expensive.”

“How are you affected today?”

“There are times when my hands do not work at all. I do not walk and must use a scooter to get around both inside and outside my home. I have no speech problems, and this is the usual situation with the overwhelming majority of people who have my type of MS. The new drugs cut down on the frequency and duration of relapses that I have with symptoms. It is very important for people who have a new diagnosis of multiple sclerosis to begin taking the new medications immediately. They will experience less nerve damage and consequently less disability if they do this. There is a complete MS clinic under the tutelage of Dr. Pardo at Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City. It is the only one of its kind in Oklahoma.”

“Mary Ann, I want to get back to you and the volunteer work which you do here at the Oklahoma Multiple Sclerosis Society in Tulsa.”

“After I retired from the Tulsa Public Library, I had some time and I chose to use it to help other people with MS like myself. I began by setting up the lending library of the Oklahoma MS Society. I also review books and videos before the Society purchases them with recommendations where best to invest their money in materials. I have served as programs committee person and on the Board of Directors. I do various telephoning projects which need to be done, and I volunteer as a peer counselor to talk to callers from all over Oklahoma about multiple sclerosis and how it may affect their lives. I have also helped organize support groups for people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and their caregivers. That's about it.”

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THE OKLAHOMA BUDGET SHORTFALL

(And the Impact On Social Services)

We recently sent you a letter to let you know why you had not been receiving a hard copy of Will's Corner, Oklahoma. We shared with you that due to recent budget cuts at the Office of Handicapped Concerns, we were not able to afford the printing and postage necessary. Of course, as funds become available, we will resume sending you a hard copy of our newsletter every three months—in January, April, July, and October. In the meantime, you may access our newsletter from our website on the internet at www.ohc.state.ok.us. What we shared with you about budget cuts in our agency has also been happening in many of the state agencies you depend upon for services. Let me give you a few examples.

I recently received an email from the public relations officer of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. In his email, Nico Gomez shared with me some of the reductions in Medicaid services which have been authorized by the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. (Medicaid is the broad umbrella funding which covers many social service programs in Oklahoma.) Without going into all the detail, these reductions affect about 130,000 Oklahomans who are receiving some type of Medicaid services—services to the medically needy, to children, and to the aged, blind, and disabled population of Oklahoma. That could well be you or someone whom you know and love. A woman recently called my office and was telling me the great difficulty her husband was having in adjusting to living in a nursing home. He rapidly became disabled at 53 due to a neurological disease. He had been an active man and employed in a responsible position. The woman told me how her husband was receiving counseling at the nursing home to help him adjust to the day-by-day changes going on in his body.

Then—suddenly—she said, the nursing home stopped providing the services. I explained to her that this happened because of changes in the policy of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority reflecting budget reductions. Budget reductions play out into individual lives of people just like you and me in ways very similar to this.

Let's go to another important state agency which provides services to Oklahomans with disabilities—the Department of Rehabilitation Services. DRS is perhaps the prime agency in state government

designed to provide the services and supports necessary for people with disabilities to return to work if that is something they would like to do with their lives. The Department of Rehabilitation Services places all those who apply for services into one of their four categories depending on the level of disability the applicant exhibits. A person

who was blind might be served before a person with a learning disability because they are considered to have a higher degree of disability. On July 31, 2002, DRS closed priority groups 3 and 4 which represent applicants who are considered to have less debilitating conditions. (We told you about this event in our October, 2002 issue of Will's Corner, Oklahoma available on the internet.) On December 23, 2002, DRS announced the closing of priority groups 1 and 2. This in effect closes off DRS services to new applicants after that date. This does not mean that if you had DRS services before December 23 that your case will be closed. It only means that if you applied for services after that date your eligibility would be determined, and you would be placed on a waiting list. You will be served when new monies are available. The Department of Rehabilitative Services is a good exam-

Our Legislature needs to
hear from grassroots
Oklahoma

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THE OKLAHOMA BUDGET SHORTFALL (continued)

ple of how services are affected when state dollars diminish.

The Aging Services Division of the Department of Human Services is another example of how social service programs can be adversely affected by shrinking budgets. Aging Services has reduced some of its funding to the approximately 275 congregate meal sites in Oklahoma which offer a hot meal and fellowship to many of our disabled and elderly population. There has also been a reduction in personal care supports offered through the Advantage Waiver program which offers a wide array of services necessary to keep our elderly and disabled fellow Oklahomans in the community rather than having to enter a nursing home. Another program for seniors which has been affected is in the 30 something adult day care programs which exist currently in Oklahoma. Aging Services is not authorizing funding for new slots. (There are about 830 slots in adult day cares available for senior Oklahomans now.) Adult day cares often permit family members to keep a senior at home rather than seeking services in a nursing home.

Pam McKeown who is the public relations officer for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA) confirms that DMHSA is considering closing the Carl Albert Community Mental Health Center in Holdenville, Oklahoma because of budget cuts to that agency. She states that Carl Albert is the smallest of the community mental health centers in Oklahoma. She also states that the agency has experienced internal policies freezing new hiring, prohibiting reimbursement of out-of-state travel, and other internal efforts to embrace a reduction in monies from the State Legisla-

ture. The Developmental Disabilities Services Division of DHS which is the primary state agency serving individuals with mental retardation states they are encouraging their clients who live in the community to find two roommates if they are needing 24 hour-a-day staffing. DDS is also authorizing new group homes in Oklahoma after a long period of not authorizing new group homes. It is considered that group homes are more cost effective than other models of residential services.

“Most of us know how challenging it is to create change—change in how we see ourselves and what we believe is possible, change in how others see us and treat us, and change in the world and our options in it. Yet we know that self-advocacy depends on our effectiveness in creating change.”

