

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

Persons with Disabilities Employment Program (House Bill 1340)

If you are a person with disabilities and are interested in going to work for the State of Oklahoma in some capacity, House Bill 1340 may be information helpful to you. HB 1340 was passed by the Oklahoma Legislature in 1987. It gave state agencies the option of waiving entrance examinations for applicants with disabilities. Another important advantage in being certified under HB 1340 is that an applicant with disabilities can be hired without going onto the registry and can be hired before the job is posted for statewide recruitment. These things can be an advantage for the person with disabilities, but it requires going through the process to be certified under the provisions of the bill.

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THE CASEY SMITH STORY

9 a.m. October 12, 2003

“He is bleeding badly from that right leg. Get that blood stopped or we’re going to lose him. Thank God we are only a few minutes away. Young lady, you’re going to have to calm down.”

(Screaming) “Is my boyfriend going to be all right?”

“Do something for us, call his family and let them know to meet us at Loma Linda ER. Just call, OK.”

“Mr. Smith, it’s about Casey. He’s been hit by a car . . . (losing it). He’s been hit by a car on the off ramp of the #10. They’re taking him . . . I think they said Loma Linda ER. (phone goes dead).

(vascular surgeon) 11 a.m., Loma Linda

“These guys can’t pump enough units of blood into him fast enough. We’ve got a decision to make real quick. We’re going to have to take that leg.”

(Lynda Smith, Billy Smith) “Do whatever you have to.”

Thus began a drama in Redlands, California on what started out to be a quiet Sunday morning when a young man by the name of Casey Smith stopped at the scene of an accident and ended up himself hit by a car making what was estimated to be 65 mph. Casey thought he had his life ahead of him. He had a loving family, a girl friend, a promising career as a professional boxer.

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

THE CASEY SMITH STORY (continued)

Things were looking great until his whole life changed in an instant.

Doctors were able to stop the bleeding by amputating his right leg, but they were not able to repair the injury to Casey's head. You see, Casey Smith suffered a traumatic brain injury when he was hit by that car, and he didn't wake up for three months.

Casey and his family were determined that his accident and disability would not be the last word in his story. Given the trauma involved, most people would have died as a direct result of the injuries sustained from being hit from this speeding vehicle. Casey and his family were doing lots of positive things that helped to change the outcome in his situation. A lot of circumstances worked in Casey's favor as well.

What circumstances, you say. Well, first of all a major trauma center in southern California was only minutes away from the scene of the accident. The first accident (the accident where Casey stopped to render help) already had an ambulance on the way when he was injured. Critical time was saved which made the difference between life and death.

Some other circumstances—Terry Reynolds who knew Casey and his family and was a trauma nurse at the Loma Linda emergency room just happened to be on duty that day when Casey arrived. She was invaluable to him and his family in shuttling information between his medical team and his family. This reduced some of the uncertainty and shock at what was happening.

A third circumstance which worked in Casey's favor was the nature of his parents—Billy and Lynda Smith. They kept cool heads in circumstances where many people would panic. As I interview Casey this afternoon, I see that Linda and Billy Smith are almost as much a part of this story as Casey himself. You may ask how?

Lynda Smith, Billy Smith, brother and sister (Beau



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and Melissa) never left Casey for one moment at Loma Linda Hospital. Casey had family around the clock every day for over seven weeks. When one family member had a spare moment, they were researching about traumatic brain injury and what Casey's needs were.

Lynda found out that one of the latest theories on the internet underscored that people who are unconscious are able to hear. Family members talked to Casey continually even though he was outwardly unresponsive. They played tapes of some of his high school football games and maintained the mental stimulation although they got precious little response for all their efforts. The precious little response seemed discouraging at first, but over time that scenario changed.

One day Billy Smith was in the room with his son moving his left leg to exercise it. The leg countered his efforts, and Billy Smith knew that his son was responding in a small way. Casey Smith was beginning the long road back to consciousness, and his family redoubled their efforts.

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THE CASEY SMITH STORY (continued)

In the meantime, Billy Smith scouted out a new beginning for the family in Oklahoma. Billy had Oklahoma roots, and Lynda Smith's mother had moved to Guthrie. Billy Smith had been hearing lots of good things about the Jim Thorpe Rehabilitation Hospital in Oklahoma City. He found out that it was easier to get in to see a doctor in Oklahoma than where they lived in California. Also Billy checked out an Oklahoma company which fit people with prosthetic legs. He had heard of the company back home and researched how they would be able to help Casey.

