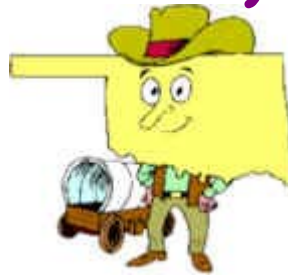


OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

AGENCY NEWS

The Office of Handicapped Concerns is getting a new name. Beginning November 1, 2007 this office will be called the Office of Disability Concerns. This name change resulted from passage of House Bill 1084 in of the Oklahoma Legislature last year.

I applaud this effort which will reflect a more current terminology in our agency name. We will continue with our agency mission providing accurate and timely information services, technical assistance and advocacy. We act as an intermediary for persons with disabilities and provide services to those with disabilities.

Sincerely, Steve Stokes, Director

THINKING ABOUT WORKING?

For those of you who are considering working, the month of October is Disability Employment Awareness Month according to the U.S. Department Labor. I interviewed Peppi Boudreau in her capacity as Disability Program Specialist specializing in employment development at the Office of Handicapped Concerns.

Peppi tells me that there are some excellent programs out there encouraging people with disabilities to work. She explains that people with disabilities have many concerns about returning to the work force.

The first concern is how returning to work may affect their Social Security benefits. Many people with disabilities have gone through a long process of eligibility for either SSI or SSDI, and an important part of that process was proving that they were not able to work. They fear that going back to work will make them ineligible for Social Security.

Since eligibility for Medicaid insurance in Oklahoma is tied to eligibility to Social Security, people may have a concern about becoming ineligible for their medical insurance if they were to return to work. There are other government benefits which they are currently receiving which could be affected by returning to work such as public housing, day care for their children or food stamps.

People must weigh their physical and mental health in considering returning to work. It is always a good idea to discuss this with your doctor or mental health professional before making changes in your lifestyle.

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ODC web site:

www.odc.ok.gov



THINKING ABOUT WORKING? (continued)

What activities can you safely engage in? How much can you lift? How long are you able to remain on your feet? A thorough medical and mental health check will shed light on the advisability of returning to work and what types of work you might best be suited for.

In the last issue of *Will's Corner, Oklahoma* we discussed in some detail a program of hiring people with disabilities for state jobs under the Optional Hiring Program for The Disabled, formerly referred to as House Bill 1340. This program allows people with disabilities to be considered for state employment without taking tests for the position. (The applicant must still have the education and experience to qualify for the position.)

Peppi reports there is another program called the State Work Incentive Program (Senate Bill 825) allowing people with disabilities to work in state employment for two years without the position counting against the allotted positions for the agency. This is a great incentive for supervisors in state agencies to hire people with disabilities.

The SEA project (Special Excepted Appointment Project) is a program similar to the Optional Hiring Program. It is the federal counterpart. It allows people with disabilities to waive the testing requirements for federal jobs.

Peppi states that people with disabilities have been re-entering the workforce in greater numbers in the last 20 years. This is a direct result of more programs out there encouraging people to consider this option. She points out that employment benefits the person with disabilities in both gaining independence and self-esteem which working provides.

Peppi cites the example of a young woman with developmental disabilities whom she knows personally. This woman went to work 25 hours per week at a grocery store sacking groceries, stocking the shelves and running errands for other employees. Reportedly this person enjoyed a more fulfilling life than she had had before going to work.



Peppi states that people with disabilities have been re-entering the workforce in greater numbers in the last 20 years.

People fear discrimination in the work place if they have never worked before or if they are returning to work after experiencing a disability. Peppi points out that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) guarantees the civil rights of people with disabilities in the work place under Title I. She also mentions that people can ask their employer for an accommodation to permit them to perform the essential functions of their job.

People with disabilities who are considering working may contact the State Department of Rehabilitation Services at 800-487-4042. Follow the recorded prompts and you will get the contact information for the rehabilitation office nearest you. Call the office nearest to you and inquire about the Optional Hiring Program for the Disabled or the State Work Incentive Program. DRS supports people with disabilities returning to work with a specific employment outcome.

Workforce Oklahoma is a grouping of employment-related agencies under one roof to allow people the convenience of one-stop shopping if they desire to return to work. Workforce Oklahoma has 39 locations statewide to assist anyone regardless of disability in getting a job. Contact the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission at 1-888-980-9675 for local offices.

