

CAP UPDATE

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Penny's Journey into Employment

By Cindy Crissman

Ever since Penny could remember, her dream has been a secretary. Her mother was a secretary. Although she never told anyone, she wanted to be just like mom when she grew up. Penny always remembered the hours she spent with her mother learning shorthand and how to type. During high school, Penny completed all the business subjects she could take related to her goal, maintaining a 3.7 grade average. Penny liked sports and played on the school's first string softball team.

The summer before her junior year, she decided to attend the local vocational school for 2 years until graduation. Penny decided to take computer science to study in school. She reasoned what her mother previously typed or wrote in short hand in her jobs, she would now be able to accomplish with good computer skills. Penny felt this year was more difficult than before. She found herself spending more time on school work, and she still pushed herself to play softball. Some days she felt she was up for most of the day, until she had her studies finished to her satisfaction. Penny felt some fatigue and stress. Still once again she maintained a 3.7 GPA and led the softball team to victory.

Toward the end of her junior year she began to notice that her fatigue had not lessened, even though the softball season had been finished for about three weeks. And she didn't want to admit to herself that the longer she was on her legs, whether walking or running, her legs seemed to get weak and had a tingling feeling. Penny decided she would "lay low" for the summer and get as much sleep as she could. She did not want to stop playing softball, but decided to play for fun. She also had a personal philosophy that if you ignore something, that something will go away. She had uneasy feelings about what she had been feeling. Penny decided to try not to worry, at least until school started in the fall. Penny convinced herself that everything would go away in three months. All she had to do was sleep, play less softball, and all would be fine.



After having what Penny deemed a successful summer, she was excited to start her senior year. She was looking forward to having her best school year yet. Although she didn't play competitive softball, she still enjoyed softball games with friends and at family reunions. She went swimming for exercise and to relax. She was finally able to sleep throughout the night. She was positive her concerns during her junior year were gone. Penny planned to be involved in several school activities. She sang in the school's chorus, and their two chorus concerts. She was a member of the decoration and planning committee for her Christmas Dance and junior/senior prom. She was also in the school play. She preferred working behind the curtain making props and building scenes. She was anxiously waiting to start softball in early spring.

Determined to maintain her 3.7 GPA, Penny studied during the week and weekends were "rest" days devoted completely to family and friends. She especially enjoyed watching Sunday afternoon football games with her dad, family outings, and spending time with her friends. Following her Christmas choral concert and her school dance, Penny noticed a change in her legs. Her legs felt weak. The tingling she had been experiencing was now numbness. Christmas was five days away. She had an eleven day vacation during the holiday season. She reasoned her legs would be fine after a few days rest.

Penny had so much fun during her time off. She enjoyed Christmas with her parents. She visited with aunts, uncles, cousins, friends and attended church. She and her parents attended a New Years dance party to welcome the New Year.

Penny had little idle time during her holiday vacation to dwell on anything. Now Penny was back in school and looking forward to the rest of her senior year. The school play was important to Penny. She worked behind the scenes her junior year, and planned to do the same this year. She wanted to sing in the spring choral concert. Attending the prom had been a dream for Penny since she started her junior year. Most of all, she waited for the beginning of soft ball. She was positive she would enjoy the remaining months of her senior year.

All at once Penny felt like she had the wind knocked out of her. What was she thinking? She tried blocking out the symptoms developing in her legs. However no matter how much she tried, her legs were still numb. Some days were worse than others, but the feeling was always there. Deep down in, she knew the numbness would never completely go away. She also knew once everything started, the fatigue would likely return. She didn't think the choral concert would be too taxing. There would be practices, but in the end all she had to do was dress up and sing. Early meetings of the prom committee indicated moving the prom outside of the high school to a different location and having caterers. Although she didn't want to, Penny felt she could forego the play. But she refused the thought of not playing softball.

She was scared. Winter wasn't even over. She spent long periods of time worrying about the pathway her life was beginning to take. She didn't know what was happening to her. Her legs were numb. The numbness in her legs was staying for longer periods at a time. She knew she needed to talk to her mom and probably a doctor. She had so many unanswered questions in her mind about her health and her senior year. Please read the next part of this article to learn more about Penny's health and see how her journey continues.

CAP PARTICIPATES IN OVR COUNSELOR TRAINING

On June 14, 2007, CAP Executive Director Stephen S. Pennington addressed a group of OVR counselors, supervisors, staff and administrators receiving training in Denver Pennsylvania. The group gathered together to consider the unique issues faced by Counselors in the field as they attempt to assist VR customers who may have criminal records.