You see, Casey had been measured for a prosthesis in California, but it never fit right. Casey didn't seem to be improving in California after he reached a certain plateau. The family had greater visions for their son, and they moved to central Oklahoma

about eight months ago. The Smith family reports that Casey has made progress at Jim Thorpe which he never did back in California. He also has a new artificial leg which fits much better than his original, and he can take steps with the aid of a walker. Is there more? Well, that really depends on Casey at this point. He has a goal to be able to walk again, and you know, after seeing this young man's determination to get where he is now, I wouldn't be surprised if that happens.

Casey Smith wants to do motivational speaking, and he wants to share his story with other people. I must say he has convinced me that there is life after acquiring a disability. He is building a life which includes the limitations which he has experienced. Isn't that what all of us are doing?

Self discipline is self care.

(anonymous)

Persons with Disabilities Employment Program (House Bill 1340) (continued)

First you must obtain a letter from the State Department of Rehabilitation Services stating that you are a person with disabilities. You do not have to be a client with Rehabilitation Services in order to request this letter. You may call the DRS state office (800-487-4042) to find out the nearest DRS office to you and contact information in order to complete this first step in the process of getting certified under HB 1340.

Now that you have your letter from DRS certifying you as a person with disabilities, you will want to determine what state jobs you want to apply for. If you live in the Oklahoma City area, you may want to visit the Office of Personnel Management in the basement of the Jim Thorpe Building immediately southeast of the State Capitol. For the many of you who are out of the central Oklahoma area, you may also go to the website of the Office of Personnel

Management (www.opm.state.ok.us) and find the information on every job the state has in classified service. Click on HR and Employee Services and scroll down to Job Family Descriptors. If possible, narrow your interests as you approach these many listings.

You do not have to wait for a job that is open for recruitment to apply for a job family. On each job application, write HB 1340 on the upper right hand corner of the application. If you are willing to test for the position, write "will test" underneath HB 1340. If you are certified under HB 1340, it is your option whether or not to test for any position. Fill out one application for each job family you are applying for.

The next step in getting certified under HB 1340 is to submit the completed application and a copy of

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Angel of Mercy

If you live near one of the larger cities in Oklahoma, you may have a lot of resources to meet your needs. Social service agencies are well-represented in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, but lots of Oklahomans live in more rural areas of the state. What do these people do when they need a ride to the doctor? What do they do when they need help in paying an electric bill? Where can they go if they have no money for toys for the children at Christmas-time?

It has been my experience that somebody in the community learns about social services and knows where to go to get needs met. People go to that neighbor down the road to get help. That special neighbor knows where to go and how to get things done. Frances Boye (pronounced Bowie) is that neighbor down the road in the far southeastern town of Talihina, Oklahoma. People down there consider her an angel of mercy, and you may come to agree with them.

Frances and her husband, Harold, formed what they call Neighbor Helping Neighbor in Talihina back in 1995. The "organization" is just Frances and Harold, but they have helped a lot of people. They helped get Angel Food Ministries into Talihina and actually distributed the food before a local church took over this task.

Frances works with a local senior citizens center making Indian tacos with donated ingredients. They save up their money from sales, and the seniors took a trip to Branson, Missouri last year. One year they went to Colorado. It takes a lot of Indian tacos to send fifty people on a four-day trip.

Frances volunteers as an advocate for people in the local nursing home and the local veterans center in Talihina. Her church regularly holds services, and it is also not uncommon for a resident to call her asking for a personal visit. Frances and Harold are there to be a friend to a person in a nursing home who may not have family nearby.

Somebody needs butane to heat their home and

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can't afford it. Frances goes to local merchants and finds someone who will donate to meet the need. A child in the local school needs school supplies. Frances again goes to local merchants and asks for help. She gets the job done, and that's why people tell their friends and beat a path to her door.

Frances is not a stranger to social services. After all, she did study to be an LPN and served in that capacity at St. John's Hospital in Tulsa for many years. So you see, it came as a natural thing when she and Harold moved to Talihina in 1979 to get involved in helping people. And the Boye's quickly saw lots of need in rural, southeast Oklahoma.

Frances tells the story about a 59 year old woman not far from her who has cancer and osteoporosis. Frances took her a home-cooked meal and saw a need for attendant care for short times several days a week. Frances found an agency willing to send someone to meet this need, and she found that the woman's Medicaid case could pay for this. Frances does not hesitate to use her phone to find necessary resources.