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Daycare for Children With Special Needs

If you have a child with special needs, we all know that finding appropriate daycare can be a problem. I visited with Kristi Simpson who is the Assistant Licensing Coordinator for OKDHS Oklahoma Child Care Services to get some more information.

Kristi tells me that if a child receives SSI, Sooner Start or Special Education and this child is also a client of OKDHS, this child may be eligible for the special needs rate of daycare reimbursement. This may be an incentive for daycare providers to enroll children with special needs. Talk with your OKDHS representative to see if you qualify.

Another incentive which OKDHS offers to encourage daycare providers to serve children with special needs is the OKDHS Child Care Warmline where child care providers can get information on how to address a number of subjects affecting children with special needs. Among subjects which providers can access is information on epilepsy, asthma, Down Syndrome and ADHD. Call 1-888-574-5437 to access a child care professional. The Warmline can be a resource of information to the provider who has concerns that they are not equipped to serve a child with special needs.

OKDHS also offers the Tic Toc training to providers to dispel provider concerns about accepting children special needs by giving them the information they need. For Tic Toc training opportunities call the Tolbert Center for Developmental Disabilities at 1-405-271-1836 or email stars@ouhsc.edu.

You may also call the Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association at 1-888-962-2772 or the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development at 1-888-446-7608 for information about workshops in your area to support including children with special needs in your daycare facility. There are many opportunities out there for providers to learn more about caring for children with special needs.

For a child with immune issues, OKDHS can pay for an individual to go into the child's home. The

individual who provides the care in the child's home does not have to be licensed but can get the special needs rate of care which the agency provides. The parent is responsible for locating the provider in the home. Talk to your OKDHS representative to find out more about this alternative.

Now let's discuss the law which parents and providers need to know concerning children with special needs. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is the civil rights law for people with disabilities. Title III of that Act prohibits discrimination in public accommodations, and daycares are considered to fall in this category.

Parents may do a lot to address concerns that daycares have in caring for a child with special needs. The parent may agree to do a procedure which their child needs during the day or the parent may agree to train daycare staff on what needs to be done to keep the child safe and healthy.

If a parent has attempted to address the concerns of a daycare provider unsuccessfully, that parent may call an OKDHS licensing specialist and register a complaint about the facility. Licensing specialists are located in 50 of the 77 counties in Oklahoma, and OKDHS offices will know how to contact a local representative.

While OKDHS has no policy requiring that a facility serve children with special needs, the licensing specialist can discuss ADA requirements with a provider. The licensing specialist may also refer the case to the Office of Civil Rights in OKDHS which can investigate a concern. The OKDHS Office of Civil Rights may be reached at 1-800-214-3529.

It was quite a coincidence in that while I was writing the information for this article, I got a call from a daycare provider. In the course of our conversation, the provider shared that she runs a daycare with twelve children. While her facility is small, about a quarter of the children she is currently serving have special needs.

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Desperate in Small-Town Oklahoma

The nightmare for one Oklahoma woman began February 22, 2007, the day her mother died. Her mother had a February Social Security check for \$1136 which she had signed but never cashed in her effects. This was quite a temptation for someone who was disabled and living on \$670 per month.

But this woman had the good sense to contact Social Security before cashing that check and depositing it into her account. She reports she was told over the phone that she could legitimately deposit the funds in her account. Her bank agreed to take the check if she provided her mother's death certificate which was easy enough to do.

She was thrilled and began spending some of that \$1136 for items she had needed a long time but had been unable to afford. This was quite a bonanza for her.

Everything was going well until she logged onto her bank account information and discovered an \$1136 withdrawal of funds appeared with a net \$888 overdraft. Her world stopped.

The crisis caused by this spread quickly to all areas of her finances. Her bank began to garnishee all of her own Social Security check which left her with no income at all—desperate in small-town Oklahoma.

After all she had rent, electricity, phone, cable, and food to purchase with absolutely no way to pay for any of these items. Social Security apologized for telling her she could cash her mother's check, but they left the consequences of that action squarely on her shoulders.

Her life spiraled out of control. She knew she had to do something, and she was running out of time. She protected her own Social Security disability payments by having her check sent directly to her address. (She still owed her bank \$455 from the original overdraft.)

A Tip on Health Care Fraud

Only visit your personal doctor, hospital or clinic for medical help. Only they should make referrals for special equipment, services or medicine.