Taken from Popular Education, Vol. 1, No.

I am telling you things here that you already know. You already know how your services have been affected. So why are we writing to you about budget shortfalls in Oklahoma and how these shortfalls are affecting social services across the state? We're telling you because information spawns understanding and understanding relieves fear. Remember, the Oklahoma economy goes in cycles, and state government expenditures reflect our over-

all economy. The budget shortfall is a temporary thing. Services for Oklahomans with disabilities will continue for now and increase in the long haul. But what can we do now?

I think there are some things we can do. Sometimes people with disabilities get used to other people making decisions for them. We think, that person told me that I cannot be served in their program. That is the end of it. It is possible that that is the end of it, but it may not be. Do some research to find out where that policy is coming from. Talk to that individual or board of individuals to explain how this particular policy is adversely affecting you. In the April, 2002 issue of Will's Corner, Oklahoma we talked with you about the Okla-

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THE OKLAHOMA BUDGET SHORTFALL (continued)

homa Health Care Authority which establishes policies that govern all Medicaid programs across Oklahoma. The Health Care Authority Board meets every second Thursday of the month at 1 p. m. in the boardroom of the Health Care Authority, 4545 N. Lincoln Blvd.

Suite 124 in Oklahoma City. The public is invited. If you want to speak before the board, you will need to call in advance and get on the agenda. The main number of the OHCA is 405-522-7300, and you would need to ask to speak to the director with

your request. And don't forget your legislators. You may call your local county election board with your address and they will tell you who your legislators are. They can also give you telephone numbers where you can reach them locally and at the State Capitol. Let your legislator know the importance of certain programs to you. Our Legislature needs to hear from grassroots Oklahoma. They are faced with some tough decisions this legislative session. Information from constituents will help them make good decisions for people with disabilities.

VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE (continued)

"That's quite a bit. Tell me about Nashville, Mary Ann. Were you excited to be inducted into the Volunteer Hall of Fame for the National Society?"

"It was the thrill of my life. In November my husband and I flew to Nashville. In the airport my husband walked up to total strangers and told them I was going to get an award. The awards were given on stage to each of us individually in the Grand Ole Opry House. (There were pictures of Elvis Presley when he was very young backstage.) When I went out on stage, I was immediately blinded by the glare and a loud ovation. Over all the clapping, I could hear my husband's voice shouting, 'That's my wife!' To understand my husband, you have to know that if he could have come to our wedding in jeans, he would have. For this event, he actually bought a tuxedo."

"Tell me more about the award."

"The CEO of the National MS Society actually presented the award. He gave me a plaque and a medallion which I could wear around my neck. I am the first Oklahoman to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. I was very pleased to represent our state."

"Congratulations Mary Ann Williams. I know that people in Oklahoma who have experienced multiple sclerosis have benefited from your volunteer-

ism. Let me present you with a little verbal accolade—congratulations to a volunteer extraordinaire from Oklahoma."

Now let me give you some further information about the Oklahoma Multiple Sclerosis Society in Tulsa. It does not cost to be a member of the Society. They are a wealth of information for those with MS, family, and friends. They provide counseling, education programs, wellness programs, a newsletter, information and referral, and medical equipment assistance. They also sponsor support groups in twenty-four Oklahoma cities and towns all the way from Woodward to Poteau. They have various fund raisers across the state, and they sponsor a program called Call the Expert. There are several toll-free numbers where people may call in and speak directly with a neurologist, an urologist, or a lawyer with questions. It is generally in the evening from 7-9 p.m. The next Call the Expert will be in August of this year. You may be connected with the Oklahoma MS Society through calling the national number (800-344-4867), and you will automatically be switched locally. Volunteers like Mary Ann Williams make a tremendous difference for people with disabilities whether that disability be multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, or autism. You may be able to volunteer some of your time to help others who are experiencing a similar disability. Thanks for your consideration.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 10-16, 2003 This is Cover the Insured Week. It will begin with a kickoff at the State Capitol at 10 a.m. on the 10th. There will be town hall meetings on the 16th in Tulsa, Eufaula, Muskogee, and Stigler among other locations. We have 600,000 Oklahomans without insurance in this state. Contact Kelli McNeal at 405-236-5437 ext. 108 for more information.

The Oklahoma Parent Center sponsors workshops across Oklahoma on subjects of interest to families with children in special education of the public schools. The following workshops are offered in your community. Call the Oklahoma Parent Center for more information: 1-877-4332.

March 4, 2003 Overview Basic Rights, Coalgate, Oklahoma
 March 11, 2003 Basic Rights, Poteau, Oklahoma
 March 20, 2003 504/ADA Idabel, Oklahoma
 April 7, 2003 Basic Rights, Durant, Oklahoma
 April 8, 2003 Transition to Kindergarten, Wilburton, Oklahoma

March 31-April 1, 2003 Governor's Conference on Developmental Disabilities, Cox Convention Center Okla. City.
 Contact Sheree Powell for more information at 405-521-6263.

The following two events are sponsored by the Oklahoma Business Leadership Network:

April 7-11, 2003 VIRTUAL JOB FAIR, location statewide, purpose to provide Oklahoma employers the opportunity to register their company and open job positions for individuals with disabilities. You may register online at www.okbln.jobfit.com. Contact Marilyn Burr at 1-800-522-8224.
 April 16, 2003 Reverse Job and Technology Fair, OKC Career Center, 5813 S. Robinson, Contact Marilyn Burr 1-800-522-8224.

If you have an event coming up relating to disability, let us know at 800-522-8224 we'll help you publicize.

A man was telling his neighbor, "I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me \$4000, but it's state of the art."

"Really," answered the neighbor. "What kind is it?"

"Twelve thirty."