Frances and Harold receive a lot of donated food from local merchants and private individuals. When someone calls her that they have a need, she packs them up a bag full of food and delivers it to meet that need. She is not an official food pantry for the zip code in which she lives, but she is the food pantry everyone knows about and uses. She gets a pleasure about helping others.

Sometimes the person who everybody looks up to for help needs help themselves. In 1995 a tornado struck the front of the cabin where Frances and

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The Ability to See the Big Picture

If you can't see what you are doing now as a part of a long-range goal, you'll wear out. Imagine how long athletes would be able to endure the pain of practice if they couldn't see the game in their mind's eye.



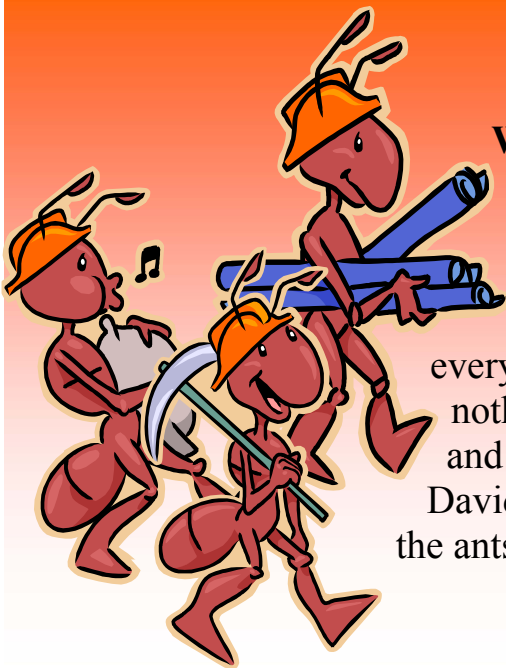
Angel of Mercy (continued)

Harold lived on their five acres a couple miles north of town. The Boye's didn't have the money to repair the damages. They were just thankful to be alive since they were actually in the cabin when the storm struck.

They needed a grant to either repair their cabin or get some other form of housing. The superintendent of schools encouraged the Boye's to apply for a grant from the Community Action agency in Stigler. It took awhile, but they got a brand, spanking new mobile home moved to their acreage. But,

they still needed a new septic tank to hook up to their new home. Frances applied to the Rural Development of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and got the money to finish the job. Even the caregiver needs care sometimes.

Frances and Harold Boye are just neighbors that live down the road. They are everything that we used to mean when we used that word "neighbor". But some people in Talihina consider them even more. To some people this couple has come to be a real angel of mercy.



Working Smart

Being successful is not about how hard you work—it is about how smart you work. Michael LeBoef said, "Devoting a little of yourself to everything means committing a great deal of yourself to nothing." There is a big difference between activity and accomplishment. Activity is being busy. Henry David Thoreau said, "It's not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: What are you busy about?"

Joseph Harp Correctional Center

Where would you go in Oklahoma if you were convicted of a crime and you had a disability? You would go to Joseph Harp Correctional Center—if you had special needs. Joseph Harp Correctional Center is a part of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. It is located about seven miles west of Lexington, Oklahoma in rural Cleveland County. Many people confuse it with its larger, sister facility with the name “Lexington” located about half mile to the west. The two are separate facilities under the same umbrella of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Joseph Harp was opened in 1978 with a capacity of 450 prisoners. Today it houses about 1400 prisoners in a medium-security setting. In February of this year, it opened the J-Unit housing 258 men, most of whom have some form of physical disability. Some of these men have mental dementia, and some of them do not have any disability.

Prisoners without disabilities living in the J-Unit serve as healthcare orderlies for their peers who need assistance in activities of daily living. They are paid \$37.50 per month, and this is considered a quite good salary among the various prison occupations.

I spoke with Diane Givens who serves as a case manager in J-Unit employed as Department of Corrections (DOC) staff. Diane tells me that a DOC doctor is available for the men on J-Unit as well as nurses who dispense medications. Ninety-four of the prisoners in this unit use a wheelchair for ambulation, and many others use a walker or a cane. One prisoner in the dementia ward of J-Unit is almost 90 years old.

Prisoners roam freely outside their cells in common access within their pod as well as common areas within J-Unit as a whole. The prisoners with physical disabilities do not have jobs as most of the other prisoners at Joseph Harp. Prisoners in J-Unit may go outside during the day any time except when all prisoners are undergoing a count.

Ninety-four of the prisoners in this unit use a wheelchair for ambulation, and many others use a walker or a cane.