Next this woman visited with her OKDHS representative who suggested she contact her local Community Action agency and her County Commissioner. She says, "That's when things started to get better." Upon hearing her story, the County Commissioner paid her electric bill. Community Action paid for her housing payment.

Her son helped out with phone and cable bills. That left food as her greatest need, and you can't get any more basic than that. She was desperate and shared her story with many people.

When her apartment manager heard she did not have food and no money to purchase it, she offered to help. This small-town woman lived in public housing and there was some money set aside to help residents just like her.

She received \$120 and a free ride to the grocery store to get her food needs met. She had been disabled for 19 years and thought she knew the social-service delivery network in Oklahoma, but she had never heard of these resources. They made all the difference in the world.

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Desperate in Small-Town Oklahoma (continued)

But this was not the end of the story. In July she attempted to open another bank account and discovered to her chagrin that she could not because of the outstanding \$455 she had over drafted her first, closed account.

It is difficult to function in this modern world without a bank account, and this woman was propelled into action once again. She called the corporate office of the bank where she had the overdraft and told her whole story again.

She was pleasantly surprised to hear that her debt would be written off. Her record was cleared, and she could now open another bank account. Her nightmare had been resolved. Even more than this, she has learned that there are people out there who will help when they see you have a legitimate need and are making efforts to help yourself.

This Oklahoma woman shares that she has done child care in the past and would like to care for an infant in her home to bring in a little extra money. She wants to insure that she does not experience a repeat of what she went through the last few months. A little extra money can make a whole lot of difference when your total monthly income is \$670.

Daycare for Children With Special Needs (continued)

This provider shared the story that her son was born with special needs and that through caring for him she gathered the courage to accept children with special needs into her daycare. She tells how she has worked with local schools to ensure that kids coming home to her daycare after school are well cared for in both environments.

Oklahoma has more than 5500 licensed child care facilities. The Department of Human Services (OKDHS) has the responsibility of licensing daycare facilities. While a license does not guarantee that the quality of a child care facility will meet every parent's or child's needs, it does ensure that a trained professional is working to help the child care staff meet minimum state requirements for a safe and enriching environment.

Kristi Simpson provided me with two publications which she feels would be of interest to parents and providers with children with special needs. OKDHS publication No. 03-30 is entitled *Choosing Child Care For a Child with Special Needs. Providing Quality Child Care for Children with Special Needs* is the title of OKDHS publication No. 01-48. Call 1-800-347-2276 to request one of these pamphlets.

**You know you live in 2007 when:**

You chat several times a day with a stranger from South Africa, but you haven't spoken with your next door neighbor yet this year.



Oklahoma Library for the Blind

The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is a special place where people with a visual impairment can get written and instructional materials in a format they can use. But it is more than a resource for people with visual impairment. It provides written and instructional materials to people with reading disabilities such as dyslexia or a learning disability. It also provides the same services to any Oklahoman with a physical disability which prevents them from turning the pages of a book.

The Oklahoma Library for the Blind run by the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services and is the only facility of its kind in Oklahoma. It offers books and magazines on audio tape. It has a lending library of 50,000 titles available to patrons of any age in the library itself as well as 19,000 items of instructional materials which can be used by students in public, private and home schools across the state.

Located at 300 N.E. 18th Street in Oklahoma City, the Library for the Blind mails materials to all corners of the state. An approved application entitles the patron to select from a broad range of materials including fiction, non-fiction, descriptive videos and magazines. The loan time for most items is two months.

When you become a patron you will be sent some materials based on the preference of subjects you selected in your application. You will also be sent a special tape player which has the capacity to play the materials sent. (Because of copyright laws the library controls access to its materials.)

A catalog of new materials will be sent to your home periodically. You can also talk to a librarian to order materials or visit the library's website to select materials from the online catalog. You may select specific items which you want as well as receiving titles selected by the library based on the preferences you made on your application.

Applicants may select their preference of either fic-

tion or non-fiction. In the fiction category, they may express their interest in receiving materials dealing with adventure, science fiction or the classics. In the area of non-fiction, the patron may choose to receive titles on poetry, religion or Oklahoma authors and subjects. There is something of interest to almost everybody.

The library has materials in formats besides audio tape recordings. Books in Braille and materials on computer disc are available as well. Over 200 newspapers are accessible via telephone hookup. The Library also has descriptive videos in which a narrator explains the action occurring in the video during lulls in the audio.