The topics discussed included, when a customer should disclose a criminal record to a potential employer, how to handle questions regarding criminal history on job applications, how and when a criminal conviction may be considered in the hiring process, and those extremely limited instances in which an individual may seek to have a record expunged.

A similar training is tentatively planned for Pittsburgh in October. CAP has also been invited to present at that training. For more information on the issues discussed at the June 14th training, you can e-mail Steve Pennington at Padislaw@aol.com.

CAP CHALLENGES PROPOSED CHANGE TO COLLEGE POLICY

By Jamie C. Ray, Esquire

At a May 2007 meeting of the Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council, OVR presented a proposed amendment to its college training policy. Under this proposal, recipients of SSI or Social Security Disability (SSDI) who also have an "expected family contribution" for school will no longer receive financial assistance from OVR to help cover the cost of room and board.

Both CAP and the Rehabilitation Council objected to the proposed policy change for several reasons. First, OVR did not provide the proposed policy amendment to CAP for review and comment. Second, OVR did not provide the proposed amendment to the Rehabilitation Council members in a timely fashion, or in a format that was accessible to all members. Third, OVR did not involve CAP, PaRC or other stakeholder groups in a workgroup to discuss the need for a policy amendment, or solicit input from stakeholder groups *before* the drafting of the proposed amendment. Fourth, the proposed amendment does not take into account the fact that under many college financial aid packages many students will have an unmet need above and beyond any amount that OVR would contribute under the current policy. Thus, the proposed amendment will only put the student in a more challenging situation by leaving them with even more unmet need. Fifth, the proposed amendment does not consider how the Social Security Administration defines the uses of SSI. SSI is not limited to providing food and shelter. It is intended to be used for clothing and other personal expenses as well. Finally, OVR did not provide results of formal testing showing how the proposed amendment will impact OVR customers.

The proposed amendment was presented to the OVR Board on June 27, 2007. After much discussion among Board members, CAP, the PaRC, other stakeholders and members of the disability community, the issue was tabled and OVR was directed to produce testing results and other information to CAP, the PaRC, the OVR Board, and other stakeholders. The issue will be addressed again at the OVR Board meeting scheduled for September 20, 2007. For more information on this proposed amendment, please contact Jamie Ray at jamiecray@aol.com

EMPLOYMENT WORD FIND

Have some fun by searching for the list of words below. All of the words can be found on the Individualized Plan for Employment that you develop with your VR Counselor.

Goal

Services

Responsibility

Rights

Customer

ADRTYUIOPLPMVDG

TUIGHTIOUPTLMNOP

MIGOALHELMTIYOU

JAHSECIVRESPQBAM

TYTAMNRCUSTOMER

ADSRESPONSIBILITYO

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Upcoming Outreach Events**Margaret McKenna to speak at Job Club**

On July 20, 2007, Margaret will speak to the Montgomery County Association for the Blind's Job Club. This event will take place at 12:30 pm in the Robinson Bldg., 42 S. 15th Street, Philadelphia, PA.

CAP advocate Jamie Ray to speak at MS Information Day

On September 15, 2007, Jamie Ray will speak at the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Information Day being held in York, PA. Topics to be discussed include advocacy services provided by CAP, information about Title I of the ADA, and questions and answers about other disability issues including resources for questions about social security disability. For more information, or to register for this event. Please contact Robin from the MS society at (717) 509-6301.

Jamie Ray to Speak at Brain Tumor Support Group

Jamie Ray will speak to the Jefferson Hospital Brain Tumor Support Group on October 17, 2007 at 7pm. The group meets in Philadelphia. Topics covered will include the services provided by the Client Assistance Program, as well as information about Title I of the ADA, and Social Security Disability. For information on meeting location, or to RSVP, please call support group facilitator Ann Marie DiBona, RN at (856) 596-5572.

Upcoming Events

July 24, 2007: Veterans Retraining Project Symposium at HGAC, Johnstown PA

July 25, 2007: ADA Celebration co-sponsored by CAP, SILC, CIL of Central Pennsylvania and other Stakeholders, Harrisburg PA

July 26, 2007: Philadelphia BBVS Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) meeting, Philadelphia, PA

August 8, 2007: Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council Meeting, Harrisburg PA

The above events are open to the public, please contact Jamie Ray at Jamiecray@aol.com if you would like more information.

Visit PA CAP on the WEB
<http://www.equalemployment.org>