J-Unit is well equipped with roll-in showers with fold-down seats and hand-held nozzles which permit the men independence in this activity. Healthcare orderlies serve as another set of legs, arms, or hands to help prisoners with disabilities in their activities of daily living. Telephones are available in certain common areas, but prisoners must call collect. Diane Givens characterizes her J-Unit as a “Cadillac” facility in the DOC system.

Debbie Dorris, assistant to the warden, continues my tour of Joseph Harp. J-Unit is the only unit in the state corrections system designed to house inmates with physical disabilities. However, inmates with mental disabilities are dispersed among all prisons in the corrections system. One hundred twenty Oklahoma prisoners with mental health disabilities are housed in the mental health unit (MHU) of Joseph Harp. (This is separate from J-Unit which we toured earlier.) MHU receives prisoners with mental health disabilities from all over the system.

These prisoners have behavior problems stemming from their mental health. When these problems are stabilized, these prisoners may return to the general population of their original prison. Psychiatrists and psychologists are available on the MHU as well as in general population units at Joseph Harp.

G-Unit at Joseph Harp houses 70 prisoners who are intellectually challenged—that is, they have an IQ of 70 or below. Living near or occasionally with an inmate with intellectual challenges are 30 resident assistants who are inmates themselves. These RA's as they are called assist the prisoners with intellectual disabilities in writing letters or reading books.

Ralph Crampton serves as Fire and Safety Consultant at Joseph Harp. He points out ramps built to

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Joseph Harp Correctional Center (continued)

the common dining area with wide sidewalks permitting two wheelchairs to pass. Ralph tells me that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was originally supposed to have a section on accessibility applicable to prisons. He says they are looking at accessibility issues at Joseph Harp to

make this facility accessible to people with disabilities. It is good to know that a place such as Joseph Harp exists within our state system. Programs for the general population and facilities for the population with disabilities make this a special place within the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Persons with Disabilities Employment Program (House Bill 1340) (continued)

the certification letter from the Department of Rehabilitation Services to the Recruitment Division of the Office of Personnel Management. Mail this information to the address at the top of the application. You will receive a letter from OPM certifying that based on their review you are qualified or not for the position(s) for which you applied. Now you are ready to approach the Human Resources department of individual agencies to locate vacancies. You will need to have copies of the DRS disability certification letter and the OPM job certification letter for each job opening.

So how do you know which agencies employ the job families which you are qualified for? This will take some effort on your part. In the blue pages of your telephone book you will find a listing for state agencies located in your service area. Call to find out if they employ anywhere in their service the job family you are wanting. Check the OPM website mentioned earlier for job openings. You may be seeking a position which is found commonly in all state agencies, or you may be seeking a position which is used at only one location in one particular agency.

When you have located an agency which does employ your job family, find out the name of the human resource manager. Go to the agency calling for this person by name and be prepared to present this person your DRS certification letter of disability and your OPM certification letter of qualifica-

tion. In addition, give the human resource manager your resume and completed state application. Ask if there is a current opening for which you qualify. If there is an opening, ask for an interview. If there is not an opening, ask to be kept in mind for future openings and how long your resume will be kept in their files. Call back on a regular basis

Follow up work is the name of the game. It requires some effort and self discipline to get the necessary certification letters. It requires more effort to locate state agencies which employ the job family you are interested in. Continuing to inquire at agencies until they actually have an opening is necessary, but the result is a job in an area of your interest if you are a successful candidate.

Since the inception of HB 1340, there have been about 50 people with disabilities hired per year. Over 40 state agencies have employed persons with disabilities through certification under HB 1340. You could be one of those people.

If you are interested in knowing more about certification under HB 1340, contact Peppi Boudreaux at the Office of Handicapped Concerns. She may be reached at 405-521-3756 in the Oklahoma City metro or 800-522-8224 state-wide. If you would like us to do training for groups in your area, let us know what your needs are. Your tax dollars support our services.

Follow up work is the name of the game.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- June 21-24, 2007** Hearing Loss Association of America Convention, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma is sponsoring the national convention, call 405-951-8383 for more information.
- July 11-13, 2007** 14th Annual Children's Behavioral Health Conference, Tulsa Southern Hills Marriott. For more information contact Cynthia Caligone at 405-522-8300.
- July 26, 2007** Caregiver essentials series on medication management. Warren Clinic from 10 a.m.- noon, Tulsa 6600 S. Yale, floor conference center. Call 918-481-7741 for more information on this ongoing series.
- October 4-5, 2007** Zarrow Mental Health Symposium on learning differences and mental health. For more information contact the Mental Health Association of Tulsa 918-585-1213.

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

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