The library moved into their present location in 1991. The building was named after Travis Leon Harris who was a director of Visual Services at one time in Oklahoma and is well known for his efforts to improve the lives of people with visual impairments.

Since 2003 the Library has had a state-of-the-art digital recording studio. Soundproof booths are available to record materials which insure clean recordings without background noise of any sort. Two computer programs allow staff to edit recordings for the highest quality.

Patrons may make special requests for the recording of materials. The recording studio has made recordings of unusual items such as appliance manuals or individual insurance contracts which make these everyday items accessible to people who need a different format. This service is free of charge to library patrons.

The AIM Center is located within the Library for the Blind. (AIM is the acronym for Accessible Instructional Materials.) As mentioned earlier, the AIM Center has 19,000 titles in Braille and large print as well as instructional aids and equipment for children pre-k through 12th grade.

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Oklahoma Library for the Blind (continued)

The AIM Center works with students, parents, teachers, administrators and special education teachers who are seeking accessible materials and instructional aids and equipment. The goal of AIM is to provide accessible textbooks, fiction and non-fiction to children with disabilities on a par of materials available to typical children in the educational environment.

Vicky Lynn Golightly is the Public Information Officer for the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. She sometimes arranges tours of the facility for people who are interested. If you are interested in knowing more about the library, you may call Vicky at the toll-free number (800-523-0288, 405-521-3514 in the Oklahoma City phone exchange or TTY 405-521-4672).

Patrons of the library sometimes have a temporary disability and still qualify to order materials. A person may have had eye surgery which temporarily affects their access to printed materials. Any disability which affects a person's access to printed materials may enable a person to utilize the services of the library.

Patrons continue to qualify as a patron as long as they order one book per year. Materials are sent and received through the mail. And yes, you can get the latest copy of the Harry Potter series on audio tape if you are interested.

The Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has a website (www.library.state.ok.us) where you may actually order materials online if you are a patron. If you are interested in getting an application, call 800-523-0288 statewide or 405-521-3514 in central Oklahoma. And by the way, the library does have about 1100 titles available in Spanish for those who feel comfortable in that language.

THINKING ABOUT WORKING? (continued)

Ticket to Work is a program within the Social Security Administration to encourage recipients to consider the benefits of employment. This is one of several work incentives allowed by Social Security to make returning to work more appealing to people with disabilities. Janette Crow is the Area Work Incentive Coordinator for Social Security, and she can be reached at 866-635-8697 toll free or 405-605-3001 ext. 3002 in central Oklahoma.

Janette Crow can refer you to people who will tell you how your various governmental benefits would be affected by returning to work. It is good planning to get this information before beginning a job.

In returning to work, it is good to consider part-time or full-time work is available to people with disabilities. Many times just having an additional \$200 per month from some type of job can make a huge difference in the lifestyle you can enjoy.

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit is an incentive for employers to hire individuals with disabilities who are clients of the Department of Rehabilitation Services. It offers employers a tax credit on wages paid to employees with disabilities. It is good to have information about this tax credit to take to interviews with potential employers.

Peppi Boudreau began working at the Office of Handicapped Concerns September 28 of last year. She brings a wealth of information on the employment of people with disabilities to this office. If you would like to talk with her about returning to work or about any aspect of employment of people with disabilities, call 800-522-8224 asking to speak with her or call 405-521-3756 in central Oklahoma. Peppi is also available for public speaking and presentations. Let us know what your needs are.

Happiness sneaks in a door you didn't know you left open.

John Barrymore

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- October 26, 2007** Accessing Services Along Life's Highway Conference, Metro-Tech Oklahoma City 9 a.m.- 3 p.m. For more information contact Sidna Chambers at 405-470-3217 or sidna.chambers@oesc.state.ok.us.
- October 27, 2007** There will be a health fair open to the public from 10 to 2 at the Owens Multi-Purpose Center, 1405 S.W. 11th Street in Lawton. For more information contact Glenda Stewart at 580-248-4417.
- November 29-30, 2007** Caregivers and Grandparents Conference at Church Of the Servant in Oklahoma City. The conference is free of charge. Email Judith.Mowery@okdhs.org.
- December 5, 2007** Wrightslaw Special Education Law and Advocacy Training at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond. For more information contact the Disability Law Center 800-880-7755.

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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