

CAP UPDATE

Volume 2, Issue 1

January 2005

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>"Anne's Fact Finding Mission"</i>	1
<i>PA Rehabilitation Full Council Meeting</i>	3
<i>PUC Adds Captioned Telephone Service as Option for Deaf and Hard of Hearing</i>	4

"Anne's Fact Finding Mission"

(Part 4 of our ongoing series)

By Margaret Passio McKenna & Cindy Crissman

Anne has been giving some serious thought to her specific vocational goal. Before she meets with her counselor in two weeks, she wants to do some research so she is prepared to present to her counselor her reasoning as to why she believes a waiver would be appropriate in her case. Anne decided to call her counselor and left a message a few days later, she still had not heard from her counselor, so she called her again. The counselor was available and apologized to Anne for not getting back to her; she has been out on appointments. The counselor seemed a bit annoyed at Anne's call considering they are to meet next week and could discuss the "possibility" of a wavier at their meeting. Anne explained to her counselor she would like to be prepared as to the type of information needed to justify a waiver so she can start working on



the process. Anne is anxious to start school and interested in anything she can do to help things move along more smoothly. The counselor stated, "The district administrator may grant waivers above the OVR maximum only if they can show good cause." She added, "The client shall apply for subsidized loans prior to consideration of a waiver and most waivers don't get approved." The counselor needs to fill out a wavier request form along with client's reasoning to her supervisor. The counselor had a meeting in five minutes and told Anne she will see her next week and to bring whatever she has to the meeting. Anne understands her counselor is

busy and also realizes she does not have the final say regarding the waiver, but she felt that she needed some more information regarding the waiver process.

Anne decided it may be a good idea to call her counselor's supervisor to see if he could help shed some light on what Anne needed to do. She called and asked to speak with her counselor's supervisor. He was not available and she had to leave a message. A week later when she did not hear from him, she called back. Anne introduced herself and explained the purpose of her call. She isn't calling to rat on her counselor but for a clearer understanding of the waiver process. The supervisor understood and did his best to explain to her that waivers are granted, or not, based on the client's individual situation. For example, if there is a disability related reason one college would be better than a less expensive college, or if you can't obtain the degree you need at the less expensive college, but the more expensive the college has the program you need to become employed in your chosen vocational goal. Also, if a client has high out of pocket medical expenses, they can be a factor in determining the client's contribution and OVR's amount of funding. Anne couldn't thank the supervisor enough and asked if by chance he can come to the meeting she has scheduled with her counselor. She stated she thinks his input would help in the counselor's justification of her wavier. Sometimes, three heads are better than two. The supervisor said he would be able to come to their meeting.

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Armed with this information, Anne spent most of the next week giving serious thought about “what she wants to be when she grows up.” Next door to Anne has a family she baby-sits for occasionally. The parents have twins, one of whom was born blind. Anne has really learned a lot from this girl and finds it a special challenge helping this girl. Yes, Anne wants to teach children like this girl! She believes this would be extremely rewarding. With this decision, Anne went about researching what type of training she needs to teach children who are blind/visually impaired. She went on the computer to get some information and her mom suggested she call some schools that teach blind/visually impaired students. Anne liked this idea and called some schools she found in the yellow pages and some she had heard of. She also asked the mother next door who gave her the name and number of her daughter’s teacher. After making these calls, Anne found out that a B.S. in Education which is what she and her counselor had discussed would not be enough training for her to teach children who are blind/visually impaired. After contacting, visiting and checking online some different colleges, she narrowed it down to two schools, both of which were more expensive than local state schools. She decided to visit each school and see for herself the one that would best meet her academic and disability related needs. The school which was closer to her house did not give her any hope that they would provide any disability related services. The job placement binder in the career services office had job postings that were over two years old. When she went to the other college, she knew right away, this would be her choice. The woman in the disability office was very helpful, and stated they have software on their computers to help individuals with learning disabilities. Also, this college has smaller classes, which she needs due to her learning disability. Also, there is a daycare on the premises where she can apply for a part-time job. Although this school was more expensive adding room and board, Anne thought she had enough information to present to her counselor tomorrow. She will bring all the school’s material and even has an extra booklet for her counselor from the college. Anne feels good about her decision and hopes her counselor and supervisor will feel the same way.

Next week—Anne was eager to meet with her counselor and the supervisor to share with them her feelings. She explained to them her vocational goal of teaching the blind/visually impaired. They seemed to think this was a good idea. She showed them some of the information she gathered regarding the type of training she would need to become employed in this specialized area of teaching.

They seemed impressed with his idea and her research to support it. They briefly went over with her the waiver process and her counselor told her she will write it up based on all of this information in favor of a waiver. The supervisor said he then needs to review it and will call her with any questions. He then needs to present it to the Administrator of the office for final approval. Anne also left them her financial aid information, including copies of applications for grants and loans.

Will Anne get approved for her waiver? Stay tuned



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Full Council Meeting

Thursday, December 2, 2004

By Cindy Crissman

The Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC) met for a Full Council Meeting, Thursday, December 2, 2004, at the Hilton and Towers in Harrisburg. This meeting was especially important to me. Since my appointment to the Council I had participated in meetings via teleconference I was able to physically attend the December meeting, and I had the opportunity to personally meet people. 21 Council members were present, along with staff from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), Project staff, and guests.

Mr. Thomas Washic, Acting Director, gave an update on OVR. He began by saying, effective immediately Mr. William Gannon had been appointed OVR's new Director. He spoke about financial and budget concerns involving State VR agencies. Other areas Mr. Washic talked about included a new college policy, OVR staff vacancies and retirement; the joint PaRC retreat in September at State College, the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), State Senate Bill 79, the Dual Party Relay Service and Telecommunication Device Distribution Program Act. He also spoke about Pennsylvania entering into a contract with Electronic Vision Access Solutions (EVAS). Several concerns were expressed by Council members, and the matter was referred to the Customer Satisfaction Committee to research.

In 2005, the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services, and Harrisburg OVR are changing locations from Uptown Plaza to Forum Place. Their case management system is in place.

Mr. Ed Zale, Eastern Regional Director for the Bureau of Workforce Development talked about CareerLink Accessibility. He talked about the survey the Client Assistance Program (CAP) did on CareerLinks and how helpful OVR staff have been in providing help to make the CareerLinks accessible.

Mr. Nowell Smith reported on the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) conference he attended in October. He pointed out that, according to Ms. Joanne Wilson, Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Agency (RSA) and Mr. Carl Sutter, President, CSAVR, public vocational rehabilitation (VR) is at a very critical juncture with the Reauthorization of WIA and Rehabilitation Act. Some of the items Mr. Smith talked about were VR monies, attempting to block grant VR funds in the WIA Bill and One Stops. He mentioned an attempt to Block Grant VR funds with the WIA, and the governor being able to fund One Stops as they see fit for their states. He went on to explain how the 108th Congress would make decisions in VR areas. He said that Congress needed to be aware of all the success stories in VR. There was a discussion about the shortage of VR counselors and some reasons for the shortage.

Mr. Darryl Herman talked about the goal of the Legislative Committee. The goal is to advocate for the training of individuals with disabilities. He talked about members of the Legislative Committee going to Harrisburg on December 12th. Their field trip was to visit state legislators and deliver their position paper. While in Harrisburg, one of the Committee's goals was to have the legislators and staff use the Rehabilitation Council as a resource tool. He also explained how to use the monthly Legislative Updates that staff provide.

The next Full Council meeting will be February 9th at the Crowne Plaza in Harrisburg. Interested persons are welcome to attend.

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**PUC ADDS CAPTIONED TELEPHONE SERVICE AS
OPTION FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

HARRISBURG – The Public Utility Commission (PUC) has added captioned telephone service to the list of telecommunications options available to Pennsylvanians who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Captioned telephone service works by using voice recognition software to convert an incoming phone call into text that is then displayed on a captioning telephone for the user to read.

“After investigating the legal, technical and financial issues surrounding the long-term provisioning of captioned telephone service, the PUC concluded that this service is a valuable offering that should be made available to Pennsylvanians,” said PUC Commissioner Kim Pizzingrilli. “The provisioning of this service will enable consumers who are hard of hearing to have another option for telephone communications.”

The PUC has been overseeing a trial program for nearly 200 consumers since May 2003. The trial will end in January and the service will then become a long-term option.

The original 200 participants in the pilot program will be given the opportunity to continue the service beginning in February 2005. A maximum of 25 additional users will then be added each month. If more than 25 people apply, the additional consumers will receive the service in the following months in the sequence in which they applied.

The service will be paid for from the existing Pennsylvania telecommunications relay service fund. Residential phone customers currently pay a surcharge of seven cents per month to the fund and businesses pay 13 cents.

Twenty-seven other states offer captioned telephone relay service on either a regular or a trial basis. In addition, the federal government offers it for active and retired employees, veterans and U.S. tribal members in every state.

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission ensures safe, reliable and reasonably priced electric, natural gas, water, telephone and transportation service for Pennsylvania consumers, by regulating public utilities and by serving as stewards of competition.

For recent news releases, or more information about the PUC, visit our internet homepage at www.puc.state.pa.us

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